

Fishing Sustainably via Satellite

Mach6 Boosts Productivity of Dutch Fishing Fleet with Maritime Communications

For all of its history, fishing has been the pillar of the economy of Urk, a Dutch town of 18000 citizens, located across the bay from Amsterdam. That history goes back a bit. Urk first entered the historical record in 996, when it was as an island in a lake called Zuiderzee. Part of the lake is long lost to land reclamation, and Urk is now a coastal town on the IJsselmeer with the biggest fishing fleet in the Netherlands.



The fishing industry is under tremendous pressure in Europe, as world fish stocks plummet. Scarce fish mean longer voyages that use more fuel. Longer voyages make it harder to get fresh fish to market.

Scarcity is also behind another kind of pressure on the fishing fleet of Urk, this one emanating from Brussels, capital of the European Union. On March 1, 2010, European Commission regulations began requiring all fishing vessels longer than 24 meters to register and report on their voyages electronically through an E-Logbook system. The new rules aim to curb over-fishing and ensure that fish stocks are harvested sustainably by tracking where fishing vessels go and what they catch. It is a worthy goal, but the administrative burden can be heavy.

Onshore Innovation

Nor far inland from Urk is the office and teleport of Globecom subsidiary Mach6. In addition to provide VSAT services to business and government, Mach6 has a significant maritime communications business. When the Urk fishing auction began looking for solutions to the E-Logbook challenge, Mach6 was ready to help.

Work on the project, called Onshore Innovation, began in June 2008. Mach6 collaborated

with the fishing auction and a company called Efice (www.efice.com) to find the right mix of equipment, satellite services and software to meet the real-world needs of fishing vessels at sea. Efice created E-Catch, the E-Logbook software. Each cutter was equipped with a 60cm Seatel or KNS stabilized antenna able to maintain an automatic lock on a satellite in orbit as well as all associated electronics.



Transmission speeds range from 64 Kbps up to 256, suitable for voice, Internet and email – and for posting to the E-Logbook online system. Mach6 provides equipment, installation, maintenance and connectivity. For users, the service is as simple as a telephone and a data port for their computers.

Predictable Cost at Landline Rates

Vessels equipped with the Mach6 service enjoy 24-hour communications at a fixed subscription price. The VOIP phone costs are comparable to local costs for landlines and sometimes even cheaper. As Jurie Post, captain of the UK237, noted, "Iridium is cheaper but the variable costs are much higher. I can phone my colleagues for free using the same system. It's a thousand times better than using the broadcast station with scrambler."



Regulations may be the reason that Urk fishing captains adopted the Mach6 service, but always-on connectivity does more than make it easy to follow the rules. In a word, it eliminates guesswork. "Everything is going through e-mail

nowadays," says Captain Klass-Jelle Koffeman of the FD281. "Our operational management has improved considerably." Better management comes from real-time information on weather, fuel costs and the price that fish are getting at different markets and auctions up and down the coast. By knowing where they will deliver their catch before they are in sight of land, Urk's fishing vessels maximize the return on each voyage, reduce operating costs and minimize waste.

Peace of mind has its value, too. "We depend on daily communications," says Captain Koffeman, "which is now possible at an affordable price. My crew also benefits from the free contact with home."

Mach6 signed up 21 vessels in the first month after the March 1 deadline. On July 1, the E-Logbook regulations will go into effect for smaller vessels, and Mach6 expects to build a customer base up and down the coast of Netherlands and the other major fishing ports of the continent.

"Broadband via satellite is fast changing how the maritime business operates," says Mach6 CEO Patrick Visser. "Maritime communications today is about business efficiency and effectiveness, up-to-date market knowledge, crew morale and much more. The 'Net' is global and Mach6 has grown its maritime coverage across Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia to match." ■

The logo for GLOBECOMM features the word "GLOBECOMM" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. A red swoosh underline is positioned above the letters "O", "B", and "E".

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