INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION
COMISIÓN INTERAMERICANA DEL ATÚN TROPICAL

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FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEMS

1. BACKGROUND

The IATTC has considered the issue of a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) since 2000. The topic was discussed in April 2000 at the first Stock Assessment Review meeting, and in June 2000 at the first meeting of the Permanent Working Group on Compliance and the 66th meeting of the IATTC. A VMS resolution was discussed at the 69th and 70th meetings of the IATTC in June 2002 and June 2003, and Resolution C-04-06 on the establishment of a Vessel Monitoring System was approved at the 72nd meeting of the IATTC in June 2004.

Paragraph 1 of Resolution C-04-06 requires that each Party with tuna-fishing vessels 24 meters or more in length establish a VMS by 1 January 2005, or as soon as possible thereafter. Paragraph 5 of the resolution required Parties and cooperating non-Parties (CPCs) to send a progress report on its VMS to the Director by 31 May 2005. Based on these reports, the Commission would, at its annual meeting in June 2005, discuss how best to proceed with future consideration of VMS to support its conservation and management program.

2. PROGRESS REPORTS

The following is a summary of the responses received, as of 31 May 2005, to the letter sent to CPCs on 11 April 2005 reminding them of these requirements:

Costa Rica. Article 59 of the newly-approved Fisheries Law requires a VMS for all purse-seine vessels fishing in the Costa Rican EEZ. The development of Regulations to implement this law will take six months, so it is expected that the VMS will be in place by the end of 2005.

Chinese Taipei. Since June 30, 2004, all large-scale tuna longline vessels authorized to fish in the EPO are required to have a VMS. To date, 131 vessels have a VMS (21 with an Argos system, and 110 with the INMARSAT-C system). The VMS transmits, 4.8 times per day on average since April 2005, vessel identification and position (<500 meter error at 99% confidence). The VMS equipment is tamper-proof and fully automatic.

The most common failure is antenna malfunction. In these cases, it must be replaced within two months or the vessel has to go to a designated port for repairs. The captain is required to fax the vessel position while the VMS is not operational. By the end of June 2005, a second operational VMS set will be required aboard.

Ecuador. Some Ecuadorian tuna vessels are already equipped with VMS. However, some issues regarding data confidentiality and the definition of the entity in charge of the establishment of a Fisheries Monitoring Center (FMC) remain. A meeting to establish the date for implementation of VMS for the whole tuna fleet will take place after the Commission meeting in June 2005.

European Union. A VMS for all vessels larger than 18 meters was implemented on 1 January 2004, and a system for all vessels larger than 15 meters on 1 January 2005, within the scope of the Common Fisheries Policy (Regulation (EC) No. 2244/2003, 18 December 2003). The standard procedure is for information to be transmitted to the FMC of both the flag state and the coastal state in whose waters the vessel is fishing. The Regulation establishes the technical details of the transmission, rules for access to

data and reports, and requirements for third-country vessels operating in EU waters. The European Commission has, on specific request, remote online access to information in FMCs.

The VMS transmits, 24 times per day, vessel identification, position (<500 meter error at 99% confidence), and by 1 January 2006, also vessel speed and course. The VMS equipment is tamper-proof and fully automatic, but is not required to be capable of manual transmission of reports or messages.

Guatemala. Options for VMS services are currently being considered. A VMS will be implemented as soon as operational problems are solved.

Korea. A satellite-based VMS has been established for all Korean purse-seine and longline vessels 24 meters or more in length operating in the EPO. The technical specifications of the Korean VMS comply with the terms of the Resolution.

Mexico. Within the national management policy, since 2000 several pilot VMS programs in different fisheries have been conducted. Currently 66% of Mexican tuna purse-seiners have a VMS in operation (a list of the vessels with VMS equipment is attached to the progress report). The tuna VMS reports directly to a Monitoring Center in Mazatlan. In total, 1685 vessels of all types of the Pacific fleet currently have a VMS in operation.

A VMS Regulation that will establish the technical details of the VMS for all Mexican fishing vessels, including the artisanal fleet (currently on a pilot VMS project), has been in discussion since the end of 2004. Besides position and speed in near real time, some of the technical characteristics that will be required include triggering devices to alert the crew of closed areas, emergency safety features, and the ability to send reports and messages manually.

Panama. Since 4 August 1999, a VMS (Argos system) is a requirement for all Panamanian vessels that request a fishing license (Administrative Resolution No. 10-99). The system is capable of transmitting vessel identification, position (+/- 100 meter precision), and vessel speed and course, 24 times per day. The VMS equipment is tamper-proof, but not capable of manual transmission of reports or messages.

United States. A satellite-based VMS has been established for all vessels 24 meters or more in length operating in the EPO, harvesting species for which the Commission has established conservation and management measures. Currently 77 % of the vessels required under the Resolution to have VMS are equipped. This includes all of the tuna purse-seiners and trollers, and most of the longliners. All of the vessels report to the U.S, and some also report to the Forum Fisheries Agency.

Other CPCs. Several CPCs have had a VMS for some time, or have recently established one, but the details of these systems have not been made available.

3. FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF VMS

The staff suggests two options for future consideration of VMS by the Commission to support its conservation and management programs. The first deals with summary reports from national VMS that would provide more monitoring information than the initial reports summarized in 2. above, and also would strengthen systems for data reporting and monitoring of compliance. The second is for the voluntary use of VMS to facilitate various at-sea reports. In particular, VMS could provide a relatively simple means of reporting fisheries data.

3.1. Reporting and Data access

A reporting system, that is more comprehensive than the initial report provided in the Resolution, could be established for VMS reports to the Commission. This might take the form of a six-month progress report. The following information (based on a similar requirement established by the European Union regarding the functioning of its VMS), covering the previous six months, and specifically for the EPO, could be part of the report:

a. The number of tuna-fishing vessels of each CPC subject to VMS.

b. A list of tuna-fishing vessels whose VMS equipment has repeatedly experienced technical failures or has failed to function.

c. The number of position reports received by each CPC;

d. The number of days spent in the EPO, or subareas of the EPO, by each fishing vessel.

3.2. Reporting data on catches and fishing effort

VMS could be used, on a voluntary basis, to provide a relatively simple means of meeting the catch and effort reporting requirements of Resolution C-03-05 for some sectors of the fleet fleet and to assist in implementing other relevant resolutions. This would be particularly valuable for the large distant-water longline vessels, whose catch data are usually not available until long after the fish are caught. The staff is currently discussing with Vanuatu the possibility of establishing a pilot program for such a system to facilitate the provision of relevant data.