

## EXPANSION OF VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM (VMS)

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.

The Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) first implemented VMS requirements for the limited entry sectors of the groundfish fishery in 2004. The Council and NMFS have been considering the expansion of this monitoring program and have convened several meetings and Council sessions on the matter.

- **October 7, 2003** - The Ad Hoc Vessel Monitoring System Committee (VMSC) met 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.
- **November 2003 Council meeting** - The Council opted to postpone a decision on expanding the monitoring program until the pilot program in 2004 was implemented and evaluated.
- **September 2004 Council meeting** - NMFS presented a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) that contained a range of five VMS coverage alternatives for the open access fishery based on the VMSC's October 2003 recommendations to the Council. The Council recommended a range of eight alternatives for further analysis. The Council also recommended a delay in Council final action to provide more time for public and advisory body input.
- **October 7, 2004** - The VMSC met and recommended Alternative 6B requiring VMS for any vessel engaged in commercial fishing to which a RCA restriction applies, except salmon troll vessels north of 40° 10' N. latitude that only land yellowtail rockfish.
- **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.
- **April 2005 Council meeting** - The Council reviewed a revised EA and recommended further analysis to examine thresholds for identifying vessels that land insignificant amounts of groundfish and low impact fisheries that could be considered as exceptions to the VMS requirement. In addition, concerns about the cost of a VMS system being borne by industry to maintain the integrity of the Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) management regime for the open access (OA) fisheries were expressed by the Council.
- **June 2005 Council meeting** - The Council adopted measures to protect groundfish essential fish habitat. As part of the habitat protection measures, the Council requested that VMS requirements for bottom-trawl vessels be included in the OA VMS analysis. At this meeting, the Council also decided to move its final decision on this action from September 2005 to November 2005.
- **September 2005 Council meeting** - As a result of Council discussion at the April 2005 meeting, NMFS developed three additional alternatives and broadened the analysis and distributed a revised EA for review.

- **September 29, 2005** - The VMSC met to review the latest EA and developed preliminary recommendations to the Council. The VMSC noted several important sections of the EA were incomplete but developed tentative recommendations to the Council including a preferred alternative focused on groundfish directed fisheries and the Council's June 2005 action on groundfish essential fish habitat (Agenda Item H.10.c, Ad Hoc VMS Committee Report).

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 and adopt a Council preferred alternative.

**Council Action:**

**Adopt a preferred expansion alternative.**

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item H.10.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 H.10.c, Ad Hoc VMS Committee Report.
3. Agenda Item H.10.c, HMSMT Report.
4. Agenda Item H.10.c, CPSAS Report.
5. Agenda Item H.10.c, Supplemental Ad Hoc VMS Committee Summary Minutes.
6. Agenda Item H.10.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 Final Preferred VMS Expansion Alternative

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10/14/05