

Gary C. Matlock, Ph.D., Director  
Office of Sustainable Fisheries  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1335 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

September 15, 1999

Dear Gary:

Having just received the final regulations (Vol.6, No.174 9/9/99) on the Vessel Monitoring System law (VMS), I guess I will have to agree with George Orwell. "Big Brother" is truly here and it is you.

Have you been in contact with the shark fishermen here in the southeast who will come under this draconian federal regulation? My members say they have not been included in the process and that requiring a large expenditure for a device that belongs to NMFS for all practical reasons as outlined in the regulations, is just another way of shutting them down without economic impacts being done.

If you think VMS's are so good, why doesn't NMFS buy them for the fishermen? I'm not being sarcastic Gary, but you could eliminate a meeting or two that you fund for special groups and have more than enough money to provide these spy devices to the folks you want to monitor. This regulation is saying you are going to hit the shark fishermen over the head and then you force them to buy the hammer for you to use. That's fairly sinister, but not unprecedented.

Shark boats don't have many closed areas, they don't have much of a quota and you seem to be trying to take away what remnants of a quota they do have. To top it all off, the shark season is very short under current rules. None of my shark members were involved in how you selected the devices, what they will cost to buy and install and what will the costs be to pay for air time and maintenance.

Having said all this, there is room for some compromise if the regulations provided that any violations would be the responsibility of the captain and not the boat owner if the boat owner was not on board the vessel. We do not support this awful intrusion into the privacy of fishing from a philosophical or cultural viewpoint. There are other ways to monitor us rather than mandate a type of house arrest device. Are charter and partyboats the next segment to be targeted for these devices? Will you then target billfishermen?

If we had enough money to hire a lawyer, we would be in court on this issue and that still might be the only option we have as time goes by. Just what the system needs, another lawsuit. Right?

Sincerely yours,

Bob Jones, Executive Director  
Southeastern Fisheries Association, Inc.