

PROPOSAL 164

5 AAC 39.105. Types of legal gear.

Establish bottom contact monitoring requirements for pelagic trawl gear operated inside state waters, as follows:

We recognize that pelagic trawl fisheries are part of Alaska's seafood economy. Our goal is to improve the enforcement and accountability of existing regulations and ensure that this gear type can operate responsibly as part of Alaska's sustainable fisheries.

All vessels using pelagic trawl gear in state waters must participate in a mandatory monitoring program, which includes seafloor contact sensors.

In coordination with the Alaska Board of Fisheries, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) shall establish a compliance verification system to confirm that pelagic trawl gear is not in contact with the seafloor.

Proposed amendment to 5 AAC 39.105:

Monitoring Requirements for Pelagic Trawl Gear.

All vessels using pelagic trawl gear in Alaska state waters must be equipped with a Department-approved seafloor contact detection system capable of recording and verifying gear behavior in relation to the seafloor.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) shall:

- Approve appropriate sensor technology or electronic monitoring systems that can detect bottom contact by trawl doors, nets, or other components;
- Define data submission and retention requirements;
- Require real-time or near-real-time data access to support compliance enforcement;
- Provide technical assistance and a grace period for gear modification, with full enforcement beginning no later than [specific date].

Vessels not equipped with verified monitoring systems shall be classified as bottom contact trawl operations and subject to all relevant restrictions. Failure to comply with this regulation may result in enforcement action, including fines or loss of fishing privileges in state waters.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The current definition of pelagic trawl gear in 5 AAC 39.105 prohibits seafloor contact, yet there is no requirement for gear-mounted sensors or other monitoring systems that can verify whether vessels comply with this regulation. As a result, vessels may routinely make contact with the seafloor without consequence.

This lack of accountability poses a serious risk to sensitive benthic habitats and undermines Alaska's reputation for sustainable fisheries management. It also creates an uneven playing field, where law-abiding fishermen who avoid bottom contact may be at a disadvantage compared to others who ignore the regulation.

Introducing mandatory seafloor sensing technology would close this gap, provide transparency, and enable managers to verify compliance with midwater gear restrictions.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. This proposal was developed in concert with the members and supporters of the Alaska Healthy Habitat Alliance.

PROPOSED BY: The Alaska Healthy Habitat Alliance

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