



## New England Fishery Management Council

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John Pappalardo, *Chairman* | Paul J. Howard, *Executive Director*

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** October 13, 2006  
**TO:** Executive Committee  
**FROM:** Paul J. Howard  
**SUBJECT:** Possible uses of study fleets

The Council staff has a number of recommendations on the possible uses of study fleets (see the list below); however in considering the recommendations the Council should be aware of at least two concerns. If the information gathered by study fleets is too closely linked to a possible regulatory change, the information might be inaccurate. Also, information gathered by study fleets might not be representative of a larger fleet group to which management might want to apply it.

The staff identified the following list of information items that might be provided by study fleets.

1. Additional fish length information to supplement catch at length data collected onshore
2. Data that would help detect unusual levels of discards of sub-legal fish.
3. Tow-by-tow data that might shed light on the directivity of effort on a particular species. For example, whether species are generally caught together in the same tows or whether vessels are targeting species in different tows.
4. Information on the selectivity of different gear configurations
5. Geographical (locational) information on fishing by vessels. Some of the valuable information provided by fishing industry groups in the past in terms of the location of catches may soon be provided by VMS; however, study fleets can provide more precise tow-by-tow information more quickly when needed.
6. Collection of finfish discard and benthic invertebrate data on trips with video monitoring, information that is rarely reported on VTRs.
7. Fishing behavior in response to changes in fishing rules. Examples: scallop bag tags and quota management. Non-regulated fishing behavior that reduces finfish bycatch or sea turtle encounters.
8. Stomach content data
9. Environmental data – bottom type, temperature and oceanographic information

10. More data on trip costs and crew lay systems on a trip basis. It seems that in the recent years there is an increase in such data items collected by the observer program

Additionally, the staff had the following specific recommendations:

1. Scallops – a) Study fleets might be useful to help avoid yellowtail flounder bycatch in controlled access areas. With a very small yellowtail TAC, some scallop boats avoided yellowtail, but other were not as successful. Information about which tows (where, how deep etc.) catch yellowtail would be useful to help the industry reduce the bycatch. b) We are also hearing that catch per unit of effort is declining greatly in certain areas. Tow-by-tow information about scallop fishing on a large scale could help the PDT identify areas where localized depletion may be occurring. c) The Great South Channel was just opened for general category vessels. Tow-by-tow information on bycatch by general category boats on an annual basis in this area would be useful to know. The area is closed several months a year for groundfish spawning, but there is not much information to support the area boundaries and appropriate length of time for the closure.
2. Skates - Some sample tow-by-tow information from vessels that catch skates would be useful since species identification information is poor. Even though the regulations require that skates be reported by species, the majority of skates are identified as unclassified, but a study fleet may help.
3. Red crab - There is no tow-by-tow information available from the red crab fishery and a red crab trip has never been observed. We do not have a good sense of how many crabs are caught in the traps, how many are thrown back (too small or females), and if the catch rate has gone down in recent years. This is a small fishery where a study fleet could work because the industry is very organized and seems supportive of better management.