

IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EXPANDED VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM

The Council is considering an expansion of the existing Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) program to open access groundfish fisheries to enhance state and federal enforcement's ability to monitor vessel compliance with depth-based conservation areas. Depth-based management areas were established so that healthy fisheries could continue in areas and with gears where little incidental catch of overfished species occurs. Therefore, maintaining the integrity of conservation areas is consistent with the conservation goals and objectives of the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

At the Council's September 2004 meeting, NMFS presented a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) that contained a range of five VMS coverage alternatives for the open access fishery. These alternatives were based on the Ad Hoc VMS Committee's (VMSC) October 2003 recommendations to the Council. The coverage levels identified in the alternatives are based on different combinations of the open access gear groups as prioritized by the VMSC: longline, groundfish pot, trawl (excluding shrimp), and line (excluding salmon). The Council reviewed the five alternatives and considered input from its advisory bodies and the public before recommending a range of eight alternatives for further analysis and an October 1, 2005 implementation date for the expanded VMS program. Though some alternatives specifically excluded vessels that fish only in state waters, those vessels are already excluded under all of the alternatives because there is no link to federal authority at this time.

In October 2004, the VMSC met and reviewed the alternatives recommended by the Council for further analysis in the EA. At this same meeting, the VMSC unanimously agreed on a recommended alternative. This alternative was added to the range of alternatives analyzed in the EA as Alternative 6B. Alternative 6B is the same as alternative 6A, except that only salmon troll vessels north of Cape Mendocino that fish pursuant to the harvest guidelines, quotas, and other management measures governing the open access fishery for groundfish species other than yellowtail rockfish would be required to carry and use a VMS transceiver and provide declaration reports under Alternative 6B. Table 2.0.1 in Agenda Item B.5.b, contains a summary of the alternative management actions for expanding coverage of the monitoring system and is followed by a more detailed description of each alternative.

In January and February 2005, NMFS held seven public meetings covering all three West Coast states to provide interested public with information regarding the expansion of the VMS program. NMFS will brief the Council on the outcome of those meetings under the NMFS report, Agenda Item B.5.b.

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 adopt a Council preferred alternative.

Council Action:

Adopt a preferred expansion alternative.

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item B.5.b, NMFS Report: Draft Environmental Assessment, Regulatory Impact Review & Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, Expanded Coverage of the Program to Monitor Time-Area Closures in the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery.
2. Agenda Item B.5.c, Ad Hoc VMS Committee Minutes.
3. Agenda Item B.5.d, Public Comment.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview
- b. NMFS Report
- c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- d. Public Comment
- e. **Council Action:** Adopt a Preferred Expansion Alternative

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