



New England Fishery Management Council

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Groundfish Monitoring Amendment 23: Council Votes to Send Draft Document out for Comment with Preferred Alternatives

The New England Fishery Management Council voted on January 29 to send Draft Groundfish Monitoring Amendment 23 out for public comment. The amendment contains numerous proposals, and the Council selected several “preferred alternatives” to help guide the public in supplying feedback. The hearings will take place this spring, likely in late March and April. The Council then will review all oral and written comments and take final action during its June 23-25 meeting in Freeport, ME.

The Council developed the amendment “to improve the reliability and accountability of catch reporting in the commercial groundfish fishery to ensure there is precise and accurate representation of catch.” Catch is defined as both landings and discards.

Preferred Alternatives

In short, the Council’s first preferred alternative calls for 100% at-sea monitoring on all groundfish sector trips. This coverage level could be achieved through one of two ways:

- **Human At-Sea Monitors:** People would be on board the vessels to track catches and discards; or
- **Electronic Monitoring (EM):** In lieu of human monitors, cameras would be mounted on vessels to video record catches and discards under one of two programs, both of which are fully described in Amendment 23:
 - Audit Model EM; or
 - Maximized Retention EM.

About the Council’s 1st Preferred Alternative

Draft Amendment 23 contains four alternatives for at-sea monitoring coverage rates for groundfish sectors: 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100%. Here, the Council selected 100% coverage as its preferred alternative in order to solicit the broadest range of public comment possible and get a sense from industry of the maximum costs associated with this action. The Council is not bound to select 100% in June when it takes final action, and it emphasized the importance of listening to the public before making a final decision.



A mounted camera (top left) records catches and discards under an electronic monitoring pilot program. – The Nature Conservancy photo



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- **Uncertainty Buffer:** The Council also voted to support as a preferred alternative eliminating the management uncertainty buffer that's applied to sector annual catch limits (ACLs) for allocated stocks, but **only** if 100% monitoring is approved for all sector vessel trips. Eliminating the buffer would result in more fish being available to sector boats since 3% to 7% of each stock's acceptable biological catch currently is deducted to account for uncertainty. This uncertainty would be reduced under 100% monitoring.
- **Dockside Monitoring:** The Council supported "no action" as preferred for dockside monitoring. If no action is approved during final action, the commercial groundfish fishery would **not** be subject to mandatory dockside monitoring.

The Council selected other preferred alternatives related to: (1) establishing a review process for at-sea monitoring coverage rates; (2) adding new sector monitoring tools through a framework adjustment rather than an amendment; (3) issuing waivers to exempt vessels from industry-funded monitoring requirements if insufficient funding is available for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS/NOAA Fisheries) to cover shoreside costs for the program; and (4) removing monitoring program requirements for vessels fishing exclusively west of 71 degrees 30 minutes west longitude.

What's Next?

The Council will develop a public hearing document and schedule hearings throughout the region. The Council will announce the schedule as soon as it's available and post the hearing document on its website. Keep tabs on the Council's groundfish [webpage](#) for updates.

QUESTIONS? CONTACT:

- **Dr. Jamie Cournane**, the Council's groundfish plan coordinator, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 103, jcournane@nefmc.org; or
- **Robin Frede**, the Council's fishery analyst who led much of the work on Amendment 23, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 124, rfrede@nefmc.org.
- Documents used during the Council's January 29, 2020 discussion on Amendment 23 in Portsmouth, NH are available at [groundfish](#).

At right: Measuring cod on a Gulf of Maine trip under electronic monitoring. —Energy Films photo

Key Amendment 23 Documents

- **Decision Document:** This easy-to-read file contains tables that sum up all of the options within the amendment and provides short descriptions of the biological, economic, and social impacts, plus more. Download a copy [here](#).
- **Amendment 23 Webpage:** All of the sections within the draft amendment, as well as appendices and background materials, are available [here](#).

