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vessel may not leave port to fish in the EEZ until 48 hours after notification of early withdrawal is received by the Regional Administrator.

(iv) The Regional Administrator will furnish a phone number for call-ins upon request.

(v) Such vessels must comply with the VMS notification requirements specified in paragraph (b) of this section by notifying the Regional Administrator by entering the appropriate VMS code that the vessel is fishing outside of the scallop fishery. VMS codes and instructions are available from the Regional Administrator upon request.

(f) *Additional NE multispecies call-in requirements*—(1) *Spawning season call-in*. With the exception of vessels issued a valid Small Vessel category permit, or the Handgear A permit category, vessels subject to the spawning season restriction described in § 648.82 must notify the Regional Administrator of the commencement date of their 20-day period out of the NE multispecies fishery through either the VMS system or by calling and providing the following information: Vessel name and permit number, owner and caller name and phone number, and the commencement date of the 20-day period.

(2) *Gillnet call-in*. Vessels subject to the gillnet restriction described in § 648.82(j)(1)(ii) must notify the Regional Administrator of the commencement date of their time out of the NE multispecies gillnet fishery using the procedure described in paragraph (f)(1) of this section.

(3) *Gillnet call-in*. Vessels subject to the gillnet restriction described in § 648.82(s)(1)(ii) must notify the Regional Administrator of the commencement date of their time out of the NE multispecies gillnet fishery using the procedure described in paragraph (f)(1) of this section.

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[61 FR 34968, July 3, 1996, as amended at 62 FR 14647, Mar. 27, 1997; 62 FR 15386, Apr. 1, 1997; 62 FR 51381, Oct. 1, 1997; 63 FR 11593, Mar. 10, 1998; 63 FR 15329, Mar. 31, 1998; 63 FR 42592, Aug. 10, 1998; 63 FR 58329, Oct. 30, 1998; 64 FR 24072, May 5, 1999; 64 FR 31149, June 10, 1999; 64 FR 54745, Oct. 7, 1999; 64 FR 55825, Oct. 15, 1999; 65 FR 21664, Apr. 24, 2000; 66 FR 24056, May 11, 2001; 67 FR 50305, Aug. 1, 2002; 67 FR 63232, Oct. 10, 2002; 69 FR 22947, Apr. 27, 2004; 69 FR 35214, June 23, 2004; 69 FR 63472, Nov. 2, 2004; 69 FR 67796, Nov. 19, 2004; 70 FR 2823, Jan. 18, 2005; 70 FR 21941, Apr. 28, 2005; 70 FR 31339, June 1, 2005; 70 FR 54306, Sept. 14, 2005; 70 FR 48867, Aug. 22, 2005; 71 FR 33224, June 8, 2006]

EFFECTIVE DATE NOTE: At 71 FR 19372, Apr. 13, 2006, § 648.10 was amended by suspending paragraphs (b)(1)(vii); (b)(2)(i), (iii), and (iv); (b)(3)(i)(A) and (C); (b)(3)(ii) and (iii); (c)(1) and (3); and (f)(2); and adding paragraphs (b)(1)(x); (b)(2)(v) through (vii); (b)(3)(i)(E) and (F); (b)(3)(iv) and (v); (c)(6) and (7); and (f)(3), effective May 1, 2006, through Oct. 10, 2006.

EDITORIAL NOTE: At 71 FR 33224, June 8, 2006, § 648.10 was amended by revising paragraph (b)(2)(i). This amendment could not be incorporated because paragraph (b)(2)(i) was suspended at 71 FR 19372, Apr. 13, 2006, effective May 1, 2006, through Oct. 10, 2006.

EFFECTIVE DATE NOTE: At 71 FR 34844, June 16, 2006, § 648.10 was amended by suspending paragraphs (b)(4)(ii) through (iv), effective June 16, 2006 through Dec. 13, 2006.

§ 648.11 At-sea sea sampler/observer coverage.

(a) The Regional Administrator may request any vessel holding a permit for Atlantic sea scallops, NE multispecies, monkfish, skates, Atlantic mackerel, squid, butterflyfish, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, spiny dogfish, Atlantic herring, tilefish, or Atlantic deep-sea red crab; or a moratorium permit for summer flounder; to carry a NMFS-approved sea sampler/observer.

(1) For the purpose of deploying at-sea observers, sea scallop vessels are required to notify NMFS of scallop trips as specified in § 648.10(b)(4). Unless otherwise notified by the Regional Administrator, owners of scallop vessels shall be responsible for paying the cost of the observer for all scallop fishing trips on which an observer is carried onboard the vessel, regardless of whether the vessel lands or sells sea

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scallops on that trip, and regardless of the availability of set-aside for an increased possession limit, or reduced accrual rate of DAS.

(2) [Reserved]

(3) The Regional Administrator may request any vessel holding a permit for Atlantic sea scallops, NE multispecies, monkfish, skates, Atlantic mackerel, squid, butterfish, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, spiny dogfish, Atlantic herring, tilefish, or Atlantic deep-sea red crab; or a moratorium permit for summer flounder; to carry a NMFS certified fisheries observer. A vessel holding a permit for Atlantic sea scallops is subject to the additional requirements specified in paragraph (g) of this section.

(b) If requested by the Regional Administrator to carry an observer or sea sampler, it is the responsibility of the vessel owner to arrange for and facilitate observer or sea sampler placement. Owners of vessels selected for sea sampler/observer coverage must notify the appropriate Regional or Science and Research Director, as specified by the Regional Administrator, before commencing any fishing trip that may result in the harvest of resources of the respective fishery. Notification procedures will be specified in selection letters to vessel owners.

(c) The Regional Administrator may waive the requirement to carry a sea sampler or observer if the facilities on a vessel for housing the observer or sea sampler, or for carrying out observer or sea sampler functions, are so inadequate or unsafe that the health or safety of the observer or sea sampler, or the safe operation of the vessel, would be jeopardized.

(d) An owner or operator of a vessel on which a NMFS-approved sea sampler/observer is embarked must:

(1) Provide accommodations and food that are equivalent to those provided to the crew.

(2) Allow the sea sampler/observer access to and use of the vessel's communications equipment and personnel upon request for the transmission and receipt of messages related to the sea sampler's/observer's duties.

(3) Provide true vessel locations, by latitude and longitude or loran coordinates, as requested by the observer/sea

sampler, and allow the sea sampler/observer access to and use of the vessel's navigation equipment and personnel upon request to determine the vessel's position.

(4) Notify the sea sampler/observer in a timely fashion of when fishing operations are to begin and end.

(5) Allow for the embarking and debarking of the sea sampler/observer, as specified by the Regional Administrator, ensuring that transfers of observers/sea samplers at sea are accomplished in a safe manner, via small boat or raft, during daylight hours as weather and sea conditions allow, and with the agreement of the sea samplers/observers involved.

(6) Allow the sea sampler/observer free and unobstructed access to the vessel's bridge, working decks, holding bins, weight scales, holds, and any other space used to hold, process, weigh, or store fish.

(7) Allow the sea sampler/observer to inspect and copy any the vessel's log, communications log, and records associated with the catch and distribution of fish for that trip.

(e) The owner or operator of a vessel issued a summer flounder moratorium permit, a scup moratorium permit, a black sea bass moratorium permit, a bluefish permit, a spiny dogfish permit, an Atlantic herring permit, an Atlantic deep-sea red crab permit, a skate permit, or a tilefish permit, if requested by the sea sampler/observer, also must:

(1) Notify the sea sampler/observer of any sea turtles, marine mammals, summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, spiny dogfish, Atlantic herring, Atlantic deep-sea red crab, tilefish, skates (including discards) or other specimens taken by the vessel.

(2) Provide the sea sampler/observer with sea turtles, marine mammals, summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, spiny dogfish, Atlantic herring, Atlantic deep-sea red crab, skates, tilefish, or other specimens taken by the vessel.

(f) NMFS may accept observer coverage funded by outside sources if:

(1) All coverage conducted by such observers is determined by NMFS to be in compliance with NMFS' observer guidelines and procedures.

(2) The owner or operator of the vessel complies with all other provisions of this part.

(3) The observer is approved by the Regional Administrator.

(g) *Atlantic sea scallop observer program*—(1) *General*. Unless otherwise specified, owners, operators, and/or managers of vessels issued a Federal scallop permit under § 648.4(a)(2), and specified in paragraph (b) of this section, must comply with this section and are jointly and severally responsible for their vessel's compliance with this section. To facilitate the deployment of at-sea observers, all sea scallop vessels issued limited access permits fishing in open areas or Sea Scallop Access Areas, and general category vessels fishing under the Sea Scallop Access Area program specified in § 648.60, are required to comply with the additional notification requirements specified in paragraphs (g)(2) of this section, except that scallop vessels issued Occasional scallop permits not participating in the Area Access Program specified in § 648.60 may provide the specified information to NMFS by calling NMFS. All sea scallop vessels issued a VMS general category or Non-VMS general scallop permit that are participating in the Area Access Program specified in § 648.60 are required to comply with the additional VMS notification requirements specified in paragraph (g)(2) of this section. When NMFS notifies the vessel owner, operator, or the vessel manager of any requirement to carry an observer on a specified trip in either an Access Area or Open Area as specified in paragraph (g)(2) of this section, the vessel may not fish for, take, retain, possess, or land any scallops without carrying an observer. Vessels may only embark on a scallop trip in open areas or Access Areas without an observer if the owner, operator, or vessel manager has been notified that the vessel has received a waiver of the observer requirement for that trip pursuant to paragraphs (g)(3) and (5) of this section.

(2) *Vessel notification procedures*. For the purpose of determining if an observer will be deployed on a vessel for a specific trip, a vessel issued a limited access permit fishing in open areas or in the Sea Scallop Area Access pro-

gram specified in § 648.60, or a vessel issued a general category scallop permit and fishing in the Sea Scallop Area Access program specified in § 648.60, is required to comply with the following notification requirements:

(i) Prior to the 25th day of the month preceding the month in which fishing for scallops is to take place, the vessel owner or operator must submit, through the VMS e-mail messaging system, notice of its intention to fish for scallops, along with the following information: Vessel name and permit number, owner and operator's name, owner and operator's phone numbers, and number of trips anticipated for open areas and each Sea Scallop Access Area or open area in which it intends to fish. General category vessels are required to submit this information only for Sea Scallop Access Area trips. The e-mail address shall be provided to vessels in a Small Entity Compliance Guide issued by the Regional Administrator. The Regional Administrator may waive this notification period if it is determined that there is insufficient time to provide such notification prior to a Sea Scallop Access Area opening or beginning of the fishing year. Notification of this waiver of a portion of the notification period shall be provided to the vessel through a permit holder letter issued by the Regional Administrator.

(ii) For each scallop trip, the vessel owner, operator, or vessel manager shall notify NMFS by telephone, using the phone number provided by the Regional Administrator in the Small Entity Compliance Guide, and provide the following information: Vessel Name; contact name and number; date and time of departure; port of departure; area to be fished (either open areas or the specific Sea Scallop Access Area), and fishing as a scallop dredge, scallop trawl or general category vessel.

(3) *Selection of scallop fishing trips for observer coverage*. Based on predetermined coverage levels for various sectors of the scallop fishery that are provided by NMFS in writing to all observer service provider approved pursuant to paragraph (h) of this section, NMFS shall notify the vessel owner, operator, or vessel manager whether the vessel must carry an observer, or if

a waiver has been granted, on the specified trip within 24 hours of the vessel owner's, operator's, or vessel manager's notification of the prospective trip as specified in paragraph (g)(2)(ii) of this section. Any request to carry an observer may be waived by NMFS. With the exception of vessels issued a non-VMS general category scallop permit that are fishing in an access area, all waivers for observer coverage shall be issued to the vessel by VMS so as to have on-board verification of the waiver. Waivers for vessels issued a non-VMS general category scallop permit will be issued by fax, if possible, or by phone if no fax number is available.

(4) *Procurement of observer services by scallop vessels.* (i) An owner of a scallop vessel required to carry an observer under paragraph (g)(3) of this section must arrange for carrying an observer certified through the observer training class operated by the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (herein after NMFS/NEFOP certified) from an observer service provider approved by NMFS under paragraph (h) of this section. A list of approved observer service providers shall be posted on the NOAA/NEFOP website at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/>. The owner, operator, or vessel manager of a vessel selected to carry an observer must contact the observer service provider and must provide at least 72 hours notice in advance of the fishing trip for the provider to arrange for observer deployment for the specified trip.

(ii) An owner, operator, or vessel manager of a vessel that cannot procure a certified observer within 72 hours of the advance notification to the provider due to the unavailability of an observer, may request a waiver from NMFS from the requirement for observer coverage for that trip, but only if the owner, operator, or vessel manager has contacted all of the available observer service providers to secure observer coverage and no observer is available. NMFS shall issue such a waiver within 24 hours, if the conditions of this paragraph (g)(4)(ii) are met.

(5) Unless otherwise notified by the Regional Administrator, owners of scallop vessels shall be responsible for

paying the cost of the observer for all scallop fishing trips on which an observer is carried onboard the vessel, regardless of whether the vessel lands or sells sea scallops on that trip, and regardless of the availability of set-aside for an increased possession limit or reduced DAS accrual rate. Vessels that carry an observer may be compensated with a reduced DAS accrual rate for open area trips or additional scallop catch per day in Access Areas in order to help defray the cost of the observer, under the program specified in §§ 648.53 and 648.60. Observer service providers are responsible for setting the daily rate for observer coverage on a vessel. NMFS shall determine the reduced DAS accrual rate and the amount of additional pounds of scallops per day fished in an access area for the applicable fishing year based on the economic conditions of the scallop fishery, as determined by best available information. Vessel owners and observer service providers shall be notified by Small Entity Compliance Guide of the DAS accrual rate and additional pounds of scallops determined by the Regional Administrator. The Regional Administrator may adjust the DAS accrual rate and additional pounds of scallops if necessary based on economic conditions of the scallop fishery. Vessel owners and observer providers shall be notified of any such adjustments through a letter.

(6) When the available DAS or TAC set-aside for observer coverage is exhausted, vessels shall still be required to carry an observer as specified in this section and shall be responsible for paying for the cost of the observer, unless otherwise waived by NMFS, but shall not be authorized to harvest additional pounds or fish at a reduced DAS accrual rate.

(h) *Observer service provider approval and responsibilities*—(1) *General.* An entity seeking to provide observer services to the Atlantic sea scallop fishery must apply for and obtain approval from NMFS following submission of a complete application to The Observer Program Branch Chief, 25 Bernard St Jean Drive, East Falmouth, MA 02536. A list of approved observer service providers shall be distributed to scallop vessel owners and shall be posted on

NMFS's web page as specified in paragraph (g)(4) of this section.

(2) *Existing observer service providers.* Observer service providers that currently deploy certified observers in the Northeast must submit an application containing the information specified in paragraph (h)(3) of this section, excluding any information specified in paragraph (h)(3) of this section that has already been submitted to NMFS.

(3) *Contents of application.* An application to become an approved observer service provider shall contain the following:

(i) Identification of the management, organizational structure, and ownership structure of the applicant's business, including identification by name and general function of all controlling management interests in the company, including but not limited to owners, board members, officers, authorized agents, and staff. If the applicant is a corporation, the articles of incorporation must be provided. If the applicant is a partnership, the partnership agreement must be provided.

(ii) The permanent mailing address, phone and fax numbers where the owner(s) can be contacted for official correspondence, and the current physical location, business mailing address, business telephone and fax numbers, and business e-mail address for each office.

(iii) A statement, signed under penalty of perjury, from each owner or owners, board members, and officers, if a corporation, that they are free from a conflict of interest as described under paragraph (h)(6) of this section.

(iv) A statement, signed under penalty of perjury, from each owner or owners, board members, and officers, if a corporation, describing any criminal convictions, Federal contracts they have had, and the performance rating they received on the contract, and previous decertification action while working as an observer or observer service provider.

(v) A description of any prior experience the applicant may have in placing individuals in remote field and/or marine work environments. This includes, but is not limited to, recruiting, hiring, deployment, and personnel administration.

(vi) A description of the applicant's ability to carry out the responsibilities and duties of a scallop fishery observer services provider as set out under paragraph (h)(2) of this section, and the arrangements to be used.

(vii) Evidence of holding adequate insurance to cover injury, liability, and accidental death for observers during their period of employment (including during training). Workers' Compensation and Maritime Employer's Liability insurance must be provided to cover the observer, vessel owner, and observer provider. The minimum coverage required is \$5 million. Observer service providers shall provide copies of the insurance policies to observers to display to the vessel owner, operator, or vessel manager, when requested.

(viii) Proof that its observers, either contracted or employed by the service provider, are compensated with salaries that meet or exceed the Department of Labor (DOL) guidelines for observers. Observers shall be compensated as a Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) non-exempt employees. Observer providers shall provide any other benefits and personnel services in accordance with the terms of each observer's contract or employment status.

(ix) The names of its fully equipped, NMFS/NEFOP certified observers on staff or a list of its training candidates (with resumes) and a request for a NMFS/NEFOP Sea Scallop Observer Training class (minimum class size of eight).

(x) An Emergency Action Plan (EAP) describing its response to an 'at sea' emergency with an observer, including, but not limited to, personal injury, death, harassment, or intimidation.

(4) *Application evaluation.* (i) NMFS shall review and evaluate each application submitted under paragraphs (h)(2) and (h)(3) of this section. Issuance of approval as an observer provider shall be based on completeness of the application, and a determination of the applicant's ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of a sea scallop fishery observer service provider as demonstrated in the application information. A decision to approve or deny

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an application shall be made by NMFS within 15 days of receipt of the application by NMFS.

(ii) If NMFS approves the application, the observer service provider's name will be added to the list of approved observer service providers found on NMFS website specified in paragraph (g)(4) of this section and in any outreach information to the industry. Approved observer service providers shall be notified in writing and provided with any information pertinent to its participation in the sea scallop fishery observer program.

(iii) An application shall be denied if NMFS determines that the information provided in the application is not complete or the evaluation criteria are not met. NMFS shall notify the applicant in writing of any deficiencies in the application or information submitted in support of the application. An applicant who receives a denial of his or her application may present additional information to rectify the deficiencies specified in the written denial, provided such information is submitted to NMFS within 30 days of the applicant's receipt of the denial notification from NMFS. In the absence of additional information, and after 30 days from an applicant's receipt of a denial, an observer provider is required to resubmit an application containing all of the information required under the application process specified in paragraph (h)(3) of this section to be re-considered for being added to the list of approved observer service providers.

(5) *Responsibilities of observer service providers.* (i) An observer service provider must provide observers certified by NMFS/NEFOP pursuant to paragraph (i) of this section for deployment in the sea scallop fishery when contacted and contracted by the owner, operator, or vessel manager of a vessel fishing in the scallop fishery unless the observer service provider refuses to deploy an observer on a requesting vessel for any of the reasons specified at paragraph (viii) of this section.

(ii) An observer service provider must provide to each of its observers:

(A) All necessary transportation, including arrangements and logistics, of observers to the initial location of deployment, to all subsequent vessel as-

signments, and to any debriefing locations, if necessary;

(B) Lodging, per diem, and any other services necessary for observers assigned to a scallop vessel or to attend a NMFS/NEFOP Sea Scallop Observer Training class;

(C) The required observer equipment, in accordance with equipment requirements listed on NMFS website specified in paragraph (g)(4) of this section under the Sea Scallop Program, prior to any deployment and/or prior to NMFS observer certification training; and

(D) Individually assigned communication equipment, in working order, such as a cell phone or pager, for all necessary communication. An observer service provider may alternatively compensate observers for the use of the observer's personal cell phone or pager for communications made in support of, or necessary for, the observer's duties.

(iii) *Observer deployment logistics.* Each approved observer service provider must assign an available certified observer to a vessel upon request. Each approved observer service provider must provide for access by industry 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, to enable an owner, operator, or manager of a vessel to secure observer coverage when requested. The telephone system must be monitored a minimum of four times daily to ensure rapid response to industry requests. Observer service providers approved under paragraph (h) of this section are required to report observer deployments to NMFS daily for the purpose of determining whether the predetermined coverage levels are being achieved in the scallop fishery.

(iv) *Observer deployment limitations.* Unless alternative arrangements are approved by NMFS, an observer provider must not deploy any observer on the same vessel for two or more consecutive deployments, and not more than twice in any given month. A certified observer's first deployment shall be on a scallop closed area trip and the resulting data shall be immediately edited, and approved, by NMFS prior to any further deployments of that observer.

(v) *Communications with observers.* An observer service provider must have an

employee responsible for observer activities on call 24 hours a day to handle emergencies involving observers or problems concerning observer logistics, whenever observers are at sea, stationed shoreside, in transit, or in port awaiting vessel assignment.

(vi) *Observer training requirements.* The following information must be submitted to NMFS to request a certified observer training class at least 30 days prior to the beginning of the proposed training class: Date of requested training; a list of observer candidates, with a minimum of eight individuals; observer candidate resumes; and a statement signed by the candidate, under penalty of perjury, that discloses the candidate's criminal convictions, if any. All observer trainees must complete a basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation/first aid course prior to the beginning of a NMFS/NEFOP Sea Scallop Observer Training class. NMFS may reject a candidate for training if the candidate does not meet the minimum qualification requirements as outlined by NMFS National Minimum Eligibility Standards for observers as described in paragraph (i)(1) of this section.

(vii) *Reports—(A) Observer deployment reports.* The observer service provider must report to NMFS when, where, to whom, and to what fishery (open or closed area) an observer has been deployed, within 24 hours of their departure. The observer service provider must ensure that the observer reports back to NMFS its Observer Contract (OBSCON) data, as described in the certified observer training, within 12 hours of landing. OBSCON data are to be submitted electronically or by other means as specified by NMFS. The observer service provider shall provide the raw (unedited) data collected by the observer to NMFS within 72 hours of the trip landing.

(B) *Safety refusals.* The observer service provider must report to NMFS any trip that has been refused due to safety issues, e.g., failure to hold a valid USCG Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination Decal or to meet the safety requirements of the observer's pre-trip vessel safety checklist, within 24 hours of the refusal.

(C) *Biological samples.* The observer service provider must ensure that biological samples, including whole marine mammals, turtles and sea birds, are stored/handled properly and transported to NMFS within 7 days of landing.

(D) *Observer debriefing.* The observer service provider must ensure that the observer remains available to NMFS, including NMFS Office for Law Enforcement, for debriefing for at least two weeks following any observed trip. An observer that is at sea during the 2-week period must contact NMFS upon his or her return, if requested by NMFS.

(E) *Observer availability report.* The observer service provider must report to NMFS any occurrence of inability to respond to an industry request for observer coverage due to the lack of available observers on staff by 5 pm, Eastern Standard Time, of any day on which the provider is unable to respond to an industry request for observer coverage.

(F) *Other reports.* The observer provider must report possible observer harassment, discrimination, concerns about vessel safety or marine casualty, observer illness or injury, and any information, allegations, or reports regarding observer conflict of interest or breach of the standards of behavior must be submitted to NMFS within 24 hours of the event or within 24 of learning of the event.

(viii) *Refusal to deploy an observer.—*
(A) An observer service provider may refuse to deploy an observer on a requesting scallop vessel if the observer service provider does not have an available observer within 72 hours of receiving a request for an observer from a vessel.

(B) An observer service provider may refuse to deploy an observer on a requesting scallop vessel if the observer service provider has determined that the requesting vessel is inadequate or unsafe pursuant to the reasons described at § 600.746.

(C) The observer service provider may refuse to deploy an observer on a scallop vessel that is otherwise eligible to carry an observer for any other reason including failure to pay for previous observer deployments, provided

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the observer service provider has received prior written confirmation from NMFS authorizing such refusal.

(6) *Limitations on conflict of interest.* An observer service provider:

(i) Must not have a direct or indirect interest in a fishery managed under Federal regulations, including, but not limited to, a fishing vessel, fish dealer, fishery advocacy group, and/or fishery research;

(ii) Must assign observers without regard to any preference by representatives of vessels other than when an observer will be deployed; and

(iii) Must not solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, any gratuity, gift, favor, entertainment, loan, or anything of monetary value from anyone who conducts fishing or fishing related activities that are regulated by NMFS, or who has interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the official duties of observer providers.

(7) *Removal of observer service provider from the list of approved observer service providers.* An observer provider that fails to meet the requirements, conditions, and responsibilities specified in paragraphs (h)(5) and (h)(6) of this section shall be notified by NMFS, in writing, that it is subject to removal from the list of approved observer service providers. Such notification shall specify the reasons for the pending removal. An observer service provider that has received notification that it is subject to removal from the list of approved observer service providers may submit information to rebut the reasons for removal from the list. Such rebuttal must be submitted within 30 days of notification received by the observer service provider that the observer service provider is subject to removal and must be accompanied by written evidence that clearly disproves the reasons for removal. NMFS shall review information rebutting the pending removal and shall notify the observer service provider within 15 days of receipt of the rebuttal whether or not the removal is warranted. If no response to a pending removal is received by NMFS, the observer service provider shall be automatically removed from the list of approved observer service providers. The decision to remove the

observer service provider from the list, either after reviewing a rebuttal, or if no rebuttal is submitted, shall be the final decision of NMFS and the Department of Commerce. Removal from the list of approved observer service providers does not necessarily prevent such observer service provider from obtaining an approval in the future if a new application is submitted that demonstrates that the reasons for removal are remedied. Certified observers under contract with an observer service provider that has been removed from the list of approved service providers must complete their assigned duties for any scallop trips on which the observers are deployed at the time the observer service provider is removed from the list of approved observer service providers. An observer service provider removed from the list of approved observer service providers is responsible for providing NMFS with the information required in paragraph (h)(5)(vii) of this section following completion of the trip. NMFS may consider, but is not limited to, the following in determining if an observer service provider may remain on the list of approved observer service providers:

(i) Failure to meet the requirements, conditions, and responsibilities of observer service providers specified in paragraphs (h)(5) and (h)(6) of this section;

(ii) Evidence of conflict of interest as defined under paragraph (h)(3) of this section;

(iii) Evidence of criminal convictions related to:

(A) Embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements or receiving stolen property; or

(B) The commission of any other crimes of dishonesty, as defined by state law or Federal law that would seriously and directly affect the fitness of an applicant in providing observer services under this section;

(iv) Unsatisfactory performance ratings on any Federal contracts held by the applicant; and

(v) Evidence of any history of decertification as either an observer or observer provider.

(i) *Observer certification.* (1) To be certified, employees or sub-contractors operating as observers for observer

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service providers approved under paragraph (h) of this section must meet NMFS National Minimum Eligibility Standards for observers. NMFS National Minimum Eligibility Standards are available at the National Observer Program website: <http://www.st.nmfs.gov/st4/nop/>.

(2) *Observer training.* In order to be deployed on any scallop vessel, a candidate observer must have passed a NMFS/NEFOP Sea Scallop Fisheries Observer Training course. If a candidate fails training, the candidate shall be notified in writing on or before the last day of training. The notification will indicate the reasons the candidate failed the training. Observer training shall include an observer training trip, paid for as part of the observer's training, aboard a scallop vessel with a trainer. A certified observer's first deployment shall be on a scallop closed area trip and the resulting data shall be immediately edited, and approved, by NMFS prior to any further deployments of that observer.

(3) *Observer requirements.* All observers must:

(i) Have a valid NMFS/NEFOP fisheries observer certification pursuant to paragraph (i)(1) of this section;

(ii) Be physically and mentally capable of carrying out the responsibilities of an observer on board scallop vessels, pursuant to standards established by NMFS. Such standards are available from NMFS website specified in paragraph (g)(4) of this section and shall be provided to each approved observer service provider; and

(iii) Have successfully completed all NMFS-required training and briefings for observers before deployment, pursuant to paragraph (i)(2) of this section.

(4) *Probation and decertification.* NMFS has the authority to review observer certifications and issue observer certification probation and/or decertification as described in NMFS policy found on the website at: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/>.

(5) *Issuance of decertification.* Upon determination that decertification is warranted under paragraph (i)(3) of this section, NMFS shall issue a written decision to decertify the observer to the observer and approved observer service providers via certified mail at the ob-

server's most current address provided to NMFS. The decision shall identify whether a certification is revoked and shall identify the specific reasons for the action taken. Decertification is effective immediately as of the date of issuance, unless the decertification official notes a compelling reason for maintaining certification for a specified period and under specified conditions. Decertification is the final decision of NMFS and the Department of Commerce and may not be appealed.

[61 FR 34968, July 3, 1996, as amended at 61 FR 43425, Aug. 23, 1996; 61 FR 58465, Nov. 15, 1996; 65 FR 1569, Jan. 11, 2000; 65 FR 45852, July 26, 2000; 65 FR 77466, Dec. 11, 2000; 66 FR 49144, Sept. 26, 2001; 68 FR 49700, Aug. 19, 2003; 71 FR 33225, June 8, 2006]

EFFECTIVE DATE NOTE: At 71 FR 34844, June 16, 2006, § 648.11 was amended by suspending paragraphs (a)(1) and (a)(2), and adding paragraphs (a)(3), (g), (h), and (i), effective June 16, 2006 through Dec. 13, 2006.

§ 648.12 Experimental fishing.

The Regional Administrator may exempt any person or vessel from the requirements of subparts A (General provisions), B (Atlantic mackerel, squid, and butterfish), D (Atlantic sea scallop), E (Atlantic surf clam and ocean quahog), F (NE multispecies and monkfish), G (summer flounder), H (scup), I (black sea bass), J (Atlantic bluefish), K (Atlantic herring), L (spiny dogfish), M (Atlantic deep-sea red crab), N (tilefish), and O (skates) of this part for the conduct of experimental fishing beneficial to the management of the resources or fishery managed under that subpart. The Regional Administrator shall consult with the Executive Director of the MAFMC regarding such exemptions for the Atlantic mackerel, squid, butterfish, summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, spiny dogfish, bluefish, and tilefish fisheries.

(a) The Regional Administrator may not grant such an exemption unless he/she determines that the purpose, design, and administration of the exemption is consistent with the management objectives of the respective FMP, the provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other applicable law, and that granting the exemption will not: