

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EXPANDED VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) spent several hours reviewing the documents provided, listening to public comment, receiving information from the National Marine Fisheries Service, and discussing the issues and options surrounding this controversial issue.

GAP discussion centered on two options shown on Table 2.0.1 of the draft Environmental Assessment for this proposal (pages 10 - 12 of Agenda Item B.5.b, NMFS Report): a modified version of Alternative 1 (status quo), and Alternative 6B (Ad Hoc Vessel Monitoring System [VMS] Committee, which is a modified version of a GAP proposal). Arguments were made regarding costs and benefits; the validity of data used in the decision-making process; the need to protect the integrity of the Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA); and the necessity to extend an electronic surveillance system to a large number of small, mostly unidentified vessels including many that harvest only a minimal amount of groundfish. The GAP also discussed the recommendations from the VMS Committee, as shown on page 5 of Agenda Item B.5.c (Ad Hoc VMS Committee Minutes), especially the recommendation regarding the issue of drifting within the RCA.

The GAP makes the following recommendations:

1. A majority of the GAP supports Alternative 6B, which would require a VMS unit to be carried on vessels which fish in federal waters AND take and retain or possess groundfish in federal waters, other than salmon trollers retaining allowed amounts of yellowtail rockfish north of 40E10'. The majority believes this alternative best expresses the GAP's intent that vessels whose operations are restricted as a result of an RCA limitation should carry VMS units.
2. A minority of the GAP supports Alternative 1, until such time as the Council completes action on identifying and limiting the open access fleet, at which time Alternative 6B would be appropriate. The minority believes waiting until this action is completed will enable NMFS to more precisely enforce VMS coverage.
3. The entire GAP supports VMS Committee recommendation number 2, requesting federal funding of all GAP requirements.
4. The entire GAP supports VMS Committee recommendation number 4, endorsing a removal of the drifting prohibition on existing VMS-covered vessels and not imposing a drifting prohibition on vessels that will be covered under this Council action. Several GAP members pointed out that in addition to the safety concerns the GAP has consistently raised, the high cost of fuel virtually requires vessels drift during some part of a fishing trip.

PFMC
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