Where is VMS required?

There are many Canadian fisheries that require vessels to be equipped with VMS units, notably various scallop, pelagic, crab, groundfish and shrimp fleets.

VMS is also widely used in many fisheries throughout the world including some Regional Fisheries Management Organizations. For example, all foreign and domestic vessels fishing groundfish and shrimp in the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization Regulatory Area outside Canada's 200 mile limit are required to have a VMS device onboard that transmits positional information, in addition to its course and speed.

How do I acquire and register an approved unit?

DFO works closely with external manufacturers and communication service providers which offer a wide selection of VMS units and services. VMS units must meet DFO standards which are developed to meet regulatory requirements and offer cost-effective solutions to fish harvesters. Unit pricing varies depending on unit functionality and vendor.

In addition to being activated by a communication service provider, VMS units must be registered with DFO using the National Vessel Monitoring System Form.

A list of DFO approved VMS units and the registration form is available on DFO's website at http://www.nfl.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/e0010178.

How is the VMS data protected?

For information pertaining to the protection and privacy of the VMS data, please refer to the Privacy Notice Statement and Authorization section at the bottom of the National Vessel Monitoring Form which is located on DFO's website at http://www.nfl.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/folios/00380/docs/vms_form_ssn-eng.pdf.

Contact information

For more information on
The National Vessel Monitoring System
please contact Fisheries and Oceans Canada
vms_support@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
1-888-772-8225

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Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Pêches et Océans Canada

The National Vessel Monitoring System

Canada

What is the National Vessel Monitoring System (VMS)?

Fisheries and Oceans Canada's (DFO) National Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) is a satellite based, near real time, positional tracking system used to monitor the location of vessels and their movement. VMS units vary in size and consist of a Global Positioning System (GPS) and a satellite data transmitter that provide the latitude, longitude, date and time of vessel locations and, depending on the type of unit, Course and Speed. The VMS data is sent to a satellite, relayed to a station on the ground and then automatically sent to DFO by the communication service provider. The data is received in near real time at pre-determined time intervals. It is stored in a centralized database which enables DFO to review and analyze past and current geographical positions of vessels. Licence conditions for certain Canadian fisheries require licence holders to carry a DFO approved VMS unit on their fishing vessels. The Department has also installed VMS on DFO program vessels.

What are the benefits of VMS?

1. **Conservation and Ecosystems Management**
   VMS improves the effectiveness of DFO's compliance program by providing valuable information to guide enforcement activities. VMS also promotes compliance with fisheries regulations by providing DFO with regular positional information of vessels which deters illegal activity and contributes to the prosecution of offenders.

   VMS provides DFO with important information to sustainably manage fisheries resources. It provides additional information about the status of fish stocks and fish movement by contributing to increased accuracy and the timeliness of catch-and-effort information. VMS data provided to DFO can also be used to support the establishment and management of protected areas.

2. **Data Communication**
   The VMS unit has a two-way data communication port that can be hooked up to a laptop computer or handheld device to provide at-sea email access, depending on the type of unit. This allows the unit to be capable of additional data transmissions which may be used for other DFO programs and also provides a communication mechanism for the crew onboard the vessel.

3. **Safety**
   VMS can be used by the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) as additional support for search and rescue activities by identifying the geographical positions of vessels that are equipped with VMS units. Vessel location can be used to find a vessel in distress and to identify other nearby vessels that could provide assistance. VMS can also provide the positions of overdue vessels to help reduce unnecessary search and rescue activities. It is important to note that VMS is not intended to replace existing mandatory safety equipment and is not required for all vessels.

4. **Science**
   VMS data contributes to scientific studies being undertaken within DFO. These studies support departmental activities and also aid Canada in its participation in Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) such as the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO).

5. **Marine Security**
   VMS is used by the Marine Security Operation Centers (MSOC) in the detection, assessment and support of a coordinated response to maritime security threats or incidents.