BELIZE HIGH SEAS FISHERIES UNIT
BHSFU

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Fishing Vessel Circular Letter No. 070

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Series: RFMO-2026

To:	All Ship Owners, Operators, Deputy Registrars, Resident Agents, Representatives, and other Stakeholders
Subject:	**REVISED 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) have 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 raw videos and data on all fishing activities with 4% of its fishing sets being reviewed to generate annotated EM data. Where possible, this data will be compared with logbook data to improve the accuracy of self-reported data.

The BHSFU has established performance standards that EMS program partners, including EMS providers and vessel owners, must meet. These performance standards will be reviewed periodically and updated as necessary. These updates will be disseminated to all relevant stakeholders through the usual communication channels.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF VESSEL OWNERS AND OPERATORS

The role and responsibilities of vessel owners and operators are outlined in greater details in the performance standards attached to this Circular. The following essential obligations established under the EM Program are outlined below:

1. Procurement of Equipment

Vessel owners must contract with an approved EM Service Provider for the installation and maintenance of EMS on their vessels. A draft uniform contract will be provided to facilitate the contracting process between EMS Service Providers and vessel owners and operators.

2. EM System Installation

Prior to installation, vessel operators must attend pre-installation training and complete necessary vessel preparations. They must coordinate installation schedules with the EM service providers to ensure vessel availability on an agreed date/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.

3. 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 manual 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.

4. 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. This Administration may share annotated data with relevant RFMOs and scientific bodies (such as ICCAT), as necessary.

5. BELIZE'S EMS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The EMS program will be launched in three phases:

Phase 1 (Pilot Phase) – COMPLETED

- Between Mid-March to August 2025 (6 months period), five vessels will be identified and selected for EMS coverage based on our annual vessel evaluation report.

Phase 2 (Program Expansion)

- Throughout 2025-2026, the program will expand to include all vessels targeting species regulated by an RFMO.

Phase 3 (Full fleet coverage)

- By the end of 2027, EMS will be fully implemented across all licensed Belize flagged fishing vessels, encompassing all gear types and both regulated and non-regulated species will be covered during this phase of the programme.

Next Steps

As the EM Program enters Phase 2 of implementation, the authorized EM Service Provider will engage with vessel owners/operators to establish contractual arrangements necessary to support the operational and administrative components of the program.

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

Please direct all queries and concerns to:
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