

Fishing Vessel Circular Letter No. 067
14 April 2025
Series: RFMO-2025

To: All Ship Owners, Operators, Deputy Registrars, Resident Agents, Representatives, and other Stakeholders

Subject: **IMPLEMENTATION OF ELECTRONIC MONITORING SYSTEM (EMS) ON BELIZE FISHING VESSELS.**

Reference: ICCAT Rec. 24-01 para. 66 and 68. Rec. 23-18 and Rec. 16-14.
IATTC Res. C-24-09

BACKGROUND

In alignment with established ICCAT and IATTC regulations on observer coverage and ongoing discussions on Electronic Monitoring System (EMS) standards, Belize has committed to fully implementing EMS across its fishing fleet by 2027.

Electronic Monitoring (EMS) has been recognized as an effective tool to enhance compliance monitoring and improve the collection of fisheries data for scientific and management purposes. The ICCAT regulation specifies that long line fishing vessels must achieve 10% human and/or EMS observer coverage over the next three consecutive years, while purse-seiners must maintain 100% coverage. Both RFMOs have established voluntary minimum standards for EMS implementation to ensure that domestic programs meet their intended objectives.

Belize has determined that full implementation of EMS across its entire fleet by 2027 will strengthen its Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS) strategy while optimizing scientific data collection and quality.,

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The EM program will collect surveillance footage of all fishing activities. **20% of this surveillance footage** will be reviewed at random to generate EM reports. Where possible, this data will be compared with **logbook** data to improve the accuracy of self-reported data, with the long-term goal of transitioning to a logbook audit model where EM is used to verify self-reported data. The BHSFU will establish technical parameters that EMS Providers must meet.

RESPONSIBILITY OF VESSEL OWNERS AND OPERATORS

Vessel owners and operators participating in the EMS program must fulfil the following obligations:

i. Procurement of Equipment

Vessel owners must establish an independent contract with an approved EM Service Provider for the installation and maintenance of EMS on their vessels. Vessels with pre-existing EM coverage may request the accreditation of their existing service provider to become an approved service provider.

ii. EM System Installation

Prior to installation, vessel operators must attend pre-installation briefing and complete necessary vessel preparations. They must coordinate installation schedules with the EM service providers to ensure vessel availability on agreed dates/time, and provide installers with access to the vessel, and relevant operational information. A vessel monitoring plan must be Completed and signed off upon installation.

iii. EM System Operation

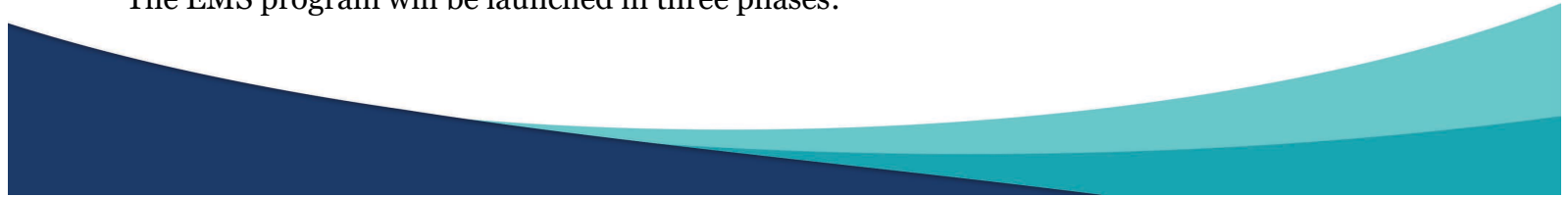
Vessel operators are responsible for Performing pre-trip and regular EM system health checks. maintaining clean camera lenses free from obstructions and preventing tampering with, or disconnection of the EM system equipment. Catch-handling procedures outlined in the vessel monitoring must be followed. Any system malfunctions must be reported to the EMS provider within 24 hours and basic repairs should be attempted at sea when feasible. Finally, vessel owners are responsible for ensuring that the EM system is made available for inspection or service at the request of the EM Service Provider.

DATA REPORTING

Within 24 hours of returning to port, vessel operators must submit EM video and data records to the EM Service Provider in the format and manner specified. Submission can be either through physical delivery of hard drives, cloud-based uploads or courier services. Operators must also ensure accurate logbook reporting and grant EMS providers and the BHSFU access to these materials for auditing purposes. Annotated data may be shared with relevant RFMOs as appropriate.

EM PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The EMS program will be launched in three phases:



Phase 1 (Pilot Phase)

This first phase will be implemented for a 6-month period from April to September 2025. During this phase, seven fishing vessels (3 long-liners, 2 purse-seiners, and 2 trawlers) will participate to provide the necessary data to guide the revision and finalization for the program design.

Phase 2 (Program Expansion)

Immediately following Phase 1, the program will be expanded to include all vessels targeting species regulated by an RFMO. It may also extend to other vessels based on the availability of funding to cover additional vessels.

Phase 3 (Full fleet coverage)

By the end of 2027, EMS will be fully implemented to all licensed Belize flagged fishing vessels; inclusive of all gear types and vessels operating under the purview of an RFMO and State jurisdiction alike.

FINANCING

This EM Program has a financial facility available through the BHSFU for the procurement of the necessary EM equipment. This facility is available to vessel owners/operators for this purpose at concessional rates. The terms of the facility will be made available prior to the conclusion of the Pilot Phase for owners/operators' consideration in advance of the full implementation.

Should you need additional information and guidance regarding the implementation of Belize's high seas fishing fleet EMS program, please contact our administration.



Please direct all queries and concerns to:
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