



New England Fishery Management Council

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Groundfish Amendment 23: Council Adopts 100% Monitoring Target; Industry to be Reimbursed if Federal Funds Available

After more than three-and-a-half years of hard work on developing measures to improve the groundfish monitoring program, the New England Fishery Management Council took final action on September 30, 2020 on [Amendment 23](#) to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. The Council overwhelmingly voted to submit the amendment to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS, NOAA Fisheries) for review, approval, and implementation.

The Council supported the following measures for this action.

- **100% Monitoring:** The Council adopted a target at-sea monitoring coverage rate of 100% for all groundfish sector trips for the first four fishing years following the effective date of Amendment 23. This target rate is intended to establish a baseline of accurate and precise catch information for the fishery until a subsequent Council action modifies the coverage level.
 - The Council recognized that waivers for at-sea monitoring coverage may be granted “in limited circumstances and for good cause only,” such as when at-sea monitors are not available.



The Council held nine public hearings on Amendment 23. Eight were webinar hearings and the ninth was held outdoors, in person, under a large tent.

- The summary of comments received during all of the public hearings is available [here](#).
- The summary of written comments received as of the August 31, 2020 deadline is available [here](#).
- Visit the Amendment 23 [library](#) to access all documents and public hearing materials. *–NEFMC photos*



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- The 100% target coverage rate, which will be reviewed in Year 3 as a Council priority, is subject to available NOAA Fisheries funding.
- **Funding Rates for Years 1-4:** Groundfish sectors will be reimbursed by federal funds or other funding mechanisms for 100% of the costs of at-sea monitoring, whether by humans or electronic monitors.
 - The Council set its minimum coverage rate at 40%. In the absence of federal funding sufficient to cover this minimum 40% rate, the groundfish industry will fund the additional coverage needed to achieve the 40% minimum.
 - Both the 100% target and the 40% minimum coverage rates can be achieved through a combination of at-sea monitoring and the [Northeast Fisheries Observer Program \(NEFOP\)](#).
- **Funding Rates for Years 5 and Beyond:** The 40% default target coverage rate will remain in effect unless replaced following the program review and subsequent action.

Electronic Monitoring Options

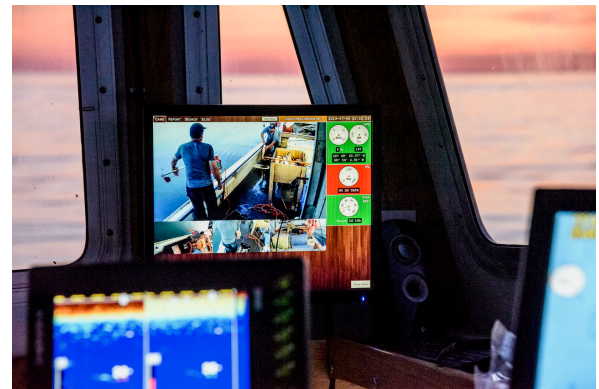
Under Amendment 23, groundfish sectors can choose to achieve the target 100% at-sea monitoring coverage rate by: (1) carrying a human at-sea monitor; or (2) using electronic monitoring where cameras mounted on the vessel record fishing activity.

The Council approved two types of EM tools. These are known as the Audit Model and the Maximized Retention EM Option.

IMPORTANT: Electronic monitoring may be used to fulfill the Council's at-sea monitoring target coverage rate for groundfish sectors, but vessels still will be required to carry human observers when selected for a NEFOP trip.

Here's the difference between the two EM options.

- **Audit Model:** Cameras run on 100% of the trips to record the catch and discards. Then, a portion of the video



Top, a mounted camera monitors fishing activity on the deck of the Cundy's Harbor, ME-based F/V Safe Haven, which is participating in an Electronic Monitoring Pilot Project supported by The Nature Conservancy. Bottom, images from all of the cameras are visible on a monitor in the wheelhouse.
– David Hills photos



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footage, as determined by NMFS, is reviewed to verify discard amounts on vessel trip reports.

- **Maximized Retention:** Under this option, cameras also run on 100% of the trips. Vessels **must** retain **all** allocated groundfish, including sublegal fish. A dockside monitoring component is involved to sample the catch and verify that all allocated, non-prohibited groundfish are landed as viewed by the camera. This EM option has been pilot-tested but not as extensively as the Audit Model, and the Council recognized it may need further refinements.

What Else is in Amendment 23?

The Council approved several other components of the monitoring program, including the following:

- Informing groundfish sectors of the total monitoring coverage level three weeks prior to the annual sector enrollment deadline;
- Adding new sector monitoring tools to the list of items that could be adjusted through future framework adjustments;
- Giving the NOAA Fisheries regional administrator the authority to streamline sector reporting requirements;
- Eliminating the management uncertainty buffers for groundfish annual catch limits for sectors when 100% monitoring of all sector trips occurs (this provision will provide additional quota for sector boats to harvest under 100% monitoring); and
- Removing groundfish monitoring program requirements for vessels fishing exclusively west of 71 degrees 30 minutes west longitude and implementing a review program for this exemption.

What's NOT in Amendment 23?

Most notably, the Council did not support a fleet-wide dockside monitoring program at this time. Amendment 23 contained an option that would have established a mandatory dockside monitoring program for the entire groundfish fishery, covering both sectors and the common pool. While the Council carefully considered the various potential components of a fleet-wide dockside monitoring program to better account for catches, it ultimately voted for “no action.”

Groundfish sectors, however, continue to have the option of establishing their own dockside monitoring program through their operations plans with NMFS approval.

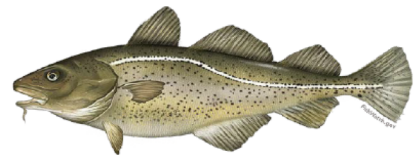
DECISION DOCUMENT

For

Amendment 23 to the

Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish)

Fishery Management Plan



- The Council followed the Amendment 23 [Decision Document](#) as it talked through the measures in the groundfish monitoring program.
- Here is the [Amendment 23 presentation](#) viewed by the Council and public before the deliberations got underway.
- All Amendment 23 documents for this meeting can be found [HERE](#).

Questions? Visit the Staff Webpage and Contact our Groundfish Team:

[Dr. Jamie Cournane, lead; Robin Frede; and Melissa Errend.](#)