

Commercial Fisher

Catch fish and shellfish for a living. No tuition, no degree, and no guarantee of what you make.

TYPICAL PAY

\$36,630

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$20k to \$90k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Fishing boats, docks, processing plants, open ocean

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or the GED (General Educational Development) test** Grade 12
Helpful for the rest of your life, but almost no skipper will ask to see it.
- 2 Buy a state crew license** Same day
Most fishing states sell a crewmember license over the counter or online for a small fee. You need it before you step on board.
- 3 Walk the docks** Days to weeks
Skippers hire in person, a week or two before the season opens. Being early, sober and willing to work beats every resume.
- 4 Your first season as a greenhorn** One season
Baiting, coiling, picking fish, cleaning. You learn whether your body and your stomach can take it.
- 5 Become crew worth keeping** 2 to 5 years
After two or three seasons you run gear, fix what breaks and get a bigger share. Some go on to mate, engineer or skipper.

Pros and cons

- + You can start with nothing but a bag and a bus ticket
- + Food and a bunk are covered while you are on the boat
- + A good season pays more in months than many jobs pay in a year
- One of the most dangerous jobs in the country
- The pay is a share, so a bad season pays almost nothing
- No health insurance, no pension, no sick days on most boats

Good to know

It is one of the deadliest jobs in America

Federal safety agencies put commercial fishing near the top of the fatal injury list year after year. Drowning, falls overboard and vessel disasters are the reasons. Boats that run safety drills and require floa...

The job is shrinking

The federal career database counts only about 21,900 fishing and hunting workers nationwide and expects the number to fall slightly by 2034. Quotas, fuel prices and consolidation mean fewer boats catchi...

Optional boosts

Merchant mariner credential. Marine diesel and hydraulics. Welding. Refrigeration.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Fishing and Hunting Workers (45-3031.00)
O*NET OnLine: Fishing and Hunting Workers, wages and outlook
NOAA Fisheries (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)
Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/commercial-fisher>



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