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**U.S. Fisheries Stakeholders Take a Hard Look at Electronic Monitoring**

*Fishermen, agencies and service providers come to Seattle for all-hands-on-deck workshop; new electronic monitoring website announced*

Maybe it was fitting that the nation's leading experts on electronic monitoring should meet at the Seattle waterfront hotel made famous when the Beatles had their picture taken while fishing from their second-floor window.

This time things were a bit more serious, however, as some 160 people came together January 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> for a results-oriented meeting of key fisheries decision makers. A broad-based shift towards improved catch monitoring and increased accountability in a period of tight federal budgets – along with the rising costs of human observers – have combined to make electronic reporting (ER) and electronic monitoring (EM) high-priority issues in federal fisheries policy.

The “National Electronic Monitoring and Reporting Workshop” was made possible by a grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), with matching funds provided by the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF). It was principally organized by Dorothy Lowman, a fisheries consultant and chair of the Pacific Fishery Management Council, who worked with a steering committee of managers, scientists, fishing industry representatives, NOAA officials and conservation interests from around the country.

“We’ve seen many EM pilot projects over the years, and they’re important, but we thought it was time to pull key stakeholder groups together from every region to talk about how we can move as efficiently as possible from feasibility to implementation,” said Lowman.

The list of workshop speakers reads like a “Who’s Who” of U.S. fisheries, but others came from as far away as Denmark to the two-day event. Sam Rauch, NOAA’s Acting Administrator for Fisheries, set the tone in his opening remarks, saying, “A lot of great work has been done

through pilot projects and the policies that have been developed around EM and ER; it is time to put these plans into practice.”

Plenary sessions addressed broad EM issues and key components of successful EM programs that have relevance across all regions, while breakout sessions gave participants a chance to dig deeper on EM goal-setting, costs, logistics, data integration, bycatch, and the particular challenges encountered in recreational, small-boat or multi-species fisheries.

“EM isn’t a one-size-fits-all solution, so it was crucial to bring the right mix of stakeholders and decision makers together,” said Sarah McTee, a Fishery Policy Specialist with EDF. “I sense a more engaged and optimistic attitude after the workshop. The conversation surrounding EM has shifted, and I predict we will see more proactive approaches to determining how technology can be utilized to meet monitoring needs.”

Recognition of the fact that every fishery brings its own challenges was broadly acknowledged at the workshop, but the more prevalent theme was about getting things done. “Each of our nation’s fisheries is unique in terms of their needs and the timeline to consider EM, but the energy and interest in moving forward is growing quickly,” said Tom Dempsey, Policy Director for the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen’s Alliance. “This workshop gave a number of us coming from New England as managers, fishermen and scientists a great opportunity to discuss what’s been done so far, and the potential for these solutions in our region. I think a lot of us left Seattle excited about the work ahead of us.”

Several participants expressed that they would like to see more programs up and running. “My biggest takeaway is that we need to implement less-complex EM programs as soon as possible; get them operating,” said Bob Dooley, a West Coast whiting fisherman and president of United Catcher Boats. “They’ll pave the way for the more complex programs that will take longer to develop. I hope everybody here got that message; I think they did.”

Lowman and her Steering Committee members were busy in the days following the workshop as they announced the launch of a new EM resource-base at [www.eminformation.com](http://www.eminformation.com). The website currently houses workshop-related presentations, background papers and contact information for the workshop’s participants, but the plan is to build it out more in the weeks to come, and provide an information-sharing network for everyone interested in electronic monitoring.

“I think we all ended up on the same page at the end of the workshop,” said Lowman. “Now the challenge is to maintain momentum.”

To be included in future updates regarding electronic monitoring in U.S. fisheries, please email [scott@fieldworkcommunications.com](mailto:scott@fieldworkcommunications.com).

Accompanying photo attachments

1. **BeatlesEdgewater.jpg**: Suggested caption: “The Fab Four try their luck from the window of Room 272” Photo courtesy of Edgewater Hotel”
2. **SamRauchPhoto.jpg**: Suggested caption: “Sam Rauch, NOAA Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, addresses attendees at the Seattle workshop’s opening session” Photo courtesy Environmental Defense Fund
3. **ColbyBradyPhoto.jpg**: Suggested caption: “NOAA Fisheries Specialist Colby Brady (far left) got a lot of attention at the workshop’s poster session for the work he’s doing at the forefront of EM technology” Photo courtesy Environmental Defense Fund
4. **VideoViewsPhoto.jpg**: **Suggested caption:** “One of the EM technology demonstrations at the Seattle workshop shows the back deck of a trawler in a split-screen image.” Photo courtesy Environmental Defense Fund

17 Steering Committee members available for interviews

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### Specific goals of the National EM Workshop

- Facilitate a better understanding of the possible range of EM applications
- Determine solutions to current challenges impeding integration of EM
- Share lessons learned from pilot studies and early EM program design and integration efforts across regions
- Identify key program design elements and processes
- Understand cost considerations and implications of EM
- Provide tools to facilitate development of regional EM implementation plans
- Discuss Electronic Reporting (ER) needs in the context of developing effective EM programs
- Build professional networks to exchange electronic monitoring information