

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON  
VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM: TRANSITING REQUIREMENTS AND EXPANSION  
OF THE PROGRAM

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a report from the Ad Hoc Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Committee and provides the following comments.

The GAP continues to express its strong concern over prohibitions on entry by limited entry vessels into the Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) for purposes other than transit. The GAP notes that the initial presentation made by NMFS two years ago on the VMS system included the statement the system could differentiate between a vessel that is fishing and a vessel that is not fishing. Now that the original presenter has retired from NMFS, we are being told that such is not the case unless there is a trained monitor observing VMS tracks 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

The GAP cannot emphasize strongly enough the safety concerns associated with an allowance for non-fishing, non-transiting entrance into the RCA. Testimony has been heard from numerous veteran fishermen about the need to get out of shipping channels, away from the weather effects of headlands, during typical northwestern storms. We are frustrated the Coast Guard, which has consistently weighed in on management measures affecting fishing vessel safety, has not taken this issue to heart. We are angry the NMFS Office of Law Enforcement continues to have tunnel vision on an issue that might make enforcement slightly more difficult or costly, but which could save lives.

The Ad Hoc VMS Committee report makes clear the lack of consensus between fishing representatives and law enforcement representatives on this issue. We ask the Council to make clear, in the strongest way possible, that an accommodation for safety must be made.

PFMC  
11/06/03