

STATUS OF VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM (VMS) PLANS

Situation: Depth-based restrictions are a fundamental aspect of the new groundfish management regime adopted at the September 9-13, 2002 Council meeting in Portland, Oregon. Depth-based restrictions are designed to limit fishing in areas inhabited by overfished groundfish stocks while providing opportunities to fish healthy groundfish stocks with minimized bycatch. The choice of depth-based restrictions was made with the intent of balancing stock conservation needs and the socioeconomic consequences of fishing restrictions.

Fathom contours can be erratic in shape and difficult to follow and enforce, particularly in deep water. Latitude and longitude waypoints submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) by the three West Coast states specify most of the fathom lines adopted for management.

Enforcement of depth-based restrictions was also a Council consideration as current enforcement capabilities may be inadequate to enforce the new groundfish management regime. At-sea patrols of deeper management lines may depend on U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) aircraft and larger cutters at a time when Homeland Security and other missions also demand USCG attention, therefore, a vessel monitoring system (VMS) is under consideration for use as early as midyear 2003.

VMS is a shoreside tracking system that allows shoreside personnel to remotely track vessel locations. Transponders on vessels and satellite receivers enable remote tracking and can be capable of two-way communications. Two-way communication could allow NMFS personnel to warn a vessel when they are approaching a closed area, allow a skipper to notify NMFS of their intent or send a distress signal, or even transmit observer information. Providing for enforcement capabilities, additional measure of safety for vessels further offshore under the new management regime, and other benefits have all been cited as reasons to proceed with VMS planning.

There are concerns with the use of VMS and obstacles to immediate implementation. Cost and funding of VMS is a significant concern. NMFS stated funding is available for the costs of mainframe computer hardware and software at the shoreside remote stations. It has not been decided how the on-board component and installation costs would be borne. Fishermen testified they were already on the economic edge and were having trouble covering expenses in the last few years. The Council has asked NMFS to consider direct funding of these on-board component and installation costs. Additional concerns include decisions on the level of technological complexity, logistics of on-board installation, privacy issues, staffing, coordination, which segments of the commercial and recreational fleets would be required to use VMS, regulatory language, and the Paperwork Reduction Act.

The Council also approved the formation of an Ad Hoc VMS Committee to be comprised of limited entry groundfish representatives from the three West Coast States, the Enforcement Consultants, and the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel chair. The Ad Hoc VMS Committee met for the first time at the Council office in Portland, OR on October 11, 2002. Their recommendations will be presented in Exhibit G.3, Supplemental Report of the Ad Hoc VMS Committee.

Council Action:

- 1. Provide a recommendation on how to proceed with RMS implementation.**

Reference Materials:

1. Report of the Ad Hoc VMS Committee (Exhibit G.3.a, Supplemental Report of the Ad Hoc VMS Committee).
2. Written public comments (Exhibit G.3.d, Public Comment).

Agenda Order:

- a. Agendum Overview
- b. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- c. Public Comment
- d. **Council Action:** Provide Guidance and Approval

Mike Burner

Groundfish Fishery Strategic Plan (GFSP) Consistency Analysis

The GFSP supports establishing a more stable, understandable, and enforceable regulatory structure (Sec. II.A.1) that protects weak stocks while providing harvest opportunities for healthy stocks (Sec. II.A.2) . The GFSP also supports establishing and maintaining a management process that minimizes adverse economic effects and takes into account the needs of fishing communities (Sec. II.C). The Council process of pursuing the implementation of VMS is consistent with these GFSP principles.

PFMC
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