

GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM STATEMENT ON  
STATUS OF VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM PLANS

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) was briefed by Mr. Dayna Matthews on the status of implementing a vessel monitoring system (VMS) for tracking fishing vessels under the depth-based management regime adopted for 2003. The GMT offers the following comments and recommendations regarding the applicability of VMS in managing West Coast groundfish.

Groundfish management could benefit from a better understanding of individual vessel fishing behavior and fleet distribution. These data could be available from VMS; however, anticipated confidentiality agreements could prevent use of such data for management. The GMT recommends VMS data be made available to federal and possibly state managers and scientists to improve understanding of fishery and stock dynamics. These data could be aggregated and/or disassociated from a vessel identification code to protect confidentiality.

The GMT notes that none of the alternatives, except Alternative 5, which covers all fishing vessels, provides for coverage of open access vessels targeting groundfish that would be prohibited from fishing in the closed area (<100 fm north of 40° 10' N latitude). Further, in setting priorities for VMS coverage, the GMT believes that coverage of open access vessels targeting groundfish that would be excluded from the closed area would be more meaningful than VMS coverage on vessels that are allowed to fish within the closed area.

While use of VMS data has potential benefits for managing groundfish, the GMT reiterates its strong support for implementing an electronic logbook system. Electronic logbooks could be linked to depth finders and Global Positioning System (GPS) systems which would provide a record of total catch and effort by depth and area. These data are viewed as critical by the GMT for providing fleet access to healthy stocks while avoiding overfished species. Such a system has been in the planning stage for many years, and the GMT believes implementation on a trial basis should occur as soon as possible. A comprehensive electronic logbook system would supplant the need for management and scientific access to VMS data.

The Council also requested, and the Ad Hoc VMS Committee analyzed alternative declaration systems, where skippers would declare their intended target when fishing in an otherwise closed area. The GMT believes a federal declaration system would aid enforcement of compliance of depth-based restrictions. State declaration systems may not be tenable due to lack of resources, and a federal declaration system may be delayed due to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act. The GMT urges implementation of a federal declaration system as soon as practicable in 2003.

Finally, the GMT would like to express its gratitude to the Enforcement Consultants, NOAA Fisheries Enforcement, the Northwest Region staff of NMFS, and the members of the Ad Hoc VMS Committee for their strong efforts and progress implementing VMS. Their support and hard work has resulted in remarkable progress in advancing this important management tool.

PFMC  
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