



## **Council Policy on Vessel Monitoring Systems in the Western Pacific Region**

### **A. Background**

The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council has adopted this policy to help it coordinate the development and use of electronic fishing vessel monitoring systems in the central and western Pacific, in support of regional fisheries management.

The Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 established US jurisdiction over fisheries in federal waters of an exclusive economic zone (EEZ, from 3 - 200 nautical miles offshore). The Western Pacific Council is one of eight councils created by the Act, and is the policy-making organization for the management of fisheries around American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, the Northern Mariana Islands, Johnston Atoll, Kingman Reef and Palmyra Island, Jarvis Island, Howland and Baker Islands, and Wake Island, an area of nearly 1.5 million square miles.

The main task of the Council is to protect fishery resources while maintaining opportunities for domestic, commercial and recreational fishing at sustainable levels of effort and yield. To accomplish this, the Council identifies fish species and species groups that are in danger of over-fishing or otherwise need management. With the help of its member agencies, the Council then analyzes the biological, environmental, economic and social aspects of these fisheries, and prepares plans and regulations designed to protect them. The regulations are implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and enforced jointly by the NMFS and US Coast Guard, with assistance from state and territorial agencies. The Council encourages cooperative fishery management among the island governments throughout the Pacific so that management is carried out in a manner that is effective, and sensitive to the cultures and traditions of native people.

Western Pacific fisheries are in constant flux. Fishing fleets are increasingly mobile and technologically advanced. Fleets that face expanding restrictions in other areas are appearing in the central and western Pacific fisheries in ever-increasing numbers. In addition, compliance with fishery regulations often varies with national flag of the fleet, and experience within the fishery.

Western Pacific fisheries operate in a region of multiple island areas and nations, each with its own EEZ. These EEZ's are very large in comparison to the islands' land area, and are often non-contiguous. The size of the EEZ's create problems for fisheries

surveillance and enforcement due to the distances involved and the scarcity of suitable logistic support throughout the region. Resources to conduct surveillance and enforcement are constrained by limited budgets and other information for fisheries management is generally insufficient and/or unreliable. As pressures on fishery resources increase, managers must adopt new technology to encourage the proper use of the resource to avert stock depletion. A significant part of this management endeavor is conducting surveillance and enforcement activities based on better knowledge and cost-effective methods.

Remote fishing vessel monitoring systems provide additional tools to meet today's management requirements and provide benefits to the fishing industry. This policy was formulated to assure that the development and application of vessel monitoring systems in the central and western Pacific are carried out in a manner that is comprehensive and organized on the part of management authorities, and cost-effective and fair to the fishing industry.

## **B. Policy Statement**

The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council recognizes that electronic remote vessel monitoring systems are a viable and desirable technology for use in fisheries management. The Council also recognizes that fishery management needs and available technologies may differ among fisheries and geographical areas. Thus, it is the policy of the Council to:

- ◆ Where appropriate and desired, implement satellite-based fishing vessel monitoring systems (VMS) to assist fishery management programs in the region.
- ◆ Develop specific technical and operational guidelines for VMS programs under the authority of each FMP, as appropriate and in consultation with the domestic and foreign fishing industry and relevant government agencies.
- ◆ Concentrate VMS programs on the enforcement of area and seasonal closures (i.e., automated, real-time reporting of vessel identification and location) until such time when the Council, NMFS and state/territorial agencies decide that real-time reporting of fisheries and research data is desirable and feasible.
- ◆ When developing VMS programs, consider efficiency and cost-effectiveness for the fishing industry and management agencies.