

EXPANSION OF THE VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM

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 formed the Ad Hoc VMS Committee (VMSC) in 2002 and implemented a pilot program for limited entry vessels in 2004 to explore the use of this new tool in enforcing West Coast groundfish fishery regulations.

The VMSC met October 7, 2003 and discussed criteria and priorities for potential expansion of the VMS program to groundfish fishery sectors other than the limited entry trawl and limited entry fixed gear sectors. Following the VMSC presentation at the November 2003 Council meeting, the Council opted to postpone a decision on expanding the monitoring program until the pilot program in 2004 was implemented. At the June Council meeting, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reported successful implementation of the VMS program and the associated telephone declaration system. At that time, 270 VMS units had been activated generating more than 700,000 position reports in conjunction with 540 declaration reports. NMFS will present a draft Environmental Assessment that builds on the existing program and includes a preliminary range of alternatives for VMS program expansion.

The Council is to hear reports from NMFS, as well as receive advice from the Council advisory bodies and the public, on the expansion alternatives for VMS in groundfish fisheries and consider adopting a range of alternatives for public review. The VMSC is scheduled to meet October 7, 2004 in Portland, Oregon to review and comment on Council recommendations from the September Council meeting. The Council is scheduled to adopt a preferred alternative for VMS expansion at the November 2004 Council meeting in Portland, Oregon.

Council Action:

Adopt alternatives for public review.

Reference Materials:

1. Agendum C.10.b, Attachment 1: Draft Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review/Regulatory Flexibility Analysis for Expanded Coverage of the Program to Monitor Time-Area Closures in the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery, NMFS, Northwest Region.
2. Agendum C.10.d, Public Comment.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agendum Overview
- b. NMFS Report
- c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- d. Public Comment
- e. **Council Action:** Adopt Program Expansion Alternatives for Public Review

Mike Burner
NMFS Staff

PFMC
08/25/04