

ENFORCEMENT CONSULTANTS REPORT ON VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM:
TRANSITING REQUIREMENTS AND EXPANSION OF THE PROGRAM

The Enforcement Consultants (EC) strongly opposes any dilution of the selected enforcement tool for depth-based management. The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) has stated that in the past the original vessel monitoring system (VMS) presenter with NMFS (now retired) advised that drifting in the Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) could be differentiated from vessels that are fishing. The EC would like to set the record straight. The presenter advised that VMS system operators could tell the difference between fishing and not fishing, with “not fishing” being interpreted as “being underway.” The context of that discussion was in reference to the trawl fishery and the declaration system in the 2003 specifications. Not including fixed gear in the discussion of transiting versus drifting was an oversight made by enforcement endeavoring to implement a complicated and new strategy. Nonetheless, this oversight needs to be rectified by applying a transiting requirement for fixed gear vessels in the 2004 specifications. Once system operators have become familiar with the capabilities of VMS, there is “potential” that drifting and fishing can be differentiated from each other. Obviously, implementation of VMS on the West Coast is new, and short comings have not yet been identified. It would be unwise to place constraints on our ability to utilize this program before we even implement it.

The Ad Hoc VMS Committee has discussed expansion of the program to other sectors of the fishing industry that directly impact groundfish species. One of the groups identified for consideration is the open-access-directed groundfish fishery. A drifting allowance will add an unmanageable level of complexity for system operators and law enforcement responses, as an estimated additional 1,500 vessels could potentially be drifting in and out of the RCA.

If the Council chooses to allow drifting within the RCA’s, the EC does not recommend expansion of what would become a dysfunctional, yet expensive enforcement tool. Additionally, given a decision to allow drifting, the EC recommends the Council reconsider requiring VMS on any fixed gear vessel.

PFMC
11/06/03