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Spring 2009

The Lobster Bulletin, Spring 2009

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Repository Citation

Lobster Institute, University of Maine, "The Lobster Bulletin, Spring 2009" (2009). *Lobster Bulletin*. 19. https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/lobster_bulletin/19

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Spring 2009

“News, research updates, and information on lobsters and the lobster industry.”

Published by the Lobster Institute

“Protecting and conserving the lobster resource, and enhancing lobstering as an industry...and a way of life.”

Canadian Officials May Consider Ban of Floating Rope

According to a report by Randy Boswell of Canwest News Service (2/19/09), Canadian fisheries officials are considering follow the U.S. in banning the use of floating rope on lobster traps, which has been implicated in entanglements of the endangered North Atlantic right whale. Just such a regulation was imposed by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service on April 6, despite a vigorous campaign by Maine lobstermen and the Maine Department of Marine Resources against the measure.

'It's definitely on our radar,' said Harvey Millar, a senior official with the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) in New Brunswick.

North Atlantic right whales migrate in the winter to calving grounds in the southeast U.S. from coastal Atlantic Canada and New England. Conservation organizations in both the U.S. and Canada have argued that eliminating floating rope is needed to protect these migrating whales and other large whales from the risk of entanglement in fishing gear in the Gulf of Maine.

In January, Canadian Whale Institute spokesman Jerry Conway, a former top DFO official, told Canwest that Canada should match the U.S. rules mandating the use of 'sinking groundlines' to reduce entanglements.

The Canwest report quoted Millar as saying, “We both (Canada and the U.S.) have the same objective, to do everything we can for the right whale. We're not absolutely positive that fixing the line is necessarily going to be the right way or the best way. But we're exploring that option.” He noted the Canadian lobster fishery has implemented a warning system through which fishermen and federal officials share information about right whale sightings and move lobster traps 'to keep the path clear' for the huge animals.

Another major difference between Canada and the U.S., said Millar, is that most North Atlantic right whales have begun their annual southward migration before the lobster fishing season starts in mid-November.

(From SEAFOOD.COM NEWS [Canwest News Service] Feb 19, 2009)



Sustainability Labeling & Traceability Trigger Much Discussion at Lobster Institute's 2009 Canadian/U.S. Lobstermen's Town Meeting

Lobstermen from both Canada and the United States gathered in Saint John, New Brunswick on March 27 & 28 for the Lobster Institute's sixth annual Canadian/U.S. Lobstermen's Town Meeting. The Town Meeting is designed as an industry-wide gathering of lobstermen, lobster dealers and distributors, scientists and other interested parties coming together to discuss topics of direct concern to the fishery and the lobster industry. Nearly 50 people were in attendance from throughout the commercial lobstering areas in the U.S. and Canada. Lobstermen were asked to share their thoughts, concern, questions, and experiences. The suggested focus for the meeting was, “The status of the resource: what is on the horizon?” While there was some talk of water quality and the possible effects on lobsters from electromagnetic fields generated by offshore power cables, the topics uppermost on most people's minds were sustainability labeling, marketing, and traceability requirements – and this was reflected in the conversation.

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The Lobster Bulletin
published by the



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A member of the University of Maine System

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Made possible through an endowed gift by Helene & Frank Crohn.

Lobstermen's Town Meeting

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During the course of discussion, all agreed that being able to claim that the lobster fishery is sustainable would be a valuable and almost necessary marketing tool. How to substantiate that claim and label the product triggered considerably more debate.

Obtaining certification of sustainability for the lobster fishery in various regions through the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) was widely discussed. It was noted that both the lobster fishery in LFA 41 in Nova Scotia and the Maine fishery are both being reviewed for certification through MSC. In the case of the Maine fishery, it was noted that a select group of people with private funding were pursuing the MSC certification and that there was no consensus in the industry that this was the best course of action. There was a great deal of concern raised by lobstermen and dealers alike about paying to receive certification from an "outside company" (MSC is based in London, England). Part of the concern centered on what would happen if certification was granted initially but was later revoked. As Jon Carter, a lobsterman from Bar Harbor, Maine put it, "the idea scares the hell out of me."

Others questioned if MSC would only mean more money for retailers and distributors, while the boat price for lobstermen would not increase no matter what their sustainability practices were.

The concept of "self-certification" as an alternative to MSC and other "outside" certifying companies was also discussed at length. "Self-certification" would entail promoting all of the conservation measures and fishing regulations, historically and currently, which have kept the commercial lobster fishery vital for nearly 150 years. It was noted that these regulations, by design, are based on the "best available science", and references for pertinent scientific studies could be cited as part of the "self-certification" process.

Dana Rice, co-chairman of the Town Meeting Planning Committee and a lobsterman and dealer from D. B. Rice Fisheries in Bunker's Harbor, Maine, called for a straw poll on how people felt about MSC certification versus "self-certification". A show of hands indicated that the majority of the nearly 50 people in attendance favored "self-certification."

A call for exploring a joint marketing effort between the U.S. and Canada was also raised, as it had been at the 2008 Town Meeting in Portland, Maine. The Lobster Institute reported that it is currently developing a feasibility study to explore the benefits and pitfalls of implementing such an effort. Catherine Lessard, a graduate student in Resource Economics and Policy at University of Maine, who has an undergraduate degree from Université Laval (Québec) in Agricultural Economics and Management, will be developing this project. Several people suggested that dealers and

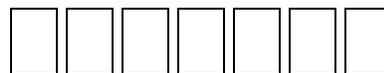
lobstermen on both sides of the border contribute a few cents per pound of lobsters sold into a fund to allow the fishery in both nations to work together to come up with a North Atlantic lobster promotion campaign.

Traceability was another topic that elicited much discussion. It was suggested that many lobstermen look at traceability strictly as a marketing tool, used to facilitate branding. While it can be used for this purpose, it appears traceability may soon be a more pressing issue as a food safety requirement for international and inter-state shipping. The objective for traceability in this instance would be to track lobsters from boat to plate in order to facilitate trace-back should concerns be raised about quality control and food safety. Lobstermen from Canada noted that having a reliable system in place for traceability might soon be required by the European Union for lobster imports. Others noted that this movement may quickly emerge in the U.S. as well, and that preparing for such an eventuality now would be in the best interest of the lobster industry.

As the meeting closed, fishermen commended the Lobster Institute for the format of the Canadian/U.S. Lobstermen's Town Meeting, stating that cross-border dialogue was beneficial for the industry and resource as a whole. Those in attendance encouraged one another to bring a friend, or sponsor a young lobsterman to come with them to the 2010 Town Meeting.

Darden Restaurants and Fisheries Products International/Highliner Foods were both recognized for their continuous sponsorship of the Lobster Institute's Canadian/U.S. Lobstermen's Town Meeting every year since its inception in 2004. Other sponsors recognized included: Downeast Lobstermen's Association; East Coast/Paturel; Lobster Gram, Inc.; Maine Import/Export Lobster Dealers Association; Maine Salt Company; and Riverdale Mills.

As always, the Town Meeting session was recorded, and the Lobster Institute will make a CD or written reports available to interested parties. In addition, a summary report and full transcript will be made available on the Lobster Institute's Web site at www.lobsterinstitute.org as soon as they are compiled. Contact Deb Seekins at 207-581-1443 or deb.seekins@umit.maine.edu for information. ❧



Check out the Lobster Institute website at www.lobsterinstitute.org, providing the definitive site for lobster information with nearly 200 links.





Contact us at 207-581-2751 if you would like to sponsor our “Research Report” and see your logo here!

RESEARCH REPORT

Readers may contact the Lobster Institute for more detailed information on any of these projects.

❖ **FSRS Lobster Recruitment Index** – A summary of results from the Fishermen & Scientists Research Society 2007-2008 Lobster Recruitment Index was published in the FSRS Winter 2009 newsletter. The summary, which began in the spring of 1999, is designed to study the change in abundance of juvenile lobsters that will be recruited into the lobster fishery. Volunteer fishermen count, sex, and measure the size of lobsters from their science traps and record them in a logbook. Each participant receives a minilog temperature gauge, which they attach to one of the science traps where it will record bottom temperatures around the trap. This study includes Lobster Fishing Areas (LFAs) 27-35. From October to February there were 71 participants, 3,845 traps hauled and 13,290 lobsters measured. From March-July there were 152 participants, 17,367 traps hauled, and 59,441 lobsters measured. Most areas saw a good sign of recruitment and pre-recruit sizes for the past season. Temperature averages were presented and varied over the different areas. The fall temperatures for 2007 were a bit cooler than the previous fall but warmed up again in the spring season for LFAs 33, 34, and 35. The spring temperatures for the other areas were a little bit warmer at the beginning of the season compared to the end of the season. (Excerpts from summary by Katie McGrath, Fisheries Technician, FSRS.)

❖ **American Lobster Stock Assessment 2009** – A May 7 press release from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission reported that the 2009 peer-reviewed stock assessment report indicates the American lobster resource presents a mixed picture, with record high stock abundance and recruitment throughout most of the Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Georges Bank (GBK), continued low abundance and poor recruitment in Southern New England (SNE), and further declines in recruitment and abundance in NMFS Statistical Area 514 (Massachusetts Bay and Stellwagen Bank) since the last assessment. The Peer Review Panel noted particular concern regarding the status of the stock throughout the SNE assessment area and within Area 514 and recommended that further restrictions are warranted for both areas. Despite current high levels of abundance and recruitment in GOM and GBK,

the Panel recommended “that managers be particularly vigilant of recruitment patterns in these stocks and stand ready to impose substantial restrictions should recruitments decline.”

The 2009 stock assessment used a new length-based model developed by Dr. Yong Chen of the University of Maine. This model increased the ability to predict changes in population length structure and account for changes in management measures. The model also incorporated more fishery independent survey data. The Panel noted improvements in commercial and fishery-independent data efforts. However, states should be strongly encouraged to standardize collection of fishery-dependent data and work toward mandatory universal coverage.

Results showed current abundance of the GOM stock overall is at a record high when compared to the 26-year time series. Recent exploitation rates have been comparable to the past whereas recruitment has steadily increased since 1997. The exception is statistical Area 514, which has continued to experience high exploitation rates and declines in recruitment and abundance since the last assessment. Continued restrictions are warranted given persistent low recruitment and its negative effect on total abundance and potential egg production. Across GOM, recent effort levels are the highest observed since 1982 (both in number of traps and soak time) and further increases in effort are not biologically advisable.

The new assessment showed current abundance of the GBK stock is at a record high compared to the 26-year time series and recent exploitation rates are at a record low. Recruitment has remained high in GBK since 1998. Sex ratio of the population in recent years is largely skewed toward females (~80% from 2005 to 2007) for unknown reasons. The Technical Committee noted that the stock could experience recruitment problems in the future if females are sperm-limited.

The new assessment showed current abundance of the SNE stock is the lowest observed since the 1980s and exploitation rates have declined since 2000. Recruitment has remained low in SNE since 1998. Given current low levels of spawning stock biomass and poor recruitment further restrictions are warranted.

A full copy of the release is available on the Lobster Institute’s Web site at www.lobsterinstitute.org in the News section.

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LOBSTER INSTITUTE
Lobster Bulletin, Spring, 2009

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See video of Lobster College 2008 at

www.wcsh6.com/news/local/story.aspx?storyid=93112&catid=2&provider=email