

## Engagement of EM Providers in EM Standards Development

*This paper is part of a series that summarizes discussions from the 2022 Global Electronic Monitoring Symposium<sup>1</sup>, which convened more than 50 EM experts, both in person and virtually, for a three-day workshop. The symposium focused both on the use of electronic monitoring programs to increase oversight and transparency in international fisheries management and on existing barriers to the uptake of EM. Although this series of papers does not represent an exhaustive discussion of the issues, it includes the key points that symposium participants raised.*

### Introduction

Participants in the Global Electronic Monitoring Symposium (GEMS) identified a critical gap in communications between electronic monitoring (EM) service providers and those who develop EM programs, leading to a mismatch of EM expectations between the two groups. EM service providers are not involved in the fishery management negotiations process and thus are not fully aware of policy decisions at regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs) or national policies and government rules and regulations that can affect EM program development and implementation processes. And fisheries managers, for their part, may lack the familiarity with the technical capabilities of EM equipment that is needed to make informed decisions.

More organized engagement and collaboration between EM service providers and government authorities could enhance the understanding and discussion on the implementation of electronic monitoring—using technology to collect and analyze data on a fleet’s catch, fishing efforts and discards—as a tool. EM service providers participating in EM policy discussions at the RFMOs can help influence the type of requirements their technologies will have to meet and, in return, can share practical EM insights with policymakers.

Other stakeholders such as markets and industry partners have formed coalitions to amplify their voices and effectively participate at RFMOs and other regional EM discussions. Similarly, EM providers should form a coalition to participate efficiently in mutually beneficial bilateral consultations with fisheries managers, technical specialists and country representatives developing EM policies.

---

<sup>1</sup> GEMS Steering Committee members – Andrew Clayton, Claire van der Geest, Esther Wozniak, Eugene Pangelinan, Gerald Leape, Mark Zimring, Papa Kebe, Robert Gillett, Ruth Hoban

## **Background**

RFMOs, subregional fisheries management organizations, national fisheries authorities and other fisheries stakeholders recognize that increased monitoring is needed on commercial fishing vessels to gather more information on target catch, bycatch, fishing effort and compliance with regulations. In 2019, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas agreed to double observer coverage requirements for longline vessels through a combination of human observers and EM; this decision kicked off efforts to develop an EM program for the region. Paramount to the implementation of EM is the difficulty in achieving the minimum requirements set for observer coverage. This is in part related to the difficulty in persuading observers to deploy on longline vessels due to poor working conditions relative to purse seine and the dangers associated with on board human conflicts. Parallel initiatives have also been underway at the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.<sup>1</sup> This uptick in monitoring requirements and EM discussions at RFMOs indicates a potential increase in market demand for EM designed specifically for industrialized fleets such as commercial longline vessels.

EM service providers, the main vendors of this technology, are well placed to meet this demand. But to do so effectively and ensure that systems are cost efficient, RFMO electronic monitoring standard developers will need to understand the different requirements and constraints of scalable EM equipment. Although many EM trials have demonstrated the capabilities of EM, vendors can provide fisheries managers with a more realistic view of what EM applications are available to meet RFMO data requirements. And by directly engaging with RFMOs, EM vendors can learn what data fisheries managers need from EM and enhance products and services to support them.

## **Benefits of a coalition**

Since fishery managers must deliberate with multiple stakeholders, creating a coalition of EM service providers would be the best way to coordinate successful engagement at RFMOs and enable representation across various providers. A coalition could allow EM service providers to collaborate on and put forth unified considerations for regional governing bodies. An EM service provider coalition also could formally join RFMO meetings as a participating observer, similar to what the Global Tuna Alliance<sup>2</sup> and other industry associations have done; such participation in meetings would help the coalition members understand the policies that will influence EM operations and the various objectives being considered for regional EM programs. The coalition could also help create company-neutral guidance for fisheries managers on key topics that benefit the standards

development process, ensuring that the standards are practical at the operational level and do not lock into any one type of technology as EM equipment evolves. A coalition could also provide input to RFMOs on interoperability of EM systems between RFMOs and set realistic expectations on how machine learning and artificial intelligence will affect EM programs for commercial tuna fleets.

The Net Gains Alliance<sup>3</sup> initiative set a precedent for an EM service provider coalition in 2019 by creating an ad hoc working group to develop common guidance on EM procurement for government and fishing industry customers globally. However, a longer-term, standing professional global coalition of EM providers would enable members to influence regional EM policies that EM providers will ultimately help countries implement at a domestic level.

### **Next steps**

Building off the foundation of trust established through previous ad hoc EM service provider working groups, providers could consider forming a more formal and enduring coalition—with as wide geographic representation as possible—to enable participation in RFMO electronic monitoring discussions. Resources are available from nongovernmental organization partners to host an initial meeting of the 11 major EM service providers currently operating to begin meaningful discussions on the development of such a coalition with the hopes of securing commitments from partners to continue the coalition.

---

<sup>1</sup> See GEMS output paper titled, “Harmonizing Tuna RFMO Electronic Monitoring Standards” for a summary of EM progress at the four major tuna RFMOs.

<sup>2</sup> The Global Tuna Alliance is an independent group of retailers and supply chain companies with a major interest in improving the sustainability of the tuna sector, as well as implementing the objectives laid out in the World Economic Forum’s Tuna 2020 Traceability Declaration

<sup>3</sup> The Net Gains Alliance is a global initiative that supports sustainable management of ocean resources.