Northeast Region Pilot Program

By Melissa Hooper

In 2010, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center and Archipelago Marine Research, Ltd. initiated a multi-year pilot project to test the applicability of electronic monitoring (EM) technology in the Northeast region. The study has focused on evaluating the utility of EM to monitor discards by Northeast groundfish cooperatives (aka "Sectors"), a multispecies catch share fishery. Approximately 30% at-sea observer coverage is currently required to monitor catch toward quota allocations. Some members of the New England Council and the fishing industry are interested in using EM in place of, or to supplement, observer coverage to reduce costs. To date, the pilot project has focused on building capacity and exploring methods for estimating weight and identifying to species. Preliminary results are promising and the Northeast Regional Office and Science Center are evaluating next steps for the pilot project and EM, which may include expanding experiments to hone methods for species identification and weight estimation, developing operational protocols, and planning for implementation.