

## Q&amp;A

# E-log systems in the EU fleet

The fishing industry is under tremendous stress in Europe, as worldwide stocks of some species of fish come under pressure. Scarcer fish yields will require longer voyages to sea, which will add costs to the fishermen and the companies that rely on fish for their livelihood. Longer voyages also make it increasingly difficult to get fish to market. To address this issue, and others related to it, the European Commission has turned to technology as a first step to manage the looming challenge. In March 2010 it mandated that all fishing vessels of 24m or greater to register and report their voyages electronically. The new rules are aimed to reduce over-fishing.

Because of the nature of the mandates, communications technology companies like Globecomm company Mach6 in Urk, The Netherlands, have begun to equip fleets with satellite technology. The early results are promising. The Founder and General Director of Globecomm company Mach6, Patrick Visser, discusses the importance of electronic logbooks and their future role in the European fishing industry.

**FNI:** How do you view the new EC regulations and their overall impact on the fishing industry?

**PV:** The European Commission regulations became active on 1 March, 2010 for vessels of a certain size. The main goal of the E-logbook requirement is simple and clear: to control overfishing. One can argue about the precise format, procedures or related expenses for fishermen, but most Europeans agree that this is the only way forward to ensure that fish stocks are harvested properly and preserved for enjoyment by all. It is also good for the long-term economic outlook for the fishing industry.

The key is how to minimize additional costs and introduce efficiencies through the use of technology. The introduction of the E-logbook is the key to this, in my view, because prior to its introduction vessels reported their catch only once per week, and reported the information via fax! Now the reporting is daily and in real time.

**FNI:** What have been the biggest obstacles in the implementation to date? Is it the technology?

**PV:** Not at all. The technology is working brilliantly. Currently, the biggest complaint from the fishing community in the Netherlands is that other

countries have managed to postpone the EU Commission's requirement to introduce e-log reporting. As you can imagine, the Dutch industry has pointed out that this seems hardly fair because of the added costs and challenges with conforming to any new regulation at its outset and imposition. In addition, it has not been made fully clear that this requirement is mandated and a firm requirement which must be complied with.

I personally think that the approach

from the Urk fishing auction was the correct one in fully embracing the program. As the auction has the most customers, it has a tremendous incentive to ensure business continuity. It went so far as to investigate the range of technical options for compliance, as well as connectivity options at its own expense.

**FNI:** What was the result from decision in Urk?

**PV:** The result was incredibly promising.

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To ensure compliance and the best technological solution they created their own E-logbook software package. This enabled them to adhere to the regulations and added more value to the auction and the fishing fleets served. These daily digital catch reports are sent over a secure satellite network to the authorities and the fisherman

receives an automatic status notification upon receipt.

The same file can also be sent to a fisherman's logistics partner so that they may plan more effectively the vessel's plan for going to sea.

This data offers the fish auction valuable information, including types of fish, sizes, etc., which are useful to understand and make a good market. Information, as they say, is power. Over time this will enable trading of catches even while vessels are at sea.

**FNI:** How are Dutch fishing fleet owners, or individual fisherman, responding to this now?

**PV:** Early adaption is never easy for most things; especially regulations that add another layer of potential complexity to a business!

Initiatives like this, however, will result in a cost reductions and better fish prices. While there will be good long term benefits, most agree, the short-term benefits are seen as the broadband internet connection which is available on the ships now, and all of the benefits of having the internet.

Thanks to the E-logbook regulation, vessels which did not have good communications capabilities can now join the 21st century. Voice over IP (VoIP) is enabling more frequent contact with home for crews and the ability to do banking and other administrative tasks also allows a skipper to be more efficient at sea – and perhaps save more time at the weekend to spend with his or her family.

For those vessels that selected our VSAT, flat-fee option, a solution was designed that enabled them to watch the World Cup soccer matches at sea with previously installed video equipment. There were very few things more important than this in June and July 2010!

**FNI:** What do you see happening next?

**PV:** Based on the successful rollout in the Netherlands in March, and the fact that Mach6 support the service as a complete package, including equipment, installation, maintenance and connectivity, we expect a lot of work during the coming months from all fishing ports in Europe as more countries allow the E-logbook regulation to go into effect.

