



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 11, 2016

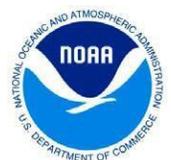
Dear Vessel Owner,

The North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer Program is seeking vessels to participate in the 2017 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 2017 EM selection pool by **September 20, 2016**. Any vessel that does not opt-in by September 20 will likely not be eligible for the EM pool in 2017 and will be required to participate in the partial coverage human observer pool per Federal regulations. Temporary exemptions from observer coverage due to life raft limitations or bunk space will not be issued in 2017.

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. Vessels granted a conditional release for insufficient life raft capacity or limited bunk space in 2013 or 2014;
- B. Vessels granted temporary exemptions for limited life raft capacity in 2015. Eligibility is based on consistent fishing history with a crew of 4 including the vessel master, and a 4-person life raft;
- C. All vessels participating in the 2016 EM cooperative research program that received a positive vessel participation score based on their cooperation with deployment of EM systems;
- D. Vessels fishing with hook and line or pot gear.



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 2017 EM selection pool will not be required to carry a human observer for the entire 2017 fishing year, however these participants will be required to log their fishing trips into the Observer Declare and Deploy System (ODDS).

A EM Pre-Implementation Plan created in 2016 provides comprehensive details on the EM cooperative research program for 2017. The plan includes specific criteria for vessel participation and other operational details to ensure effective deployment of EM systems in 2017. Once the criteria for participating in the 2017 EM cooperative research program are approved by the Council, NMFS will notify vessel owners that are selected for the EM pool with more details about the 2017 EM cooperative research in November 2016 via their email address using an email subscription service (Constant Contact). 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.

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 2017. 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. 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 **September 20, 2016**. We look forward to working with you in this EM cooperative research effort.

Chris Rilling
Director
Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division
Alaska Fisheries Science Center
7600 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115