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NOAA FISHERIES REQUIRES VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEMS FOR PELAGIC LONGLINE FISHERIES IN THE ATLANTIC

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) today announced that vessels with pelagic longline gear on board fishing for Highly Migratory Species (HMS) in the Atlantic will need to carry a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS). Effective Sept. 1, 2003, the requirement affects approximately 320 vessels with limited access permits for Atlantic tunas and swordfish. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is an agency of the Department of Commerce.

NOAA Fisheries uses VMS to assist in monitoring compliance with closed-area regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. VMS is an electronic tool installed on a vessel that transmits global positioning system information on a real-time basis, allowing NOAA Fisheries to determine the location and travel patterns of fishing boats. VMS is an important tool that can help monitor and enforce areas that are closed to fishing.

"In order to ensure the success of fisheries conservation programs, they must be enforceable" said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries. "VMS is an exciting way of using technology to benefit our stakeholders and fishery resources by monitoring compliance with regulations and increasing safety at sea."

VMS also holds tremendous potential for future data collection and real time catch reporting for scientists and managers. Other possible benefits include increased vessel safety and dependable and confidential communications, which may improve fleet management.

The regulation requires all permitted vessels that fish for Atlantic HMS and that have pelagic longline gear on board to have a VMS installed and operating whenever the vessel is away from port. Pelagic longline means a longline that is suspended by floats in the water column and that is not fixed to or in contact with the ocean bottom. Pelagic longline gear is on board when (1) a power-operated longline hauler, (2) a mainline, (3) floats capable of supporting the mainline, and (4) leaders (gangions) with hooks are on board.

Although the VMS regulation will impose a cost on the fishery, the VMS program will also have a beneficial economic impact by allowing pelagic longline vessels to continue fishing up to the date of any closures, cross closed areas provided they are not fishing, and delay offloading after any seasonal closures. This could allow fishermen to obtain higher prices for their catch.

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Fishermen could also link the VMS system with personal computers to improve communication with other vessels and port facilities. VMS position reports are automated, require no action on the part of the vessel operator, and provide much greater detail about vessel location than traditional logbooks. If electronic catch reporting is developed in the future, VMS could potentially take the place of paper logbooks which may become obsolete.

The approved VMS consists of both a mobile transceiver unit placed on the vessel and the communications service provider that supplies the wireless link between the unit on the vessel and the shoreside data user.

To obtain copies of the list of NOAA Fisheries approved VMS mobile transmitting units and communications service providers or information regarding VMS write to NOAA Fisheries Office for Law Enforcement (OLE), 8484 Georgia Avenue, Suite 415, Silver Spring, MD 20910, or contact Jonathan Pinkerton, National VMS Program Manager, phone 301-427-2300.

NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement, and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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On the Internet:

NOAA - <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries - <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>