



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: American Lobster Management Board
FROM: Lobster Reporting Work Group
DATE: September 27, 2016
SUBJECT: Reporting Recommendations in the Lobster Fishery

On September 26, 2016 the Lobster Reporting Work Group (Work Group) met to discuss data deficiencies in the lobster fishery and ways to improve them. The Work Group discussed several aspects of harvester and dealer reporting, including temporal and spatial data deficiencies, the prevalence of electronic reporting, and the percentage of trip level reporting by active harvesters. The Work Group also reviewed the collection of biological data in the lobster fishery, including port and sea sampling, and whether this meets the needs of the current stock assessment model.

As a part of their discussion, the Work Group came up with the following goals for reporting in the lobster fishery:

1. Improve the spatial resolution of harvester reporting.
2. Utilize the latest technology to improve and increase reporting.
3. Collected greater effort data in harvester reports.
4. Define inshore versus offshore areas in the lobster fishery.
5. Proactively address data concerns of the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team(ALWTRT).

In order to achieve these goals, the Work Group compiled a list of recommendations to improve reporting in the lobster fishery. The recommendations are categorized as short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals.

Short-Term (less than 1 year)

- Recommend that Maine's 10% active harvester reporting only include commercial license holders who have actively fished in the previous two years for which data is available. Currently, recreational license holders are included in the 10% of lobster harvesters selected to submit trip level reports in Maine. Removing non-commercial fishermen from the sampling pool will ensure that the greatest amount of harvester data is collected from the current reporting requirement.
- Define the inshore fishery as occurring from 0-3 miles offshore, the nearshore fishery as occurring between 3-12 miles from shore, and the offshore fishery as greater than 12 miles from shore. There is currently no definition of inshore versus offshore in the lobster fishery. As a result, when asked to analyze effort or catch in the offshore or inshore fishery, the Technical Committee assigns NMFS statistical areas to one of the two areas. This is an imperfect system as some statistical areas span large distances from shore and include both inshore and offshore fishermen.

Intermediate (1-2 years)

- Require 100% active harvester reporting for all state and federally permitted lobster license holders. For those jurisdictions which are resource limited and unable to achieve 100% harvester reporting, at a minimum, states should require reporting from a statistically valid sample of harvesters. In a 2007 memo to the Board, the Technical Committee defined this as 30% active harvester reporting. The Work Group

- recommends the TC revisit this analysis to make sure 30% is still the minimum percentage of harvester reporting required for a statistically valid sample.
- Add the following data components to current harvester reporting coastwide: number of trap hauls, soak time, catch disposition, gear configuration, number of vertical lines, LCMA, and depth. Trap hauls and soak time are recommended as they are an important measure of effort in the fishery. Gear configuration and number of vertical lines directly address data concerns from the ALWTRT as this information helps determine potential interactions with protected resources. LCMA and depth will provide additional information on where the fishery is occurring.
 - Further delineate NMFS statistical areas on harvester trip reports. While statistical areas are an important component of the current stock assessment model, these areas do not provide the spatial resolution needed to fully understand where the lobster fishery is taking place. This is a concern that more precise information on the location of the fishery is needed, especially as marine spatial planning and habitat protection continue in the Atlantic Ocean. At a minimum, NMFS statistical areas should delineate distance from shore (inshore, nearshore, offshore).

Long Term (greater than 2 years)

- Establish an electronic swipe-card system for harvester and dealer reports in the lobster fishery. A swipe-card system is currently used in the Maine elver and urchin fisheries and in the Massachusetts shellfish fishery. The system works by dealers swiping harvester cards during a transaction. Harvesters and dealers are unable to complete a transaction if reporting and/or permits are not current. Advantages of the swipe card system include ease of dealer reporting, quick linking of harvester and dealer reports, pre-programmed fishermen information which reduces data entry mistakes, and the ability ensure reporting compliance.
- Incorporate Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) or another locator beacon to all lobster vessels. As previously mentioned, spatial data in the lobster fishery is lacking and this hinders the ability to identify areas critical to the lobster fishery. By requiring a system like VMS, the fishery will be able to show not only where effort is taking place but also important transit routes for fishermen.
- Establish a fixed-gear Vessel Trip Report (VTR) for all federal permit holders. One of the major hurdles in lobster reporting is that current reporting forms are intended for a wide variety of gear types. This limits the detail of information which can be collected. A fixed-gear VTR would allow managers to address specific data needs in fixed gear fisheries such as the number of hauls, soak time, the number of sets (or panels for pound nets), and total gear in water. This VTR would only be offered in an electronic format and all federal lobster fishermen would be required to report electronically. A fixed-gear VTR would be applicable to pot gears, pound nets, and anchored gill nets.