



New England Fishery Management Council

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New England Joins Mid-Atlantic to Require eVTRs for Vessels with Federal Commercial Permits for Council-Managed Species

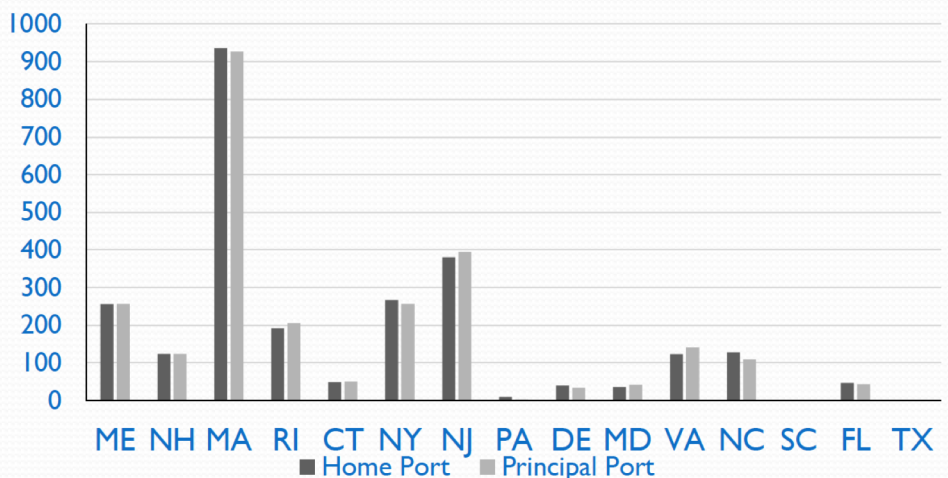
The New England Fishery Management Council is taking steps to bring all commercial fishermen who hold federal permits for Council-managed species into the digital age by requiring vessel trip reports (VTRs) to be submitted electronically instead of on paper. These electronic reports are known as eVTRs, and this proposed action will apply to all of the Council’s fishery management plans.

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) has been working since December of 2018 on a [Commercial eVTR Omnibus Framework Action](#) that would apply to all vessels with federal commercial permits for MAFMC-managed species, which include summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, Atlantic mackerel, squid, butterfish, surfclams, ocean quahogs, bluefish, and tilefish.

During its June 2019 meeting in So. Portland, ME, the New England Council voted to: (1) “engage in a joint omnibus eVTR action” with the Mid-Atlantic Council for spiny dogfish and monkfish, which are managed by both Councils; and (2) expand the framework action to include the full range of fisheries managed by the New England Council for *all* commercial and recreational for-hire permit holders.”

NOTE: The Mid-Atlantic Council already has an eVTR requirement in place for the [charter and party fleet](#) for species managed by the MAFMC. Therefore, the New England Council will develop a *separate action* to address eVTRs for recreational for-hire vessels. The timing for this trailing action has not been determined yet. The new joint omnibus framework that’s currently under development will apply only to vessels with **commercial permits** for species managed by both Councils.

Number of Vessels With Commercial Permits in 2018 for Species Managed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council



The table above can be found in the Mid-Atlantic Council’s “Regulatory Omnibus Framework to Modify Reporting Requirements for Electronic Vessel Trip Reports (eVTRs) by Commercial Vessel Operators Holding Federal Permits for MAFMC-Managed Species.” A copy is available at [Framework Discussion Document](#). Also visit the MAFMC’s [eVTR webpage](#) for additional information.



New England Fishery Management Council

The New England Council decided to join the Mid-Atlantic Council's Commercial eVTR Omnibus Framework Action for a number of reasons, including the following.

- Since the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils jointly manage monkfish and spiny dogfish, the Mid-Atlantic Council could not fold these two species into its omnibus action without concurrence from the New England Council. This led the New England Council to discuss the issue.
- Roughly 90% of all vessels with permits for New England-managed species hold at least one permit for Mid-Atlantic-managed species. Under existing reporting regulations, fishermen with multiple permits are required to abide by the "most restrictive rule." As such, the majority of New England fishermen would be required to submit eVTRs under the Mid-Atlantic Council's action even if the New England Council did nothing.
- If the New England Council had voted to join the Mid-Atlantic Council's omnibus framework for monkfish and dogfish **only**, then 94% of New England's stakeholders would have been required to submit eVTRs, leaving only 6% of the commercial fleet with the option of continuing to submit paper VTRs.
- Commercial fishermen have been able to voluntarily submit eVTRs since 2013, so the tool has been available for several years even though it has not been widely used (see box and red text at right). And,
- The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS/NOAA Fisheries) intends to transition to eVTRs across the board to: (a) reduce costs associated with processing paper reports; (b) improve reporting efficiency; and (c) decrease errors.

Number of Permit Holders

Q: How many fishermen will this affect?

A: The Commercial eVTR Omnibus Framework Action is expected to apply to 2,929 permit holders across both Councils. The action does not apply to lobster-only permit holders.

Number of Commercial Vessel Trip Reports (VTRs) Submitted to the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) in 2018

* For Mid-Atlantic Council-managed species minus monkfish

Paper VTRs – 70,394

Electronic VTRs – 7,172

TRANSITIONING to eVTR: *Fishermen with commercial permits have had the option to submit VTRs electronically since 2013, but few have used this format. Recognizing that many stakeholders will need time to learn the new system and gear up: (1) the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office of NOAA Fisheries has informed both Councils that it will provide an extended implementation period once a final rule is in place in order to facilitate a smooth transition to an electronic format; and (2) the Mid-Atlantic Council is planning an extensive outreach effort that will include in-person workshops and training webinars from the fall of 2019 through the spring of 2020 for both New England and Mid-Atlantic fishermen. The Mid-Atlantic Council has hired a contractor to coordinate the outreach effort.*



New England Fishery Management Council

A six-member Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) is working to develop and analyze management alternatives for the joint omnibus framework. The team includes staff from the Mid-Atlantic and New England Councils, GARFO, and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. At present, the FMAT is:

- Analyzing a variety of alternatives that would unify the current NOAA-mandated reporting deadline to either a 24-hour, 48-hour, 72-hour, or weekly reporting deadline following the completion of a fishing trip; and
- Gathering available information on current NMFS-approved eVTR applications and compatible devices. The intent is that vessel operators would have a choice of which NMFS-approved eVTR application to use and would be allowed to switch at any time.

Excerpts From the eVTR Framework Discussion Document

“According to GARFO, ‘A well-designed eVTR program or application has the ability to significantly reduce the amount of time required for a vessel operator to comply with their VTR reporting requirements by eliminating the need to fill out redundant information (e.g., vessel permit, registration, gear type).’

“Requiring electronic submission would be intended to increase the timeliness and accuracy of fisheries data submitted to NMFS while also reducing the burden on the commercial fishing fleet.

“Under current VTR regulations, operators must submit a separate VTR for each chart area, gear type, and/or mesh size fished, potentially requiring multiple paper forms for a single trip. While eVTRs still require reporting of fishing activity in each area fished, eVTRs eliminate the paper associated with such reporting and ease the reporting associated with multiple areas. With eVTR, additional effort and catch records for each area and/or gear/mesh fished can be added instead of filling out multiple reports.”

For more information contact either:

- **Mid-Atlantic Council** – Karson Coutre at (302) 526-5259, kcoutre@mafmc.org
- **New England Council** – Sam Asci at (978) 465-0492 ext. 116, sasci@nefmc.org

Want to Learn More?

1. The Mid-Atlantic Council is hosting an informational webinar on July 23rd beginning at 8:30 a.m. for all Advisory Panel members and interested stakeholders. Tune in at [join the webinar](#).
2. Keep tabs on the MAFMC’s [eVTR webpage](#).
3. Read the Q & A about commercial eVTR [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

It’s easy to receive commercial eVTR news. (1) Go to the MAFMC’s [eVTR framework webpage](#). (2) Scroll down until you see the “sign up” box pictured below. (3) Fill in your name and email address. (4) And then hit “Submit.”

Sign up to receive email updates:

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