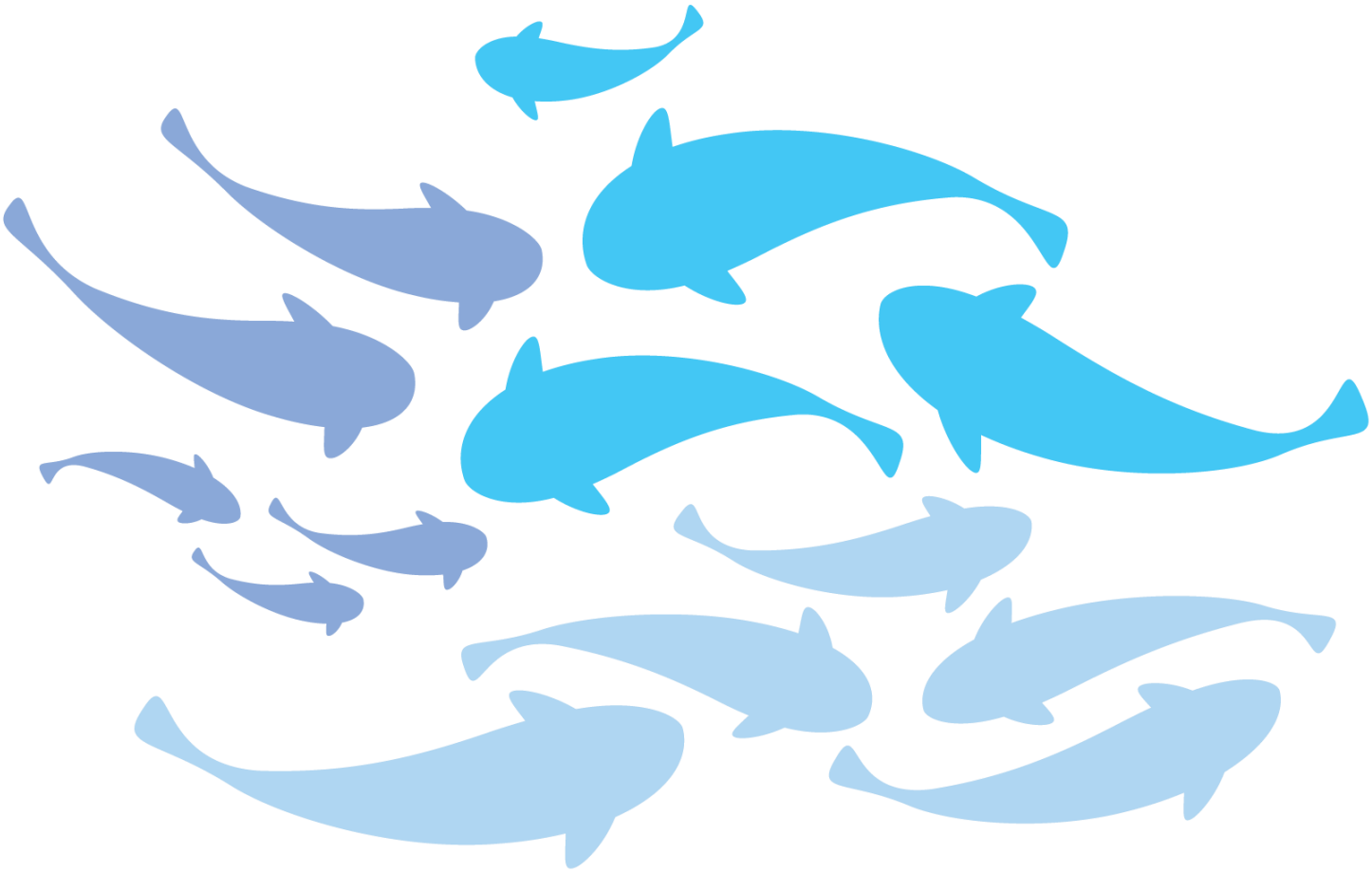
NOAA FISHERIES

Northeast Fisheries Science Center

Frequently Asked Questions

for NOAA's Pre-Trip Notification System (PTNS)



PTNS Notification Requirement Overview

- Vessel users will enter their own notifications online via the PTNS website (appsnefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS). Vessel users log in with their individual Fish Online username and password. This should be the primary means of trip notification and trip changes.
- As a backup means of notification, vessel users may call 855-FISHES1 (855-347-4371). This line is monitored by NMFS staff during business hours and by an answering service during evenings, weekends, and holidays. You may also email nefsc.ptns@noaa.gov. Complete trip notification details must be specified in the initial email or voicemail.
- Notifications must be submitted between 10 days and 48 hours in advance of planned trips, a decrease from the current 72-hour notification requirement.
- Notifications and observer assignments will now be trip-based instead of weekly for General Category scallop trips. General Category vessels will be able to submit blocks of individual notifications on a rolling basis.
- The PTNS will offer trips to providers automatically, based on vessels' provider preference settings. Vessels will not be required to call each provider to check observer availability. Vessels will only need to coordinate trip details with the observer provider after the trip has been assigned in the PTNS.
- Scallop Research Set Aside (RSA) and State Water trips will be required to notify, but will be exempt from observer coverage for Fishing Year 2026.
- All vessels using the PTNS will need to enter at least one email and one phone number prior to being able to enter their first notification, under the 'Maintenance' tab on the PTNS website.
- Vessels will be able to change their provider preferences via the PTNS website.

PTNS Basics

Q: What is the PTNS?

A: The Pre-Trip Notification System (PTNS) is a self-adjusting web-based algorithm that was designed to provide a fast, simple, and effective way to ensure fair and adequate observer/monitor coverage in certain Northeast commercial fisheries, beginning with the Northeast Multispecies groundfish fishery in 2010.

Q: Why was this change made for the Atlantic Scallop Fishery for FY24?

A: The IVR (Interactive Voice Response) system relies on aging technological infrastructure. The PTNS provides a more sophisticated and automated way to do the following: collect trip notifications; randomly and equitably select trips for coverage based on the appropriate target coverage rate for their fishing activity; offer selected trips to providers with individual vessel preference considered; inform providers and vessels when coverage is assigned.

Q: How do I notify for a trip in PTNS?

A: You can find this information in the PTNS Vessel User Guide in the "Help" section on the PTNS website: https://appsnefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/index.php/help. You can also see a step by step video guide at this website: https://players.brightcove.net/659677166001/4b3c8a9e-7bf7-43dd-b6932614cc1ed6b7_default/index.html?videoId=6344640099112.

Q: What login information do I need?

A: Log into the PTNS website using your individual FishOnline username and password.

To log into the PTNS, go here *(Note: 'PTNS' must be capitalized when typing this URL into your browser)*:

https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/

To retrieve your Fish Online username, go here:

https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/fishtank/login/forgot_username

To reset your Fish Online password, go here:

https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/fishtank/login/forgot

To create a Fish Online account, go here:

https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/fishtank/login/

Q: Who is required to notify via the PTNS?

A: Vessels taking declared Atlantic Sea Scallop trips, including vessels fishing under the RSA (Research Set Aside) program and/or the State Water exemption.

Q: Who can I contact if I have questions about the PTNS?

A: Call the PTNS Team at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) or email us at nefsc.ptns@noaa.gov.

Q: What if I forget to notify in the PTNS system, can I still call the IVR (Interactive Voice Response) System?

A: The IVR system has been inactive for scallop trips sailing April 1, 2024 and later. Vessels will be able to begin notifying in the PTNS 10 days prior to the start of fishing year 2026. The PTNS will be the only valid way to notify for trips sailing on or after April 1, 2026.

Using the PTNS

Q: Can I notify less than 48 hours in advance of a trip?

A: No. You must submit trip notifications at least 48 hours in advance of your planned sail time. *Please note, scallop trip notification time has been reduced from 72 hours' notice to 48 hours' notice.*

Q: How far in advance can I notify for a trip?

A: You can submit notifications up to 10 days prior to the planned sail date and time. This means that up to 9 individual fixed date notifications or one flex date notification can be entered at one time. Notifications for dates more than 10 days in advance will not be accepted.

Q: Can I only call the PTNS line during business hours?

A: The PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) is monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. When the PTNS Team is not answering calls and checking voicemails during business hours, an answering service takes calls. The answering service can enter notifications, help troubleshoot issues, and contact on-call NOAA Fisheries staff in the event of an urgent situation. PTNS staff can also be reached by email at NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, which is checked periodically after business hours.

Q: What methods of notifying in PTNS are valid?

A: There are 3 valid ways to notify for trips in PTNS. You can submit your PTNS notifications and manage your account via the PTNS website at https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/, email the PTNS team at NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371).

Q: What is a **fixed-date** notification and when should they be used?

A: A fixed date notification should be used by vessels planning on sailing on back to back trips. Usually vessels using fixed date notifications sail on more than one trip in a week. Fixed date notifications cannot be delayed past the calendar date of the notification.

Q: What is a **flexible-date** notification and when should they be used?

A: A flexed date notification should be used by vessels planning on sailing on trips with greater than 48 hours between these trips. Flexible date notifications can be delayed past the originally notified calendar date. Communicate any delays directly to assigned observer provider, as well.

Q: I departed on a fishing trip, but had to return to port early because of weather/mechanical issues/crew needs/etc., and I want to go right back out. Do I have to notify again?

A: If you had nothing to offload or did not make your final offload, you do not have to submit a new notification - a confirmation number will be added for you by the PTNS coordinators. You will keep the same observer assignment status as your original trip; if you were assigned an observer, the assignment continues when you re-sail, and if you had a waiver, you may re-sail without an observer. If you are breaking a trip, please send an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) for an additional confirmation number.

If you offloaded all of your catch, a new trip notification is required 48 hours in advance of your planned sail time.

Q: I was late in notifying. Do I need to wait until the sail time of my notification to depart from the dock?

A: Vessels assigned an observer for a **flexible-date** notification may be required to wait until the sail time in the PTNS if an observer is not available before that time. If the trip has been delayed, they must give the provider sufficient notice of the new sail time so that an observer can be deployed.
Vessels assigned an observer for a **fixed-date** notification may be required to wait until the sail time in the PTNS if an observer is not available before that time. Vessels may not sail under a specific fixed date trip notification on a different calendar day.

Vessels with a waived **flexible-date** notification may depart at any time upon receipt of a waiver email and/or the change of the notification's status in the vessel's PTNS web account to 'Waiver'.

Vessels with a waived **fixed-date** notification may depart at any time during that calendar day. Vessels may not sail under a specific fixed date trip notification on a different calendar day.

Q: Do I need to cancel **fixed-date** notifications in the PTNS if I don't sail?

A: We strongly encourage you to maintain accurate information on your fishing activity, including the cancellation of trips that don't sail. However, we do regularly compare PTNS information to sailing records (VMS, VTR, etc.) and cancel trips that did not sail on a vessel's behalf. The performance of the PTNS hinges on the accuracy of the fishing activity reported by the fleet.

Do not cancel trips for dates on which you have sailed; you need an active notification in the system for each date on which you have departed on a PTNS-eligible fishing trip.

Q: I did not depart on a **flexible-date** notification on the PTNS sail date. Do I need to cancel the trip and provide another 48 hours' notice?

A: It is the nature of the industry to delay trip departures, so if you are departing past the PTNS sail date of a **flexible date notification**, you may keep the same confirmation number and do not need to re-notify. The most important thing to do is ensure that you communicate the delay clearly to any assigned observer. You also can delay the sail date either in your PTNS web account, by sending an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or by calling the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-3474371). Providing accurate trip information results in more accurate coverage rates and compliance assessments.

If a trip will be delayed for more than 48 hours, due to the need for major repairs or crew availability, for example, please use your PTNS web account, send an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1855-347-4371) in order to cancel the trip. You may then enter a new notification with 48 hours' notice when trip plans *are known.*

Q: Does PTNS only show what my permit category is eligible to fish for?

A: No - fishing area, gear type, and other trip notification variables do not populate based on your permit's eligibility. Just because you see the option in the dropdown field when notifying, does not mean it is legal activity under your current permit. You may see some areas labeled inactive and active, but these distinctions should not be used to dictate legal fishing activities. To find out more information about your fishing permit's eligibility, please go to NOAA's Atlantic Sea Scallop commercial permit page.

Observer Coverage

Q: What types of coverage are handled by the PTNS?

A: NOAA Fisheries uses the PTNS to assign Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) coverage, NEFOP Protected Species Branch (PSB) Limited Gillnet coverage, Industry Funded At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) coverage, Industry-Funded Scallop (IFS), and certain types of Electronic Monitoring (EM) coverage to trips in the Northeast Multispecies groundfish, Atlantic herring, and Atlantic Sea Scallop fisheries.

Q: What are my requirements regarding interactions with monitors and observers on my vessel?

A: Work together to make sure the sea is a safe place for everyone to work. Monitors and observers are onboard to observe fishing operations and to collect catch data needed by NOAA to support our fisheries. Monitors and observers are trained fisheries professionals and should be treated with respect.

For more information about NOAAs approach to observer safety and harassment prevention click here.

Q: Who decides the target coverage rate for IFS vessels?

A: The New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (NEFMC and MAFMC) established the method used to calculate IFS target coverage rates for each new fishing year for federally-permitted Atlantic sea scallop vessels. This method determines the level of coverage that is needed on scallop trips in order to accurately estimate bycatch discard rates. Two of the main contributors setting this coverage rate are the SBRM and compensation analysis. More information on this can be found here.

Q: Which scallop trips are exempt from IFS coverage?

A: RSA and State Water trips are not subject to IFS coverage, but PTNS notifications are still required. To notify for a trip landing RSA or State Water pounds, you can select 'RSA' or 'STATEWATER' under the 'Exemption' field on the PTNS 'Enter Trips' page.

If you notify for an IFS-exempt trip in the PTNS, you must fish under the exemption or contact the PTNS Team to change your notification before departing on that trip.

Q: For LAGC (Limited Access General Category), what do you mean by '*Notifications and observer assignments will now be trip-based instead of weekly'*?

A: The PTNS is a trip-based system. There are two different notification types for the scallop fishery, **fixed-date** and **flexible-date** notifications.

Fixed-date (Fixed) notifications are associated with departure on a specific calendar day and cannot be delayed. If a trip does not sail on the calendar day notified, it will be considered canceled. A vessel user may notify for a block/week of fixed-date notifications at once, up to 9 individual fixed-date notifications can be entered at one time. Vessels planning to sail multiple times per week on shorter trips (day trips), should plan to use the fixed-date notification option (e.g., high-activity General Category vessels).

Flexible-date (Flex) notifications require the vessel user to enter an anticipated sail date, but the actual sail date may be delayed for weather, crew availability, or unanticipated maintenance. If assigned coverage, the vessel user is required to communicate any changes in sail time with their assigned observer provider. A vessel user may only notify for one flexible-date notification at a time. Vessels planning to take longer trips (multi-day trips) or vessels that are only planning 1-2 trips in a week should plan to use the flexible-date notification option (e.g., Limited Access vessels and low-activity General Category vessels).

Q: Will LAGC (Limited Access General Category) vessels still need to notify by Thursday for a Sunday to Saturday week?

A: No, notifications can be entered any day of the week, between 48 hours and 10 days prior to sailing.

Q: How can I set and change my provider preferences?

A: You may rank observer providers in the order in which you would prefer to work with each available observer provider. You can find information on how to set your provider preference in the PTNS Vessel User Guide in the "Help" section on the PTNS website: https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/index.php/help. You can adjust your provider preferences at any time, but please note, your new preferences will only affect the notifications entered after making a change to your observer provider preferences.

Trip Selection

Q: Why is my vessel being selected/assigned coverage/covered for a different proportion of trips than another vessel?

A: The PTNS selection process attempts to achieve the target coverage for the fishing year at the stratum level. Each observer sampling program may use different stratification variables (a combination of variables: permit type, gear, fishing area, etc.). Vessels may fish in different strata throughout the fishing year, but only their coverage rate in the stratum for which a vessel notifies is the individual vessel coverage rate used in the PTNS selection process. As more trips are taken within a stratum, individual vessel coverage rates tend to even out closer to target coverage levels, but they may still vary from the exact target.

For these reasons, vessels should not assume that trip selection rates, observer assignment rates, or observer coverage rates will be equal among individual vessels.

Q: What happens when I cancel a trip assigned an observer?

A: Canceled trips occur when a vessel informs the observer provider that they are canceling the trip and does not sail on the trip. NOAA Fisheries monitors vessel cancellation rates of waivers versus trips assigned observers. When calculating coverage to determine selection probabilities, PTNS does not take into account canceled trips.

The act of canceling a trip does not specifically trigger any PTNS functions.

Q: Will I continue to get selected for coverage if I cancel a trip assigned an observer?

A: PTNS uses a two-step selection process to promote equitability of individual vessel coverage.

The first step of selection is random - when a notification is entered, it may be randomly selected for coverage. The probability of random selection is based on the difference between the realized stratum coverage rate and the target stratum coverage rate.

During the second step of selection, the system evaluates a vessel's individual stratum coverage rate. If the trip was randomly selected and the vessel's individual coverage rate for that stratum is above a high threshold, then the trip will be waived in the second step. If a trip was randomly waived of coverage, but the vessel's individual coverage rate for that stratum is below a low threshold, then the vessel will be selected in the second step.

If a vessel continually cancels trips that have been assigned observers and only sails on waived trips and/or refusals, then their individual coverage rate will fall below the threshold. As a result of the low coverage rate – rather than as a direct result of canceling or refusing trips assigned observers – the vessel's notifications will be selected until its coverage rate rises above the low threshold.

Q: What happens when I don't inform the observer provider that I've canceled a trip that has been assigned an observer?

A: Please communicate with your assigned observer provider on all PTNS notifications assigned observer coverage. A No-Call/No-Show (NCNS) may occur when a vessel is assigned an observer and the observer provider does not receive return contact from a captain, so an observer is deployed to the dock for the sail time in PTNS; the captain and crew do not show, and the vessel does not end up sailing (note that if the vessel sailed, it would become a refusal - see question "What happens when I sail on a trip without my assigned observer?" below). NCNS is an incident associated with a canceled trip. These incidents are reported to NOAA Fisheries by the observer provider, and repeat incidents may be

investigated by the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE). PTNS counts these notifications as canceled trips. When calculating coverage to determine selection probabilities, PTNS does not take into account NCNS trips.

The act of changing a canceled trip's status to NCNS does not specifically trigger any PTNS functions.

Q: What happens when I sail on a trip without my assigned observer?

A: Refusals occur when a vessel is assigned an observer for a particular trip and sails on that trip without the observer. These incidents are reported to NOAA Fisheries by the observer provider and may be identified by the PTNS Coordinators when reconciling notifications with actual fishing trips. Follow up may involve OLE. When calculating coverage to determine selection probabilities, PTNS counts refusals as sailed, unobserved trips.

The act of changing a trip's status to a refusal does not specifically trigger any PTNS functions.

Troubleshooting

Q: I can't get to the login screen and am getting an error message. What's wrong?

A: Ensure you are using this PTNS web address. If you still cannot get to the PTNS website, the system may be undergoing scheduled routine maintenance or there may be an unscheduled outage. In that case, please email your notification to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) if you would like to sail within 48 hours of your attempted login.

Q: Why can't I log into my PTNS web account? It says "Authorization Failed".

A: If you forget your username, please click here: Retrieve FishOnline Username. If you forget your password, please click here: Retrieve FishOnline Password. The PTNS Team will still be able to access your PTNS account during this time, and you can contact them at 855-347-4371 if you need PTNS assistance, but they do not have access to your username and password.

Q: I notified for my trip by sending an email or by leaving a voicemail on the PTNS line. If the PTNS team doesn't enter my trip right away, will I have to wait more than 48 hours to sail?

A: The 48-hour notification requirement is based on the time of your email or voicemail, regardless of the time the new trip notification is entered into the PTNS by the PTNS team.

Q: I notified for a trip, and I have not received an entry confirmation email. Why?

A: When you enter your own notifications through your PTNS web account, you receive an entry confirmation email within 15 minutes. When you email NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) to notify, the PTNS team must manually enter your trip, so receipt of the entry confirmation email may be delayed.
If it is 24 hours or less before your trip is set to depart, and you still do not know the status of your trip, call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) as soon as possible in order to leave ample time to work out any issues before your departure.

Q: When am I supposed to get emails?

A: The PTNS will send an automated email when:

- A new notification is entered
- A trip is waived or assigned an observer
- A trip is canceled before the sail date

You may add or remove personal email addresses in your PTNS web account, by sending an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or by calling the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371).

Q: Do I have to call all approved observer providers to see if they have someone available to provide observer coverage?

A: No, when selected for IFS coverage in the PTNS, the system will offer the notification to the observer provider you have prioritized highest first, and if they are not available to provide coverage, the offer will move to the next ranked provider sequentially according to the preference specified in your PTNS account. Once an observer provider has accepted the notification, you will receive a Coverage Assigned email with the observer provider's name and contact information. Provider determination will be completed a minimum of 24 hours prior to the notified sail date and time. Once this observer assignment information is available, communication can begin with your assigned observer provider. If none of the observer providers are able to provide observer coverage, you will receive an email that states the notification is waived of observer coverage.

For more information on how to set up your observer provider preferences, please check out the PTNS Vessel User Guide on the Help tab of the PTNS website: https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/index.php/help.

Q: It is 24 hours prior to the scheduled sail time for my trip assigned observer coverage, and I have not yet heard from an observer. What do I do?

A: Observer providers have up to 24 hours prior to the PTNS sail time to accept a trip for coverage. The observer or provider will contact you as soon as possible after a trip is assigned coverage. You also have the option to contact the observer provider by calling the phone number provided in the trip's automated observer assignment email. Please call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) if you are having trouble regarding contact with your assigned observer or provider.

Q: I left a voicemail to notify for a trip. Why hasn't anyone called me back to give me my confirmation number and status?

A: When you call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) to notify for a trip, your information is manually entered into the system by the PTNS team. Your trip status will be updated in your PTNS web account and an entry confirmation email will be sent to your VMS, as well as any additional email addresses that you have registered in the PTNS. If you cannot access your PTNS web account, your VMS, or your email, specify in your notification that you would like a member of the PTNS team to call you and provide a phone number at which you can be reached.

Q: I am at the dock, and my observer is not here. What should I do?

A: Check your VMS, email account(s), and/or your PTNS web account to be sure that you were not issued a waiver for your trip. If you have been assigned an observer and have been unable to make contact with the observer or provider, call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) to obtain clearance from NOAA Fisheries to depart on your trip.

Do not leave the dock without your assigned observer if you have not called the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-3474371).

Q: I have a problem with my VMS. What should I do?

A: Contact the NMFS Northeast VMS Office at 978-281-9213 or the VMS Support Center at 888-219-9228. You may also send an email at any time to the NMFS Northeast VMS team at NMFS.OLE.NE@noaa.gov.