



New England Fishery Management Council

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**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** November 22, 2019  
**TO:** Groundfish Committee  
**FROM:** Council Staff  
**SUBJECT:** **Vessel Specific Coverage Level Option for Possible Inclusion in the Draft Amendment 23/Groundfish Monitoring Alternatives**

The Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) met on November 5, 2019 in Gloucester, MA. The PDT discussed the considerations of a vessel specific coverage level option and the challenges related to attaining specific monitoring coverage levels in the groundfish fishery. A separate memo was prepared with the details of that discussion (see Document #4c). However, the PDT did not fully respond to the Committee motion: *to develop and analyze an option to develop vessel-specific coverage levels*. Therefore, this memo includes a strawman alternative developed by Council staff for the Committee to consider. At this meeting the Committee should discuss whether this topic: 1) be included as an alternative in Amendment 23; 2) not be included as an alternative in Amendment 23; or 3) include this as a frameworkable item that could be considered in a future action following Amendment 23.

As the Committee discusses this strawman option it should be mindful of the challenges and issues highlighted in the PDT memo (Document #4c). In summary, higher levels of monitoring will likely better address possible concerns about uneven coverage among vessels and decoupling At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) and Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) coverage rates would simplify deployment of at-sea monitors and likely result in more even coverage and costs across sectors, since the main reason that vessel-level coverage varies among vessels is due to the interactions between SBRM and ASM coverage requirements, as described in the PDT memo (Document #4c). However, even if equal ASM target coverage levels across vessels are set, there is no guarantee that equal coverage can be realized across vessels, for a variety of operational reasons summarized in the PDT memo (Document #4c). Even if the same ASM coverage is achieved for all vessels, the additional NEFOP coverage will mean all vessels will not carry an observer on the same proportion of trips.

In addition, the Committee should recognize that a vessel specific system would have the highest operational complexity for the Fisheries Sampling Branch at NMFS, sector managers, and vessel/owner operators. It should be noted that many of the concerns about uneven coverage across vessels could be addressed in other ways - vessel specific coverage is not the only possible solution. Finally, the Committee should also consider input from the recent correspondence from NEFSC dated November 22, 2019 with information about the technical and

operational challenges of deploying observers for multiple monitoring programs in the groundfish fishery.

***Staff strawman option (could be included in Section 4.1 of Amendment 23):***

*Vessel-specific coverage level*

- *No Action*  
*Under this alternative, the target monitoring coverage level would be evaluated at the sector level. During the fishing year NMFS would monitor coverage levels by sector, and adjust the Pre-trip notification system (PTNS) to attain the sector level monitoring standard.*
- *Vessel specific coverage level*  
*Under this option the target ASM coverage level would be vessel specific, and each vessel within a sector would have the same target coverage for ASM. ASM coverage would be decoupled from NEFOP coverage. Under this alternative, the target monitoring coverage rate selected in Section 4.1.1 would be for ASM coverage only. NEFOP coverage would still take place on trips separate from, and in addition to, ASM, and NEFOP coverage would not count toward the coverage targets under this option. Currently, all other monitoring standard alternatives under consideration in Section 4.1.1 of A23 have ASM and NEFOP coverage combined to achieve a total coverage rate.*