

C7 Electronic Monitoring – COUNCIL MOTION 2/7/2016

Analysis to Integrate Electronic Monitoring into the North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer Program

The Council approves the following purpose and need statement:

To carry out their responsibilities for conserving and managing groundfish resources, the Council and NMFS must have high quality, timely, and cost-effective data to support management and scientific information needs. In part, this information is collected through a comprehensive fishery monitoring program for the groundfish and halibut fisheries off Alaska, with the goals of verifying catch composition and quantity, including of those species discarded at sea, and collecting biological information on marine resources. While a large component of this monitoring program relies on the use of human observers, the Council and NMFS have been on the path of integrating technology into our fisheries monitoring systems for many years, with electronic reporting systems in place, and operational EM in a compliance capacity in some fisheries. More recently, research and development has focused on being able to use EM as a direct catch estimation tool in fixed gear fisheries.

The fixed gear fisheries are diverse in their fishing practices and vessel and operational characteristics, and they operate over a large and frequently remote geographical distribution. The Council recognizes the benefit of having access to an assorted set of monitoring tools in order to be able to balance the need for high-quality data with the costs of monitoring and the ability of fishery participants, particularly those on small vessels, to accommodate human observers onboard. EM technology has the potential to allow discard estimation of fish, including halibut PSC and mortality of seabirds, onboard vessels that have difficulty carrying an observer or where deploying an observer is impracticable. EM technology may also reduce economic, operational and/or social costs associated with deploying human observers throughout coastal Alaska. Through the use of EM, it may be possible to affordably obtain at-sea data from a broader cross-section of the fixed gear groundfish and halibut fleet.

The integration of EM into the Council's fishery research plan is not intended to supplant the need for human observers. There is a continuing need for human observers as part of the monitoring suite, and there will continue to be human observer coverage at some level in the fixed gear fisheries, to provide data that cannot be collected via EM (e.g., biological samples).

The Council and NMFS have considerable annual flexibility to provide observer coverage to respond to the scientific and management needs of the fisheries. By integrating EM as a tool in the fisheries monitoring suite, the Council seeks to preserve and increase this flexibility. Regulatory change is needed to specify vessel operator responsibilities for using EM technologies, after which the Council and NMFS will be able to deploy human observer and EM monitoring tools tailored to the needs of different fishery sectors through the Annual Deployment Plan.

The Council approves the following alternatives:

Alternative 1: Status quo - EM is not a tool in the Council's Research Plan

Alternative 2: Allow use of EM for catch estimation on vessels in the EM selection pool

Option: Require full retention of key species with associated dockside monitoring

Alternative 3: Allow use of EM for compliance monitoring of vessel operator logbooks used for catch estimation

Note, the Council may select different alternatives for different sections of the fixed gear fleet (e.g., for longline vs pot gear, or by vessel size class), or may choose multiple alternatives for regulatory implementation, but specify annually in the ADP which vessels will be using which EM program.

The Council also directs the EM Workgroup to continue to evaluate the feasibility and potential cost savings associated with EM cooperatives, where a particular group of vessels would contract specifically with an EM provider to meet their monitoring needs over the course of a year, as a potential trailing amendment to this analysis.

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2017 Electronic Monitoring Pre-implementation

The Council requests the EM Workgroup to continue developing proposals for two separate pre-implementation pools for 2017, for longline and pot vessels.

- The Council endorses the Workgroup's efforts to expand the longline pre-implementation pool in 2017 to 90 vessels, and to remove the constraint that vessels must be less than 57.5 ft LOA. However, first priority in the pool would continue to be given to small longline vessels (40 to 57.5 ft LOA) that have liferaft or bunk space limitations with carrying a human observer.
- The Council also endorses developing a pre-implementation pool for 30 pot vessels (of any length) for 2017.
- For vessels under 40 foot, the Council supports EM Workgroup work in 2017 to undertake a demographic study of the under 40' fleet occur in 2017, to evaluate effort both by the number of trips and vessel length, in order to identify priorities for phase in of coverage. This work would support the development of a plan for specific field research in the under 40 ft fleet in 2018.