



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
GREATER ATLANTIC REGION
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930-2276

April 2, 2018

Dr. John F. Quinn, Chairman
New England Fishery Management Council
50 Water Street
Newburyport, MA 01950

Dear John:

At the upcoming April 2018 meeting, we encourage the Council to approve electronic monitoring (EM) and portside sampling as a substitute for at-sea monitoring (ASM) coverage aboard midwater trawl vessels participating in the Atlantic herring fishery.

Monitoring goals for the herring fishery in the Council's Industry-Funded Monitoring (IFM) Omnibus Amendment are accurate estimates of catch, including the catch of haddock and river herring/shad, and affordability.

The purpose of EM aboard midwater trawl vessels would be to confirm catch retention for portside sampling and verify compliance with slippage requirements. In 2016-2018, we conducted an EM study aboard midwater trawl vessels participating in the herring fishery. The recent review of that study concluded that EM is suitable for detecting discarding events aboard midwater trawl vessels. The ability to detect discarding events is consistent with confirming catch retention and verifying compliance with slippage restrictions.

The purpose of portside sampling midwater trawl vessels would be to collect species composition data along with age and length information. Even in the absence of EM, the Council supports the use of portside sampling data to monitor catch in the herring fishery. In a February 2016 letter, the Council requested that we use Northeast Fisheries Observer Program data and portside sampling data to monitor catch in the herring fishery.

The EM study also evaluated costs associated with using EM, especially the sampling costs that would be paid by the fishing industry. NMFS used information from the study to estimate EM costs for midwater trawl vessels participating in the herring fishery. As such, we estimate the industry's costs for EM at approximately \$296 per coverage day, including the review of video footage around fishing activity but not the initial costs of purchasing and installing equipment. The IFM Amendment estimated the industry's annual costs for portside sampling at \$96,000 for the midwater trawl fleet and \$8,700 per vessel. Therefore, we estimate the industry's costs for using EM and portside sampling would be approximately \$515 per coverage day.

The analyses in the IFM Amendment and the EM study suggest that the industry's costs for EM and portside sampling are comparable to the industry's costs for ASM (i.e., \$710 per coverage day). In addition, midwater trawl vessels using EM and portside sampling would have minimal sampling costs on trips resulting in no fishing effort, while vessels using ASM would pay the same amount for a coverage day whether or not fish were caught.



Currently, the draft IFM Amendment regulations would require all vessels with Category A or B herring permits to use ASM coverage to comply with the 50-percent IFM coverage target recommended by the Council. Additionally, the draft regulations do not contain any EM or EM service provider requirements because we wanted the EM study to inform those requirements.

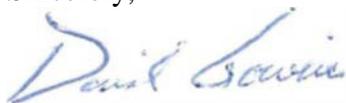
Implementing and administering a Federal EM and portside sampling program for the herring fishery would be a new undertaking for us. National policies on EM cost responsibilities, data retention, and data confidentiality are still being refined. Additionally, we are still developing regional EM recommendations for such things as technical specifications, vessel monitoring plans, and service provider requirements. If the Council approves EM and portside sampling for the herring fishery and if we approve and implement the IFM Amendment, we are considering using an exempted fishing permit (EFP) to administer the EM and portside sampling program for the next two years. The EFP would exempt vessels from the proposed requirement for IFM ASM coverage and would allow midwater trawl vessels to use EM and portside sampling coverage to comply with the Council-recommended 50-percent IFM coverage target.

Other NMFS offices administering EM programs have shared with us that EM programs need flexibility upon implementation. Our recent EM study gives us a good foundation for an EM program, but using an EFP would allow us the flexibility to further develop program standards and best practices as the program evolves. An EFP would also enable us to evaluate other monitoring issues in the herring fishery that are of interest to the Council and herring industry. We could use an EFP to evaluate the utility of EM and portside sampling when midwater trawl vessels switch to purse seining and/or fish in Northeast Multispecies Closed Areas.

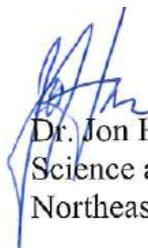
In April 2017, the Council recommended reconsidering IFM requirements two years after implementation. If we administer the EM and portside sampling program for herring midwater trawl vessels via an EFP for those two years, the Council could consider establishing EM program requirements, as well as any additional portside sampling program requirements, into regulation via a framework adjustment at that time.

In summary, we encourage the Council to approve EM and portside sampling as a monitoring option for midwater trawl vessels participating in the herring fishery. We also request the Council support us using an EFP to administer an EM and portside sampling program for midwater trawl vessels participating in the herring fishery. Additionally, we appreciate the midwater trawl fleet's participation in the EM study and Council staff's participation in the EM review panel.

Sincerely,



Michael Pentony
Regional Administrator
Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office



Dr. Jon Hare
Science and Research Director
Northeast Fisheries Science Center