



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Alaska Fisheries Science Center
Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division
7600 Sand Point Way N.E.
Seattle, WA 98115-0070

May 18, 2015

Dear Vessel Owner,

The North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer Program is seeking vessels to participate in the 2016 electronic monitoring (EM) Cooperative Research Project to collect data on board commercial fishing vessels. The goal of the research is to determine whether data collected using EM technologies can be used to estimate catch and whether this can be achieved in a cost-effective and sustainable manner. We request that you let us know of your interest to “opt-in” to the 2016 EM selection pool by **July 27, 2015**. Since vessels will be given a choice to opt-in for the EM pool or remain part of observer selection pool, the Council may reconsider if any of the current observer exemption rules remain such as life raft capacity. Any vessel that does not opt-in by July 27 will likely not be eligible for the EM pool in 2016 and will be required to participate in the partial observer coverage pool per Federal regulations.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) have yet to determine the number of vessels that will be eligible to be in the EM selection pool. NMFS and the industry continue to seek additional funds to support the EM program and the number of vessels that will be selected to participate will depend on the amount of funding received. However, any owner that is interested in participating should let us know their preference to participate.

Priority will be given to vessels that meet the following criteria:

- A. Hook and line vessels 40 to <57.5 feet in length;
- B. Vessels granted a conditional release for insufficient life raft capacity or limited bunk space in 2013 or 2014;
- C. Vessels granted temporary exemptions for limited life raft capacity in 2015, or that might be eligible for a life raft exemption in 2015. Eligibility is based on consistent fishing history with a crew of 4 including the vessel master, and a 4-person life raft.



NMFS will select vessels that meet these criteria and have contacted FMA to opt-in to create the EM selection pool. All vessels that are participating in the 2016 EM selection pool will not be required to carry a human observer for the entire 2016 fishing year.

A 2016 EM Pre-Implementation Plan will provide comprehensive details on the EM cooperative research program for 2016. The EM Pre-Implementation Plan is expected to be completed during the summer of 2015 and presented to the Council at the October 2015 meeting. The plan will include specific criteria for vessel participation and other operational details to ensure effective deployment of EM systems in 2016. Once the EM Pre-Implementation Plan is approved by the Council, NMFS will notify owners of vessels that are selected for the EM pool with more details about the 2016 EM cooperative research in November 2015. Vessels will be given an opportunity to opt-out of the EM cooperative research prior to the start of the fishing year, but any vessels that opt-out will be subject to human observer coverage, with the exception of those granted temporary exemptions for life raft capacity, if exemptions continue to apply in 2016.

All EM equipment will be provided through the EM cooperative research program. If selected, vessels will be expected to carry and maintain EM systems on all halibut IFQ trips and all groundfish trips in Alaskan federal fisheries in 2016. Vessels will also be required to use either an electronic or a paper logbook to record basic information such as fishing location, fishing effort (i.e. hook count) and fishing duration.

EM systems will be installed in a limited number of ports - likely Homer, Kodiak, Sand Point, and Sitka, AK. The final list of ports will be included in the 2016 EM Pre-Implementation Plan. Once a vessel's participation has ended, the EM system will be removed at one of these ports. Vessels will not be required to make all their landings in these ports while participating in this cooperative research project.

If you would like to opt-in to this EM cooperative research in Alaska, please contact Elizabeth Chilton at 206 526-4197 or via e-mail at elizabeth.chilton@noaa.gov by **July 27, 2015**. We look forward to working with you in this EM cooperative research effort.



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