



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

**Department of  
Fish and Game**

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Director Bruce Buckson  
US Department of Commerce/NOAA  
Office for Law Enforcement  
8484 Georgia Avenue, Suite 415  
Silver Springs, MD 20910

Dear Director Buckson:

In October 2012, fishery managers with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) were notified that their real-time access to the vessel monitoring system (VMS) through individual vTrack accounts was erroneously granted and their accounts were disabled. These accounts, some of which had been active for four or more years, were authorized through forms provided by the Office for Law Enforcement (OLE): State vTrack Account Activation/Change Form and Non-Disclosure Agreement. As an alternative, OLE has allowed state managers to participate in the State VMS data request process, in which data requests are responded to on a monthly basis. This system is not feasible or timely for inseason fishery management purposes.

ADF&G's original appeal for real-time access was requested, and subsequently granted, in the attached 2007 letter to the Alaska Regional Administrator, Dr. Balsiger, and OLE Special Agent-In-Charge Jeff Passer. Rationale for real-time access provided in that letter persists, as VMS data are a critical management tool to ensure that our shared fishery resources are managed sustainably. Please consider this letter as our formal request to have vTrack accounts reinstated as soon as possible for ADF&G fishery managers.

Harvesters will begin prosecuting Bering Sea opilio crab and federal/state Pacific cod fisheries on January 1, 2013. State regulations requiring VMS are at 5 AAC 28.087 *Management Measures in Parallel Groundfish Fisheries for Protection of Steller Sea Lions* (c) and 5 AAC 39.670 *Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Crab Fisheries Management Plan* (c)(1). These state regulations, adopted specifically in response to the need for state and federal fishery coordination, require the use of VMS in parallel groundfish and all rationalized Bering Sea-Aleutian Islands crab fisheries. Access to VMS is necessary because management of the Bering Sea crab fisheries is deferred to the State of Alaska under the federal *Fishery Management Plan for Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King and Tanner Crabs*. Harvests of Pacific cod in parallel and state waters fisheries utilize the same federal stock assessment process to

establish catch limits; therefore, it is important to ensure state managers are able to adequately control harvests in state waters. Real-time VMS access is vital to accomplishing this task.

ADF&G also relies upon the VMS database for inseason management of the Alaska scallop fishery. The scallop fishery in the exclusive economic zone off Alaska is jointly managed by the National Marine Fisheries Service and ADF&G under the federal *Fishery Management Plan for the Scallop Fishery off Alaska*. Inseason management of the scallop fishery is delegated to the State of Alaska in the federal fishery management plan.

In sum, real-time access to VMS data during multiple fisheries is critical to preventing over-harvest and localized depletion; ensuring that biological data, necessary for stock assessment and management purposes, is collected in a timely manner; and enforcing Steller sea lion protection measures.

Cooperation between our enforcement and management agencies has proven invaluable and will continue to be essential as staff and fiscal resources remain limited. We look forward to your response and resolution of this issue as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Cora Campbell  
Commissioner

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Tracy Dunn – Deputy Director, OLE Headquarters  
Ms. Kelly Spalding – VMS Management Analyst, OLE Headquarters  
Mr. Jim Balsiger – Regional Administrator, Alaska Region  
Ms. Sherrie Myers – Special Agent in Charge, Alaska Division  
Mr. Jeff Regnart – Director Commercial Fisheries, Alaska Department of Fish and Game