Frequently Asked Questions Related to Electronic Vessel Trip Reports in Commercial Fisheries

1. **What is changing?**
   A: All commercial fishing vessels with federal permits for species managed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) and New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) are required to submit Vessel Trip Reports (VTRs) to the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO). This action would require that all commercial VTRs be submitted <u>electronically</u> rather than on paper. These electronic VTRs (eVTRs) may need to be submitted sooner than is currently done (exact time frame will be determined when the Councils take final action).

2. **If I have a state permit but not a federal permit, will the eVTR rule impact me?**
   A: If you are not required to file a federal VTR, then this rule will not impact you. However, some states may also use VTRs as their state reporting, so please consult the reporting requirements for the state waters in which you fish.

3. **I am already using NOAA FLDRS to submit my VTRs. Do I need to change?**
   A: No. Although other applications are available for electronic reporting, if you are already using FLDRS to submit VTRs electronically, you may continue to do so.

4. **What systems are available for those fishing under ocean quahog and surf clam permits?**
   A. The only application that will currently allow you to comply with reporting guidelines for ocean quahog and clams is the NOAA Northeast Fishery Science Center's (NEFSC) FLDRS software. Contact Dominique St. Amand, NEFSC, at (508) 495-2121 or dominique.st.amand@noaa.gov for information on how to enroll. *All other operators without ocean quahog and clam permits who are not already using FLDRS should choose another application.*

5. **I am already using another software package to submit VTRs electronically. Do I need to change?**
   A: No. If you are already using an approved eVTR application to submit VTRs electronically, there is no need to change.

6. **What devices are available for me to use to report electronically?**
   A: Systems are available that operate on tablets, smartphones, and laptop/desktop computers.

7. What if I don't have an electronic device onboard my vessel that enables me to fill out an eVTR at sea?
   A: Regulations require VTRs be filled out with all required information prior to entering port, except for information not yet available (for example, "time landed"). This requirement exists, in part, to provide the seafood dealer(s) where you sell your catch with the unique trip identifier generated by the eVTR. Therefore, you will be required to complete the eVTR prior to entering port. This may be done on a smartphone or tablet that can be easily stored on all boats and held in a waterproof case if needed.

8. When do I need to complete my eVTR?
   A: Existing regulations require that all VTRs (paper or electronic) be filled out (but not submitted) prior to entering port and this requirement will not change with the move to electronic reporting. All approved electronic mobile device applications allow entry of trip information while at sea, and without internet connection, for later submission to NOAA upon returning to port.

9. When do I need to submit my eVTR?
   A: The timeline to submit the electronic VTR is still under consideration but will be finalized prior to the regulation taking effect.

10. What software package should I use?
    A. Seven applications are available. You can access information about these and other aspects of this at https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/aps/evtr/electronic/index.html. Many operators have chosen the SAFIS eTrips/mobile or the NOAA Fish Online programs.

11. I have both commercial and for-hire permits for the GARFO region. Can I use the eVTR software to fulfill both of these?
    A: Yes, the eVTR software covers both GARFO commercial and for-hire reporting.

12. Will the eVTR software fulfill both my state and federal reporting requirements?
    A: The SAFIS eTrips software is used by some states for reporting. The following states utilize data from SAFIS eTrips for state reporting:
    - Connecticut
    - Delaware
    - New Jersey
    - New York
    - Massachusetts
    - New Hampshire
    - Rhode Island

13. Can I submit an eVTR to fulfil my Highly Migratory Species (HMS) reporting requirements?
A: No. If you hold HMS permits and permits for fishing for species managed under a MAFMC or NEFMC fishery management plan, you will need to complete both HMS reports and eVTRs. Efforts are underway to enable the submission of a single vessel report to satisfy the reporting requirements of multiple agencies, including GARFO, HMS, Southeast Regional Office (SERO), Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), and states, but this is not possible at this time.

14. How do I get started with NOAA Fish Online?
A: For the mobile version, view the NOAA Fish Online Quick Start Card at https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/aps/evtr/doc/fish_online_app_quick_start_card_rev._1.1.6.pdf then call 1-978-281-9188 or email nmfs.gar.helpdesk@noaa.gov. Be sure to have your federal permit numbers handy.

15. Can I switch between NOAA Fish Online for iPhones and NOAA Fish Online for desktop computers?
A: Yes. Switching between any of the approved eVTR applications and programs is permissible but may complicate your own record keeping system.

16. How do I get started with SAFIS eTrips?
A: With any of the packages, you must start with the software vendor. For SAFIS eTrips, you can call 1-800-984-0810. Be sure to have your federal permit numbers handy.

17. Can I switch between SAFIS eTrips/mobile and SAFIS eTrips/online?
A: Technically, you may be able to do this, but it is not advisable since it may complicate your own record keeping system.

18. Can I use any of the approved packages on my smart phone?
A: NOAA Fish Online is available for Apple (iOS) devices and SAFIS eTrips/mobile is available for Apple, Android, and Windows 10 devices.

19. If software crashes or I lose my device, will there be some sort of waiver or will a backup paper VTR be allowed until an eVTR can be submitted?
A: As with paper VTRs that may be lost or damaged at sea, failures of electronic devices will be handled on a case-by-case basis by law enforcement personnel.

20. How is the information that I report handled? Will it be shared with anyone?
A: All approved eVTR software applications must transfer VTR data through secure methods into the VTR database. Submitting electronically does not change the confidentiality of the VTR information.

21. Will these electronic devices track where I fish?
    A: No. Reporting will still be done on the basis of NOAA grid (statistical area) that you currently use on paper VTRs. SAFIS eTRIPS/mobile offers you the ability to track where you caught your fish but this information stays with the device and is not submitted with the report *if you choose to use this feature*.

22. Is training available?
    A: Each software vendor is responsible for providing training and support for their system. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and NOAA Fisheries will be scheduling workshops and webinars to provide training in some of the software packages.

    Additional Resources:
    - MAFMC Commercial eVTR Framework Action Page
    - GARFO Overview of Approved eVTR software
    - MAFMC eVTR Outreach Liaison: Andy Loftus, aloftus@andrewloftus.com
    - MAFMC Staff Lead: Karson Coutre, KCoutre@mafmc.org