

# Status Update of the Southeast Electronic For-Hire Reporting Program

NMFS-SERO  
June 2020

**South Atlantic Final rule:** The final rule published on February 24, 2020 (85 FR 10331). The final rule requires the owner or operator of a vessel with a Federal South Atlantic for-hire permit to submit weekly electronic fishing reports. The effective date is September 1, 2020. The intent is for permit holders to be able to establish user accounts with their software vendor and begin to voluntarily report this summer in order to familiarize themselves with the reporting requirements before the effective date.

**Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) Final Rule:** The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is developing the final rule. The final rule would require the owner or operator of a vessel with a Gulf Federal for-hire permit to (1) submit an electronic fishing report for each trip prior to the vessel offloading fish, (2) electronically declare a fishing trip before leaving port, and (3) use NMFS-approved hardware and software with positioning system capabilities (satellite or cellular VMS). The goal is to have the same effective date as the South Atlantic requirements for the trip level electronic fishing report and trip declaration.

**Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Final Rule:** NMFS is developing the final rule. Currently, the only approved method for transferring VMS data from a vessel to NMFS is by satellite-linked communication services. The final rule would amend the existing VMS type-approval regulations to allow the transmittal of positioning data through adding cellular-based devices. This allows for more inexpensive option for the monthly transmission fees and the initial set up cost.

**Software Approval:** The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) and Bluefin Data have submitted eTrips and VESL, respectively, for approval by the Southeast Electronic For-Hire Reporting program at NMFS. The Southeast Electronic For-Hire Reporting program has tested both programs and the goal is to approve both software by this summer.

**Outreach:** We have been updating the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), and the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) on the progress of the rulemaking and the implementation of the For-Hire Reporting Program. George LaPointe, a contractor working for NMFS, presented to the NEFMC (via webinar) in March, and the MAFMC (via webinar) in April. We are developing *outreach toolkits* and plan to mail them to every permit holder this summer. These toolkits will contain a letter, a folder with inserts, and FAQ type information. Importantly, the toolkits will contain contact information if the person has questions or trouble reporting. In addition, we are developing a series of relatively short *instructional videos* that describe the reporting requirements, the purpose of the requirements, how to report using the electronic logbook and details about the VMS requirements for Gulf permit holders. Emily Muehlstein, Carly Somerset, Camilla Shireman

(Gulf Council staff), and Cameron Rhodes (South Atlantic Council staff) are on the team that is developing the toolkits and videos. We are not sure if we will be able to plan *in person training sessions* later this summer as we originally had intended. We will be holding live webinars.

Stakeholders may obtain more information by calling the phone line dedicated to the program (833-707-1632) or emailing [ser.electronicreporting@noaa.gov](mailto:ser.electronicreporting@noaa.gov).

**Customer Service Staff:** NMFS is currently hiring contractors and staff to support the For-Hire Reporting Program.

1. *Customer service contractors* will help answer stakeholder questions and distribute outreach materials.
2. *Quality assurance and quality control (QA/QC) staff member and contractors* will review and QA/QC data, in addition to contacting fishermen about potential errors, correcting data and run reports.
3. *VMS Technicians (1 staff and contractors)* will test and manage VMS units, while analyzing location data in conjunction with declaration and logbook data.
4. *Additional port samplers* will collect dockside information in the Gulf region to increase validation. NMFS is working with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and Marine Recreational Information Program to develop and implement a SEFHIER intercept survey.

**ACCSP and the NOAA IT Security Standards:** ACCSP, as the data warehouse, needs access to the permit data in order to receive the information from permit holders. Currently, ACCSP cannot receive permit data until their system meets NOAA IT Security standards. For instance, permit data contain personally identifiable information, or PII, (e.g., date of birth, email) and logbook data contain business identifiable information, or BII, (e.g., landings and economic info). PII and BII are protected under the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA). FISMA is a comprehensive framework to protect government information against natural or man-made threats. NMFS expects ACCSP to be compliant with FISMA by this summer.

**Dually-permitted Fishermen:** In an effort to reduce duplicative reporting, an owner or operator of a charter vessel with a Federal charter vessel/headboat permit, and with electronic reporting requirements in other regions, such as the Mid-Atlantic and as proposed by the Gulf Council for the Gulf, would be required to comply with the electronic reporting program that is more restrictive, regardless of where they are fishing. Because the Gulf Council's electronic for-hire reporting amendment requires trip-level reporting prior to offloading fish from the vessel, among other requirements, the Gulf electronic reporting program would be more restrictive, and fishermen on such vessels would be required to report to standards of the Gulf electronic reporting program, which includes installing a VMS unit. However, to make it easier on the permit holder, certain reporting software will allow fishermen with Federal for-hire permits for multiple regions to submit one report that complies with requirements of both permits. For example, it is our understanding that permit holders with GARFO and SERO permits will be able to submit a single report through eTrips mobile that would comply with the requirements of both permits. Those with an HMS permit will need to report to both programs however, some software will be able to collect data for HMS species as well. South Carolina for hire fishermen that are currently reporting to the state using VESL will be able to continue to use that platform.

VESL has updated the software to include the essential data elements for the state of South Carolina as well as the Federal requirements.

**VMS Hardware Approval:** We continue to discuss the requirements with interested vendors. If they are interested in submitting a unit to be approved for the For-Hire sector, NMFS Office of Law Enforcement will test the VMS units. Currently, three units have been submitted for testing.