



Northeast, HMS Vessel Monitoring System Updates

Updates to the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) are now underway. They include new and updated declaration codes for fisheries in the Northeast and for several highly migratory species (HMS) fisheries. The intent is to make the reporting process easier for fishermen while maintaining the level of coverage needed by enforcement personnel.

Vessel owners in the Northeast can expect to receive a software change for their installed VMS units sometime in late January or early February. Declaration codes for the Atlantic herring fishery will be added and several of the declarations for other fisheries will be updated.

The software release is being timed with the effective date of the final rule for Amendment 5 to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan. The Implementation date is scheduled for Jan. 28, 2014 and vessel owner/operators must use the new software for trips on and after that date. The date may change slightly to coincide with the Amendment 5 effective date.

If your vendor does not automatically download the new software to your VMS unit, you should receive a CD in the mail that will allow you to load it. A NOAA

Fisheries Northeast Bulletin with instructions and a start date will be sent to you soon, and the VMS webpage at <www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/vms> will contain new VMS user instructions for vessel operators and views/instructions for all VMS declarations and forms.

Here's a summary of the VMS changes.

- All VMS forms now require the vessel operator to enter his/her eight-digit "Federal Vessel Operator Permit" number. This change is being initiated so that Office of Law Enforcement personnel can determine who on the vessel was responsible for submitting the VMS report(s).
- The monkfish declaration includes a selection for "Monkfish Research Set-Aside" (RSA) days-at-sea.
- The scallop declaration includes some instructional text. Also, the RSA trip selection requires the user to acknowledge the intent to harvest RSA quota and to select an area from the general category or limited access menu.
- The surf clam/ocean quahog declaration includes a selection for the reopened portion of the Georges Bank PSP Area.
- The herring declaration has been expanded to

four steps, including selection of a carrier trip, gear type, retention of mackerel/longfin squid, and whether herring RSA quota will be harvested.

- Mackerel and longfin squid declarations have been added in advance of a new VMS requirement for these fisheries.
- The "Declare Out of Fishery" declaration includes a "NAFO" selection.
- The reports form text has been changed to improve clarity and standardization. Though the reports may look different, the information requested is mostly the same as before with only a few changes.

The (vessel) operator's permit number has been added as a new field in most forms. Fields requiring dates now ask for you to enter the two-digit year to improve processing. The groundfish trip start hail will be required if fishing under a sector exemption or an ops plan provision, and selections have been added for exemptions/provisions.

A new RSA/EFP trip start and trip end hail will allow VMS vessels that previously had to declare their RSA/EFP trips through Interactive Voice Response (IVR) to send their declaration and hails entirely through VMS.

A new mackerel and longfin squid daily catch report and mackerel pre-landing notification have been added in anticipation of the new VMS requirement for these fisheries.

For more information, visit the VMS webpage at <www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/vms>. If you have additional questions, please call the NOAA Fisheries' Northeast VMS Team at (978) 281-9213 or send the team an e-mail at <NMFS.OLE.NE@noaa.gov>.

HMS VMS updates

On Nov. 15, 2013, NOAA Fisheries published a rule
See VMS UPDATES, page 4

Fish-Online Offers New Functions For Fishermen

Fish-Online is a password protected website maintained by NOAA Fisheries Service's Northeast Region where fishermen can find regulatory information they need to fish successfully and to participate in the management process.

Fish-Online was originally made available in May 2013, enabling permit holders to view landings, days-at-sea, and potential sector contribution (PSC) information. Since that time, many more functions have been added.

You can now:

- View the data NOAA Fisheries has recorded from your submitted vessel trip reports (VTRs);
- View data NOAA Fisheries has received from dealers on your trips (dealer landing reports);
- View days-at-sea transactions;
- View PSC letters and landings;
- View observer data by trip;
- See if your vessel is compliant with VTR reporting requirements;
- View Interactive Voice Response (IVR) data reports for herring;
- View a calendar of reporting weeks;
- Verify that NOAA Fisheries has correct information on your vessel specifications, permits, ownership, and contact information;
- Submit "did-not-fish" reports;
- Request a new logbook for VTR and clam fishery reporting;
- Lease multispecies days-at-sea;

- Make cost recovery payments for the scallop individual fishing quota (IFQ) and tilefish fisheries;
- Get fisheries news updates;
- Find out who to contact at NOAA Fisheries with questions; and
- Submit questions via email at any time.

How to access

To access Fish-Online, you need a user ID, which is your permit number, and a vessel PIN number, or password. To obtain a PIN, please call (978) 281-9133 or contact Alison Ferguson, NOAA Fisheries, by phone at (978) 281-9209 or by e-mail at <alison.ferguson@noaa.gov>.

Keep your confidential vessel PIN safe, and do not share it with anyone else. If there is a change in ownership of your vessel, the current PIN will be canceled, and a new PIN will be issued and sent to the new owner. If you lose your confidential vessel PIN or cannot access Fish-Online, contact Alison.

Once you have a PIN, type the following secure web address into your Internet browser (Firefox, Chrome, or Safari are recommended): <www.nero.noaa.gov/NMFSlogin>. You then will have access to the many services provided by Fish-Online.

We are working to make scallop IFQ leasing available soon, and will continue to add new features to Fish-Online. If you have ideas about other functions that would be useful, please contact Olivia Rugo, NOAA Fisheries, by phone at (978) 675-2167 or by e-mail at <olivia.rugo@noaa.gov>.

Chatham, MA, Cape May, NJ

Port Agent Offices Close

Due to budget constraints, NOAA Fisheries Service has closed its port office in Chatham, MA. Services previously provided from that office will now be handled by Port Agent Walter Anoushian in the Point Judith, RI office.

Approximately one day per week, Walt also staffs the port of New Bedford, MA, working out of the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries office located at 1213 Purchase St., New Bedford. Walt can be reached by phone at (401) 783-7797 or e-mail at <walter.anoushian@noaa.gov>.

Additionally, the Cape May, NJ office is open on a part time basis. Services for that area will be covered by Joanne Pellegrino who works out of the Toms River, NJ office. Joanne can be reached by phone at (732) 818-1311 or by e-mail at <joanne.pellegrino@noaa.gov>.

THIS SUPPLEMENT PROVIDED BY NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE'S NORTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE

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GEARNET Completes First Batch of Projects

In the September 2013 edition of the NOAA Fisheries Navigator, we introduced GEARNET, a new networking approach to collaborative fisheries research that enables fishing gear experts, including fishermen, gear engineers, sociologists, economists, and fishery managers to work together to resolve fisheries bycatch issues in the Northeast.

GEARNET lead researchers are from the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI), Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF), University of Massachusetts Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMASST), New Hampshire Sea Grant, Superior Trawl, and Integrity Fishing Corporation.

From 2011 to 2013, GEARNET received over 30 proposals, which were reviewed by members of the commercial groundfish community, university scientists, NOAA Fisheries research staff, and fishery managers from State and Federal organizations. While work is ongoing on some projects, others have been completed. Here are summaries of those completed projects.

Developing a net that enables fishermen to catch flounder while avoiding cod and haddock – The lead industry participant on this project was Capt. Carl Bouchard, F/V Stormy Weather, and the lead GEARNET scientist was Dr. Shelly Tallack, formerly of GMRI.

Initial results suggest that about a 50% reduction in cod catch was achieved during 30 paired test tows. These preliminary results were presented at GMRI's "Exploring Innovations in Fishing Operations" workshop in April 2011.

Evaluating catch composition and selectivity in gillnets at different heights from the sea floor – The goal of this project was to identify a gillnet configuration that enables fishermen to target pollock while avoiding other groundfish species.

The lead industry participant was Capt. Jayson Driscoll, F/V Karen Lyn, with Ken La Valley from New Hampshire Sea Grant serving as the lead GEARNET scientist. Although catch on this project was somewhat limited, data analysis is underway and preliminary results are favorable.

Preventing excessive catches with a self-closing codend that activates when the desired fish volume has been captured – The lead industry participant for this effort was Capt. Daniel Murphy, F/V Bantry Bay, and the project was led by GEARNET scientists David Chosid and Mike Pol from DMF.

This low-cost solution was a contender in the 2013 International Smart Gear Competition and has shown promise in controlling the volume of catch in a very economical manner.

Evaluating gear modifications to improve fuel efficiency and catch selectivity in the Port Clyde Sector – This project tested large-mesh, fine-diameter netting and fuel flow meters to compare fuel consumption, catch, and profitability using a traditional trawl and a trawl constructed from the new netting.

Catches from the fine-diameter trawl system varied by fisherman, with no change in cod or white hake, a 5%-9% reduction in dab and grey sole, and a 5%-9% increase in pollock reported in some cases. All fishermen who used the modified trawls reported

reduced catches of undersized fish.

Some fishermen felt the fine-diameter twine was prone to hang-ups and tears, while fishermen who installed the fuel flow meters believed the meters provided information that allowed a 5%-19% reduction in fuel consumption.

Flume Tank Workshop – GEARNET principal investigators hosted a Flume Tank Workshop at the Fisheries and Marine Institute of Memorial University located in St. John's, Newfoundland for 17 GEARNET-funded industry members and additional industry partners.

The workshop tested different trawl designs, allowing participants to see how trawls performed and how to improve catch performance and efficiency. It also provided an opportunity for industry members and researchers to improve relationships by exchanging ideas and information.

Discussion topics covered: improving groundfish sector viability through more efficient fishing; selective fishing technology; fuel efficiency and drag in trawl systems; environmentally friendly fishing; and using fish behavior to improve trawl design. Over 15 hours of video taken during the workshop is being edited for public posting and access.

Semi-pelagic door financing – Resources from Coastal Enterprises Inc. and funds from the Alex C. Walker Foundation were leveraged to develop a unique financing model to allow groundfish fishermen to purchase semi-pelagic trawl doors, which can reduce fuel consumption by an estimated 10%.

Fishermen were able to purchase the doors through a low annual interest rate loan and use their fuel savings to repay the loan. Payments could be adjusted when fishing was good or slow and were always less than the fuel savings achieved through the use of the doors and fuel meter.

Fishermen received a \$2,500 rebate from the Walker Foundation to use for anything, including the loan application fee, fuel flow meter installation, or loan repayment. Four fishermen between Maine and Rhode Island have purchased semi-pelagic doors through the project and will provide feedback to the principal investigators.

GEARNET team members will be presenting their projects at Seafood Expo North America in Boston March 16-18 to showcase Northeast fishermen's efforts to produce sustainable, environmentally responsible seafood. For more information on GEARNET visit the group's website at <www.gearnnet.org>.

River Herring and Shad Management Updates

Once abundant along the East Coast, populations of river herring (alewife and blueback herring) and shad (American and hickory) have declined compared to historical levels due to various factors.

Governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, tribal groups, academia, industry, and others are currently engaged in numerous efforts to further river herring and shad conservation. Here is an update of some recent management and other initiatives.

Vessels fishing for Atlantic mackerel and Atlantic herring can encounter river herring and shad (RH/S). Both the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils have recommended river herring and shad catch caps for these fisheries beginning in 2014.

Managers don't currently have enough data to determine biologically based RH/S catch caps or to assess the potential effects of such catch caps on RH/S populations coastwide.

However, the Councils believe RH/S catch caps provide a strong incentive for the mackerel and herring fleets to continue avoiding RH/S. These catch caps are intended to allow for the full harvest of the mackerel and herring annual catch limits while reducing RH/S incidental catch.

At its June 2013 meeting, the Mid-Atlantic Council recommended establishing a RH/S catch cap of 236 metric tons (mt) for the 2014 mackerel fishery. That figure is the estimated median amount of RH/S that would have been caught if the commercial mackerel fishery had landed its current annual catch limit of 33,821 mt in recent years.

RH/S caught on all trips landing 20,000 pounds or more of mackerel would count against the cap. If the directed mackerel fishery harvests 95% of its 236-mt RH/S cap, NMFS would implement a 20,000-pound mackerel possession limit, effectively closing the directed mackerel fishery.

At its September 2013 meeting, the New England Council recommended establishing RH/S catch caps for midwater and bottom trawl gear in the herring fishery for 2014 and 2015.

The Council recommended a combined RH/S cap based on the median of historical catch for the herring fishery specifically for midwater trawl gear in the Gulf of Maine (86 mt), midwater trawl gear in the Cape Cod area (13 mt), and bottom trawl gear (89 mt) and midwater trawl gear (124 mt) in Southern New England.

RH/S caught on all trips that land 6,600 pounds or more of herring would count against the caps. If the directed herring fishery harvests the RH/S caps, NOAA Fisheries would implement a 2,000-pound herring possession limit, effectively closing the directed herring fishery for that area and gear type.

Monitoring is critical to understanding the nature and extent of RH/S catch in the mackerel and herring fisheries. The Councils decided on a combined cap for river herring and shad because the relatively small amount of shad caught by the mackerel and herring fisheries would make monitoring a separate cap for shad difficult.

Because the seasonal and inter-annual distribution of RH/S are highly variable, the Councils believe that

See HERRING/SHAD, next page

Herring/shad

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the most effective measures to address RH/S catch would be those that increase at-sea sampling, improve accounting of incidental catch, and promote cooperative efforts with the industry to minimize catch.

Working group

At its October 2013 meeting, the Mid-Atlantic Council considered whether RH/S needed additional Federal management. After extensive discussion, public testimony, and consideration of public comment, the Council determined that additional management of RH/S under a Federal fishery management plan (FMP) was neither required nor appropriate at this time.

Instead, the Council recommended addressing additional conservation of river herring and shad through an interagency working group focused on catch. The Council will review the progress of the working group on a regular basis, with the first review occurring at the June 2014 council meeting.

In three years, the Council will conduct a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of the working group approach and determine if it is appropriate or if a different strategy is required to manage RH/S.

The New England Council also is scheduled to consider whether RH/S need additional Federal management. As a priority for 2014, the Council will consider adding RH/S as stocks in fishery under the Atlantic Herring FMP.

Coastwide plan

In a separate but related action, NOAA Fisheries is working with the states, councils, and others to develop and implement a coordinated coastwide river herring conservation plan.

This effort was launched following our Aug. 12, 2013 announcement that a threatened or endangered listing of river herring under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was not warranted.

Given the many threats that river herring face throughout their lives, it's clear that our conservation efforts must be holistic. So, the primary objectives of this initiative are to:

- Develop, for the first time, a dynamic conservation plan to help restore river herring throughout their entire range in state and federal waters;
- Identify and implement important conservation efforts;
- Address some of the critical data gaps for RH/S species; and
- Help monitor progress and adapt efforts as needed.

NOAA Fisheries has provided funding to the ASMFC to jointly coordinate this effort. This initiative will build upon the many previous and ongoing efforts to further river herring conservation. For example, we will be working collaboratively with the Mid-Atlantic and New England Councils to address fishing related mortality to river herring and shad.

As part of this effort, we are convening a river herring technical expert working group. We are seeking to identify individuals who possess expertise related to river herring, threats to their survival, and/or methods for assessing human and non-human impacts to river herring such as dams, water quality, climate change, predation, genetics/hybrids, stock status, and catch.

The goal of working group meetings will be information gathering, and all meetings will be open to the public.

Updates can be found online at <www.nero.noaa.gov/protected/CandidateSpeciesProgram/RiverHerringSOC.htm>.

NOAA Fisheries intends to revisit the status of river herring under the ESA within the next five years.

For more information on the ESA listing determination, coastwide conservation plan development, or technical expert working group, call Kim Damon-Randall, Protected Resources Division, at (978) 282-8485 or e-mail her at <Kimberly.Damon-Randall@noaa.gov>.

For more information on the Councils' consideration of river herring and shad management, call Carrie Nordeen, Sustainable Fisheries Division, at (978) 281-9272 or e-mail her at <Carrie.Nordeen@noaa.gov>.

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan Annual Management Areas Summary

The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) was implemented to reduce serious injuries and deaths of right, humpback, and fin whales due to entanglement in commercial trap/pot and gillnet gear from Maine to Florida. The following table lists upcoming dates for Northeast and Mid-Atlantic ALWTRP

management area restrictions of which fishermen should be aware. Additionally, management areas also are in place in the Southeast (NC-FL). Visit the ALWTRP website at <www.nero.noaa.gov/Protected/whaletrp> for more details or contact NOAA Fisheries' ALWTRP Coordinator Kate Swails by phone at (978) 282-8481 or by e-mail at <kate.swails@noaa.gov>.

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan		
Trap/Pot Management Areas & Requirements		
Management Area	Dates	Closure or Gear Modifications
Northern Inshore State Trap/Pot Waters	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Cape Cod Bay Restricted Area (state & federal waters)	Jan. 1- May 15	Gear modifications and markings
Cape Cod Bay Restricted Area (state waters only)	May 16- Dec. 31	Gear modifications and markings
Cape Cod Bay Restricted Area (federal waters only)	May 16- Dec. 31	Gear modifications and markings
Stellwagen Bank Jeffrey's Ledge Restricted Area	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Great South Channel Restricted Trap/Pot Area	April 1-June 30	CLOSED to ALL trap/pot fishing
Great South Channel Restricted Trap/Pot Area	July 1- March 31	Gear modifications and markings
Northern Nearshore Trap/Pot Waters (Northeast)	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Southern Nearshore Trap/Pot Waters (Northeast)	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Offshore Trap/Pot Waters (Northeast)	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Southern Nearshore Trap/Pot Waters (Mid-Atlantic)	Sept. 1- May 31	Gear modifications and markings
Offshore Trap/Pot Waters (Mid-Atlantic)	Sept. 1- May 31	Gear modifications and markings
Gillnet Management Areas & Requirements		
Management Area	Dates	Closure or Gear Modifications
Cape Cod Bay Restricted Area	Jan. 1- May 15	CLOSED to ALL gillnet fishing
	May 16- Dec. 31	Gear modifications and markings
Stellwagen Bank Jeffrey's Ledge Restricted Area	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Great South Channel Restricted Gillnet Area	April 1- June 30	CLOSED to ALL gillnet fishing
	July 1- March 31	Gear modifications and markings
Great South Channel Sliver Restricted Area	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Other Northeast Gillnet Waters (Northeast)	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Other Northeast Gillnet Waters (Mid-Atlantic)	Sept. 1- May 31	Gear modifications and markings
Mid/South Atlantic Gillnet Waters	Sept. 1- May 31	Gear modifications and markings

MMPA: Do You Have Your 2014 Certificate?

The Marine Mammal Authorization Program (MMAP) is a mandatory registration program for commercial fishermen that provides exemptions from the Marine Mammal Protection Act's prohibition on the accidental taking of non-endangered/threatened marine mammals during commercial fishing activities.

In the Northeast region, fishermen with a valid state/federal permit/license as of Jan. 1 each year are automatically registered for the year.

This program applies to all fishermen who fish in federal or state waters using the following types of commercial gear:

- Gillnets;
- Pelagic long lines;
- Trap/pots;
- Midwater or bottom trawls, including pair trawl and flynets;
- Menhaden purse seines in the Mid-Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico;
- Long haul seines in North Carolina;
- Roe mullet stop nets in North Carolina;

- Pound nets in Virginia; and
- Any high seas fisheries targeting Atlantic highly migratory species outside 200 nautical miles.

If you fish with these gear types, the MMAP requires that you do the following.

- Carry an authorization certificate during fishing activities. This certificate is valid Jan. 1-Dec. 31 of each calendar year.
- Carry an observer if requested.
- Comply with applicable marine mammal protection measures and Take Reduction Plans. And
- Report any marine mammal serious injury/death caused by a fishing operation within 48 hours of the interaction using the Marine Mammal Mortality/Injury Reporting form. This form is available on the MMAP website or by calling (978) 281-9328.

If you participate in an applicable fishery and have not received your certificate in the mail, please visit the MMAP website at <www.nero.noaa.gov/mmap> to download one or call us at (978) 281-9328 and we'll mail one to you.

Habitat Restoration Projects in ME, MA, MD, VA Receive \$6.6 Million

NOAA Fisheries Service has announced more than \$6 million in funding for fisheries habitat restoration projects in Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Virginia to restore more than 11,000 acres of habitat and to open more than 200 stream miles for fish passage. These projects will benefit species such as river herring and the tuna, bluefish, cod, birds, and marine mammals that prey on them.

“Dam removal, fishways, and other restoration efforts provide a key role in helping us bring back depleted fish stocks,” said John Bullard, NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional Administrator. “They also have a variety of ecological, social, and economic benefits to

communities that border our rivers.”

From Virginia to Maine, native fish like river herring and Atlantic salmon are limited by a lack of habitat. NOAA Fisheries is working with partners in the region to restore habitat for these fish by removing barriers to fish passage and improving in-stream conditions.

Three of the funded projects will restore critical spawning and nursery areas for river herring in Massachusetts. One will open fish passage to Atlantic salmon and forage fish in Maine, two will create oyster reef habitat in Virginia and Maryland, and another will advance dam removal in Maryland along critical waterways for river herring, American eel, and American shad.

The projects are as follows.

- Bloede Dam (\$3.83 million) – Work to remove the Bloede Dam and engineering design to remove the Daniels Dam on Maryland’s Patapsco River are part of a larger effort with partner American Rivers to restore more than 65 miles of spawning habitat for blueback herring, alewife, and American shad, and more than 183 miles for American eel, ensuring sustainable populations of these target species. Two other dams on the Patapsco River – the Simkins and Union Dams – were removed in 2010 as part of this effort. The award recipient is American Rivers.
- Plymco and Holmes Dams (\$525,000) – The removal of these two dams will conclude more than a decade of work by NOAA and its partners to remove all barriers to fish along Town Brook in Plymouth, MA. It creates the potential for restoring a river herring run of over 500,000 fish. Currently, the run measures roughly 150,000 herring and is largely sustained by trucking the fish around the dams. The award recipient is the town of Plymouth, MA
- West Britannia and Barstows Pond Dams (\$77,660) – Once these dams in Taunton, MA are removed, fish will have full access to habitat from Narragansett Bay to headwater pond habitats (36 miles and 400 acres). A river herring run of more than 100,000 fish is anticipated as a result. The removals also will

eliminate the public safety threat associated with these aging dams. The award recipient is the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game.

- Penobscot, East Machias, and Androscoggin watersheds (\$174,000) – This grant will help to fund several projects, including the removal of inappropriately designed culverts and the installation of fish ladders to open up fish passage in the Penobscot, East Machias, and Androscoggin watersheds in Maine. An estimated 10,000 lake acres and 160 river miles will be made accessible to Atlantic salmon and forage fish such as alewife and blueback herring. The award recipient is the Atlantic Salmon Federation.

- Penobscot River, ME (\$365,000) – Funding is awarded to multiple partners for the removal of the Veazie Dam and environmental monitoring of the river. NOAA already has invested roughly \$21 million towards a multi-year plan, developed in close collaboration with partners, to restore fish habitat on the Penobscot River.

- Lafayette River, VA and Harris Creek, MD oyster reefs (\$1.34 million) – Nearly 67 acres of oysters will be planted in the first year of these two awards, creating habitat for black sea bass and other fish. The award recipients are Restore America’s Estuaries, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and Oyster Recovery Partnership.
- Herring River estuary (\$300,000) – This funding will be used for the design and permitting of the Herring River estuarine restoration project in Wellfleet and Truro, MA, which is expected to restore roughly 1,000 acres and more than 11 miles of estuarine and river habitat for bluefish, summer flounder, scup, striped bass, and river herring. The award recipient is Friends of Herring River, Wellfleet/Truro, Inc.

NOAA Fisheries’ investment in habitat is part of a long-term effort to rebuild fisheries, many of which have declined from habitat loss, overfishing, and climate change. Recent successes show that restoring habitat not only stops the decline of fish populations but also allows these populations to regrow to historical high numbers.

For more information, visit the NOAA Fisheries Habitat Conservation Restoration Center website at <www.restoration.noaa.gov> or contact Renata Lana by phone at (301) 427-8656 or by e-mail at <Renata.Lana@noaa.gov>.

VMS Updates

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modifying requirements for vessels required to use VMS units in Atlantic HMS fisheries.

These include: vessels with pelagic longline gear on onboard; vessels with a direct shark limited-access permit and bottom longline gear on board in the vicinity of the Mid-Atlantic shark closed area between 33° N and 36° 30’ N from Jan. 1 through July 31; and vessels with a directed shark limited-access permit with gillnet gear on board from Nov. 15 through April 15.

The changes bring HMS fisheries regulations in line with VMS regulations for other Atlantic fisheries and reduce the reporting burden on vessel operators while continuing to provide NOAA’s Office of Law Enforcement with information needed to enforce closed areas and other HMS regulations.

Under the previous regulations, vessel owners or operators who had been issued HMS permits had to hail out every time they left port for a fishing trip, even when not fishing for or retaining HMS. With the changes, vessel owners or operators now can “declare out of the fishery” and not be subject to unnecessary reporting requirements when their vessels are not fishing for HMS.

The new requirements went into effect in late 2013 and are summarized as follows.

- Vessel owners or operators may use VMS to “declare out of a fishery” when not fishing for or retaining HMS for a period encompassing two or more trips. After declaring out of a fishery, the vessel operator is exempt from HMS hail in/hail out requirements, but not any other HMS regulations.
- Vessel operators are required to provide hourly position reports via VMS units 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the times of the year that VMS reporting is required unless they are granted a documented “power down” exemption by NOAA’s Office of Law Enforcement.
- Vessel operators may “hail out” when leaving port rather than two hours ahead of time; and
- Vessel operators must “hail in” at least three hours but no more than 12 hours before returning to port.

More information is available online at <www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms> or by contacting Cliff Hutt, HMS Management Division, by phone at (301) 427-8503 or by e-mail at <Cliff.Hutt@noaa.gov>.



Nantucket Lightship Closed Area Access

In an effort to mitigate some of the challenges facing New England groundfish fishermen this season, NOAA Fisheries Service opened two sections on the eastern and western side of the Nantucket Lightship Closed Area starting on Dec. 31. Groundfish sector vessels can fish in these waters through April 30, 2014, the end of the current fishing year, under standard at-sea monitoring requirements.

The following rules also apply when fishing in the eastern or western exemption areas:

- Gillnet vessels must fish with extra-large mesh gillnets, meaning 10” or greater;
- Fishermen must attach pingers to gillnets when fishing in the western exemption area;
- Trawl vessels must fish with selective trawl gear, such as the Ruhle or haddock separator trawl; and
- Fishermen are prohibited from using standard

otter trawls and/or flounder nets in these areas.

Sectors with vessels interested in fishing under this exemption first must notify NOAA Fisheries, and vessels must carry a revised Letter of Authorization (LOA) from their sector manager on board.

“We know some fishermen are really struggling, so we’ve come up with a variety of measures that on their own don’t solve the problem for everyone, but collectively can help the industry endure,” said John Bullard, NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional Administrator. “This measure, along with approved fishing gear modifications to target healthy groundfish stocks and quota increases on abundant fish species, should keep more fishermen on the water.”

For more information, call William Whitmore, Sustainable Fisheries Division, at (978) 281-9182 or e-mail him at <william.whitmore@noaa.gov>.

The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR