

## IMPLEMENTATION OF A VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM

Situation: A Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) is a shoreside tracking system that allows shoreside personnel to remotely track vessel locations. Depth-based restrictions are a fundamental aspect of the current groundfish management regime but, fathom contours and management lines can be erratic in shape and difficult to follow and enforce, particularly in deep water. Therefore, the Council has recommended VMS measures be required in 2003 for groundfish fishery limited entry vessels.

The Ad Hoc VMS Committee met for the first time in Portland, Oregon on October 11, 2002 and drafted a range of alternatives for VMS implementation and NMFS prepared a draft Environmental Assessment (EA). The Council identified a preferred alternative at the October 28 - November, 2002 meeting and recommended that NMFS, in consultation with the Ad Hoc VMS Committee, prepare a proposed rule for a pilot VMS program for implementation at some point in 2003. The Ad Hoc VMS Committee reconvened at the Council office in Portland, Oregon on December 18, 2002 to review the Council recommendations, consider the content and language of the NMFS draft proposed rule, and discuss costs, performance and features of VMS equipment.

At the April Council meeting in Vancouver, Washington, a joint session of the GAP and the EC was held to discuss VMS issues. The session was well attended and discussions primarily centered on VMS related costs, coverage requirements for the smallest vessels, the need to have VMS transponders continuously operable regardless of the West Coast fishery in which the vessel participates, and restrictions on activities within the rockfish conservation areas. The GAP recommendation was to lengthen the public comment period to coincide with a Council meeting giving any attending advisory body the opportunity to review and respond to the proposed VMS regulations as a group. The Council recommended and NOAA Fisheries concurred to extend the public comment period for the proposed rule from 30 days to 60 days allowing the public comment period to coincide with the June Council meeting.

The proposed rule and EA are attached. NMFS is soliciting public input on the proposed rule during the 60-day open comment period. Written comments will be accepted by NMFS through July 21, 2003 and oral comments will be taken under agenda item B.9.c.

The Council is to consider advice from the Advisory Bodies and the public on the draft proposed rule and EA and make further recommendations to NMFS as necessary. The Council may also discuss next steps in the VMS implementation process.

### Council Action:

1. **Consider the Environmental Assessment (EA), the Proposed Rule, and Make Recommendations to NMFS as Necessary.**
2. **Consider Next Steps in the Process and Provide Guidance as Necessary.**

### Reference Materials:

1. Exhibit B.9, Attachment 1, Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review/Regulatory Flexibility Analysis for a Program to Monitor Time-Area Closures in the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery, NMFS, Northwest Region.
2. Exhibit B.9, Attachment 2, Proposed Rule on VMS, NMFS, Northwest Region.
3. Exhibit B.9.c, Public comments received by May 30, 2003.

### Agenda Order:

- a. Agendum Overview
- b. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- c. Public Comment
- d. **Council Action:** Consider the Environmental Assessment, the Proposed Rule, and Next Steps in Process - Make Recommendations as Necessary

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