Landings, vol. 24, no. 4

Maine Lobstermen's Community Alliance
The 41st annual Maine Fishermen’s Forum, held March 3-6 at the Samoset Resort in Rockport, kicked off with a three-hour session Thursday afternoon titled “Questioning Our Changing Oceans.” Hosted by Port Clyde lobsterman and Forum board member Gerry Cushman, the session featured scientists, meteorologists, and fishermen who spoke about what scientific data and day-to-day observations on the water suggest about the future of the Gulf of Maine.

To set the stage, Cushman noted that seafood landings in the state have shifted dramatically in the past twenty years. To set the stage, Cushman noted that seafood landings in the state have shifted dramatically in the past twenty years.

Maine’s lobster fishery hit a new record for landed value in 2015, topping $500 million. Although the total number of pounds was down slightly, the average price per pound was up. The preliminary Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) announced the preliminary 2015 landings results for the state’s lobster fishery. Last year Maine lobstermen made $37 million more in revenue than in 2014. A pretty good year, and the biggest single-year gain ever.

The Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative (MLMC) also presented at the Forum our results from last year and plans for 2016. At that session, we got a lot of questions about our competition, especially about competition from Canada and how we respond to it.

Like many others attending the Forum, we then departed and made our way to Boston for the start of the Seafood Expo North America (formerly known as the Boston Seafood Show) the following day. On
Last year Maine lobstermen landed more than 121 million pounds of lobster in the state. It was the fourth year in a row when more than 120 million pounds came across Maine’s many wharfs and docks on the way to consumers across the globe.

Not only was the harvest abundant but the price paid to lobstermen jumped, exceeding $4 per pound. That is great news for the lobstermen and the communities in which they live and work. Those dollars find their way into the pockets of the local grocery store, marine electronics dealer, boat repair shop and dozens of other local businesses whose well-being is linked directly to the lobster fishery.

But, as was noted at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum in early March, the Gulf of Maine is changing rapidly due to a changing global climate. As we report in Landings this month, fishermen from this country and abroad have seen their home waters change quickly, creating challenges for traditional fisheries. In the Gulf of Maine warmwater temperatures have caused some species to move while other species seem to be disappearing. We present several articles this month on the issues confronting fishermen in the Gulf in the face of a changing marine environment.

Landings also focuses on lobster quality this month. Dr. Jean Lavallée, a lobster veterinarian from Prince Edward Island, spoke at the annual Maine Lobstermen’s Association (MLA) meeting in early March on lobster biology and proper handling practices. Despite its armored exterior, lobsters have delicate inner structures suited to life on the cold seafloor. Changes in temperature, stress from lack of oxygen and other factors can turn a vigorous lobster into a limp, weak creature in a very short time. Landings looks at a pilot project in Stonington designed to improve lobster health and talks to prominent southern Maine lobster dealer about the issue.

Landings also looks at what lobster buyers along the coast are doing about the packaging that comes with frozen lobster. Lobstermen have turned to frozen meat, much of it produced in foreign countries, to supplement the more traditional herring and pogies. This bait comes packed in plastic and cardboard boxes. Getting rid of the stuff propels one’s way through the health insurance world can be confusing. Landings explains some of the elements of health insurance coverage, such as monthly premiums, in this month’s issue.

As lobstermen get ready for another season of fishing, making sure that they remain safe on the water should be paramount. Landings explores the components of the Coast Guard Drill Conductor Safety course that is mandatory for lobster boat captains. President Reagan signed the Commercial Vessel Safety Act in 1988. Since that time captains or individuals in charge are required to conduct safety drills once per month. Being prepared for an emergency is a necessity when something unexpected happens at sea. Landings also features a safety article by Harvard University School of Public Health professor Ann Backus geared to children who may go lobstering this summer. Backus offers an easy-to-do project to illustrate the principle of a boat’s center of gravity. Grab a pair of scissors and have fun!

Landings continues its focus on lobstermen’s health with an article on Affordable Care Act insurance coverage. Hundreds of Maine fishing families now enjoy health insurance for the first time through the federal program. But threading one’s way through the health insurance world can be confusing. Landings explains some of the elements of health insurance coverage, such as monthly premiums, in this month’s issue.

Finally, Landings celebrates some of the noteworthy people who are part of the state’s fishing industry. Bobby Ingalls, a lobsterman from Bucks Harbor, took home the MLA Golden V-Notch award this year, given in recognition of his many contributions to the lobster fishery. Jeff Turcotte, a Marine Patrol Officer on Mt. Desert Island, received the MLA Officer of the Year award. And Andy Mays, a scalloper and lobsterman from Southwest Harbor, was presented with the very first DMR Award of Excellence. Mays said later, after the shock had worn off, “The DMR has recognized me as an officer of the year. And Andy Mays, a scalloper and lobsterman from Southwest Harbor, was presented with the very first DMR Award of Excellence.” Congratulations to all three men!

We hope you enjoy this issue and as ever, would love to hear your feedback.

Patrice

MLCA fosters thriving coastal communities and preserves Maine’s lobstering heritage
INNOVATORS: A mechanical advantage in a time of abundance

Lobstering is a traditional fishery, one of the few remaining in the United States unencumbered by giant boats and high-tech equipment. Maine lobstermen continue setting and hauling their traps using much the same techniques and gear that their fathers and grandfathers did. Sure, the traps are now made of poly-vinyl-coated wire and a hydraulic hauler certainly makes the work slightly less backbreaking. Yet lobster fishing largely remains wrapped in traditional practices honed over decades of use. Some innovators, however, are injecting something different into this traditional way of life. This month Landings looks at how lobster dealers are successfully sending their live product all across the globe.

By Melissa Waterman

Moving lobsters from the bottom of the sea to the plates of hungry diners traditionally involves a lot of human effort. In the old days before most boats had hydraulic haulers, the heavy wooden traps were hauled by hand over the rail. The lobsters were kept in wooden cars floated at the dock until brought ashore to be packed in wooden barrels filled with ice and sawdust, then trundled onto trucks and railroad cars on their way to major cities.

As plastic overtook wood as a common material on the docks, hydraulics made hauling faster and vinyl-coated wire traps proliferated along the coast, lobsters continued to experience nearly as rough a ride to the consumer as they did in the early 20th century. Tossed into a tank on the boat, then sorted into plastic crates at the dock, tumbled about as those crates were hauled and stacked via forklift on pallets and then jammed into a truck, lobsters still undergo a degree of stress that often results in weak or dead animals.

“I timed it. We can load ten 90-pound crates to the pallet in just over a minute with the belt.”

Recently, however, more and more lobster wharf owners are investing in equipment that lowers the risk of harm to their valuable catches. The goal is to handle each lobster as little as possible.

The upsurge in lobster landings in recent years has made managing the vast numbers of lobsters brought to the dock problematic even for the best-run establishment. The Vinalhaven Fishermen’s Cooperative tackled that problem head-on when it set up a 40-foot conveyor belt approximately five years ago to move its lobsters from water to truck. “Without the conveyor belt it would be so much slower, especially in the summer,” said Darryl Stanley, co-op general manager. “There’s just so many pounds of lobster coming in. And it adds up to many hours of overtime.”

Conveyor belts help manage the load when the lobsters come in hard later in the season. MLA photo.

The crated lobsters are tied. 13 crates to a line, in the water. The line is then brought to the conveyor belt and the crates pulled on, one at a time. At the top of the conveyor belt they move onto rollers that will spin the crates 90 degrees and into the shed. There they move immediately onto a pallet stationed on a forklift. As soon as one pallet is full, it moves to a truck. “We stack 10 crates on a pallet before moving to the truck. And there’s a piston on the belt so that it can move up and down with tide,” Stanley explained. “Every now and then a crate will tip but not often.”

Stonington has seen a dramatic rise in the number of pounds of lobsters landed in its harbor. In 2014 and 2015 it led the state in the value of seafood landings; according to DMR, nearly $64 million worth of seafood came across Stonington docks last year. Keeping the quality of those lobsters high, partiuclarly in April 2016...
Landings continued from page 1

Resources (DMR) figures for the year show that Maine lobstermen harvested 121,083,418 pounds in 2015, surpassing 120 million pounds for the fourth year in a row. The total value of all Maine's commercially harvested marine species reached $631,768,531 in 2015. The total represents an all-time high in value and an increase of more than $33 million over the previous record set in 2014. The largest single increase in value was in Maine's lobster fishery. The overall landed value jumped by more than $37 million; the average per pound value increased by more than 10%, exceeding $4 per pound. It is the sixth year in a row that the estimated dockside value of Maine's annual lobster harvest has hit an all-time high.

"Maine's lobster fishery continues to be a major engine for our coastal economy."

The overall value of Maine's lobster fishery was $495,433,635. When factoring in bonuses paid to lobstermen as reported by 11 of Maine's 19 lobster co-ops, the overall landed value of Maine's lobster fishery reached $510,680,048. Lobster landings had remained around 20 million pounds annually until the 1990s when the catch began to rise steadily. But the more significant increase has occurred during the past five years, leaving many coastal towns solely dependent on lobster fishing for their economic livelihood.

Stonington was Maine's top landing port in 2015 valued at nearly $64 million, followed by Vinalhaven at nearly $40 million. "While this year's value and landings are great news for our coastal economy, we also recognize that lobster represents more than 81% of the overall value of our commercial fisheries," said Commissioner Kelihier. "It shows that we all must work hard to build and sustain our commercial fisheries and to create more diverse opportunity, be it with traditional commercial fisheries or expanding the role of aquaculture. This work is critical to ensure we can adapt to changes in landings and value in future years."

Maine's softshell clam industry retained its second-place standing in overall value at $22,536,086, a record for the fishery. At $2.46/lb., 2015 landings were 23% greater in value compared to 2014, despite a drop of one million pounds in total landings.

Maine's elver fishery was by far the most lucrative of Maine's commercial fisheries on a per pound basis. Last year the tiny glass eels fetched $2,171 per pound. Despite a cold spring, the fishery's overall value increased by nearly $3 million. At $11,422,381, the elver fishery was Maine's fourth most lucrative fishery in 2015, just behind herring.

Maine's ten top earning ports, based on seafood landings (2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Port</th>
<th>Value (2015)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stonington</td>
<td>$63.8 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vinalhaven</td>
<td>$39.6 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>$34 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beals</td>
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<td>Jonesport</td>
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<td>Swans Island</td>
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<td>Milbridge</td>
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Similar to previous years, lobster landings in 2015 were generally strongest in downeast Maine and weakened as you move westward along the coast. Zone C led the state in both landings and value; Zone A posted the state's second highest landings and third highest value. Zone G had the lowest landings along the coast, but posted the strongest average boat price. In general the average boat price was highest in western Maine and weakened as you move east.
Everyone knows: lobstermen use a lot of bait. In recent years much of that bait has come from far off lands: alfonsino from New Zealand, tuna heads from Vietnam, rockfish from California. These different species of fish are shipped frozen to dealers, then sold to wharves and lobster cooperatives along the coast. The blocks of bait come wrapped in plastic, packaged in cardboard boxes of various weights which themselves are bound together with plastic ties. Taken all together, the increasing use of frozen bait has led to a lot of extra trash for lobstermen and wharf owners to dispose of.

"It is a huge problem here because there's just so much packaging," said Ronnie Trundy, Stonington Fisherman's Co-op manager. "We take truckload after truckload of cardboard and straps to the transfer station." Last year the co-op purchased around 1.5 million pounds of frozen bait. Wharf workers unpack the cardboard boxes on the dock and then fill bait trays for the lobstermen. "We have Xactic totes at each area [the co-op has two buying stations] to keep the stuff contained," Trundy said. Up until recently the co-op contracted with a local garbage hauler to take the frozen bait trash and other material to the transfer station. That contract was running more than $9,000 per year. "So we bought a truck with a dump body and a snowplow. Now we take it to the dump and do snowplowing ourselves," he said.

In South Bristol, Brenda Bartlett, Bristol Fishermen’s Cooperative manager, is kept busy with the frozen bait boxes as well. Co-op members tend to want frozen redfish and pogies for bait. "We flatten out the cardboard and separate it out for recycling," she explained. "We have a dumpster for that." A local garbage hauler takes the dumpster contents to the transfer station. Co-op workers will break out the frozen bait for lobstermen who want it put in trays. "Sometimes they [the lobstermen] take the boxes out with them but they always bring them back," Bartlett said.

Out on Vinalhaven, the members of the Vinalhaven Fisherman’s Cooperative use a lot of frozen bait too, purchasing slightly more than $1 million worth in 2015, according to co-op manager Darryl Stanley. "If a fisherman wants it unpacked, we do it at the dock. Those who don’t, they bring the boxes back in their crates," Stanley said. "We sort the cardboard out and take it to the transfer station." The cardboard is put in a separate container which is lifted with the forklift into a truck to go to the dump.

The Spruce Head Cooperative makes sure that lobstermen don’t have to deal with cardboard boxes at all. "We fully unwrap all of our frozen bait and place it into bait trays. The trays are then loaded onto the individual fisherman’s boat," explained Tom Armbrecht, co-op general manager. "The cardboard and plastic are placed into a dumpster for transfer." The co-op purchased approximately 430,000 pounds of frozen bait last year.

Some lobstermen are concerned not only about the plastics they encounter while fishing, but about the plastics some fishermen may be putting into the ocean. "If you put it on your boat, you should bring it in," said David Cousins, president of the Maine Lobstermen’s Association (MLA). The items he picks up while fishing typically are plastic and styrofoam cups, but he also finds plastic wrappers for frozen bait, yogurt cups and plastic soda bottles. "If I see something, I pick it up and bring it in. Most of us do," said Cousins. "But I also see people out there tossing their cups and whatever into the water. The ocean’s not a dump."

The MLA has taken steps to make it even easier for lobstermen to keep trash from entering the Gulf of Maine. "If you put it on your boat, you should bring it in," said Cousins. "It’s a huge problem here because there’s just so much packaging," Trundy said.

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the drive down to Boston, I thought a lot about competition, and it was still on my mind when I walked into the show on Sunday.

The Boston show is the biggest seafood event in North America. More than 20,000 people attend the show and according to them, they were selling Maine lobster, about 1.4% of the total exhibitors.

Among all the hundreds of booths were 18 companies selling Maine lobster. Our company had the best stories. They talked about their ability to fill orders and to table stories highlighting the work ethic and history of the Maine lobsterman. And our vendors also talked about culinary versatility and the ability to adapt Maine lobster to dishes of all different dishes. Finally, there was buzz about new shell lobster — why it is different and worth considering.

On my way back home after the show, I had a chance to think more about our sustainability measures which have rewarded us with abundance in the face of scarcity challenges in many fisheries.

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Maine Lobstermen’s Association

Advocating for a sustainable lobster resource and the fishermen and communities that depend on it since 1954.

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Board of Directors’ Meeting Schedule
All meetings take place at Darby’s Restaurant, Belfast, unless otherwise indicated.
April 6, noon, at the Belfast Library.

Spring is such an exciting time. The days are getting longer, temperatures warmer, landscape greener and the lobster season ever closer. As you work through your gear and get your boat ready to launch, the season is a good reminder of why the MLA is here — to keep you fishing!

I know many of you for the old days when it was as simple as that and you just went fishing! These days there’s so much more to think about and keep track of. The world of management and regulation permeates all that we do, touching our lives in numerous ways. Gone are the days when a lobsterman could just set his traps without worrying about the effect possible new regulations could have on his future. Today there’s just so much happening that affects the lobster fishery — even the MLA is getting stretched thin trying to keep up with it all. But it is essential that the industry not be caught off guard when fundamental changes might be coming down the pike. The MLA’s focus — to keep you fishing — is more important than ever.

The MLA spent much this winter in Augusta working on the lobster licensing bill. Our marching orders from the MLA membership were clear — if change was to be made to the lobster licensing system, it could not be at the expense of the zone council system. Furthermore, it could not impinge on efforts in the fishery. The importance of the issue to become men became crystal clear to the Marine Resources Committee during the public hearing when hundreds of lobstermen showed up to reinforce the message delivered by the MLA.

In the end, the Committee came up with a good compromise, incorporating many of the suggestions brought forward by the industry. The waiting lists will be cleaned up at regular intervals; transfers and new entrants will be dealt with separately; students will have more time to get through the Apprentice Program if they have a high school diploma or Ged, or are continuing their post-secondary education; Island Limited Entry Zones will be able to recruit from those on the waiting list statewide; and zones that base exit ratios on tags will use the maximum number of tags associated with any retired license.

The warm winter has generated a lot of speculation on how early the lobster season may be this year. The MLA took a proactive approach to this possibility by featuring a talk on lobster quality at our Annual Meeting in March. Dr. Jean Lavallée, the region’s premier lobster health expert, captured everyone’s attention with his talk about the unique biology of lobsters and how easy it is to stress them out. Fortunately, there are a lot of simple steps that can be taken on the boats, at the dock, and through the supply chain to keep the stress down and lobsters lively. The MLA heard back from a lot of lobstermen about how helpful Lavallée’s brief talk was, so we worked with the RED board (the license plate fund) and the Island Institute to bring Dr. Lavallée back to Maine during the week of April 18 to hold a lobster quality workshop in each lobster zone. If you are a lobsterman, sternman, dockworker or anyone who deals with lobster for a living, this is an opportunity you can’t miss! Stay tuned for more details.

The MLA continues to deal with the usual dizzying array of issues, such as herring management and whale regulations. Herring will be taking up more time this year as the New England Fishery Management Council considers how to manage herring while accounting for its natural role as prey within the ecosystem. This could mean lots of things, but most importantly possible cuts in the herring quota despite the healthy status of the herring stocks. We will follow this issue closely and work hard to ensure a steady bait supply for the lobster fishery. The Council will be holding a two-day stakeholder meeting on May 16 and 17 to get input on this issue. If a steady supply of herring is important to you, please mark your calendars and make an effort to be there. The MLA will get the word out on that meeting as soon as the details are announced.

And of course, the MLA continues to stay closely involved with activities related to the whale rules. At this point, all of the rules are in place so we shouldn’t see any surprises coming our way. The next step in the process is monitoring whether or not the whale rules we have in place are working. Obviously, the outcome of the monitoring plan in five years’ time will greatly influence whether or not we see additional regulations. The other big whale issue for the lobster fishery is staying on top of the stock assessment. NMFS has been reconsidering how it tracks and monitors whale stocks, serious injuries and mortalities to whales. This sort of stuff is very technical and mundane, yet it ultimately sets the goal for federal management efforts so it is something that the MLA takes very seriously.

Keeping up with all these policy issues is fundamental to every lobsterman’s future, but it’s really not all that exciting. The MLA has been putting more thought and effort into keeping the organization relevant to our members. So, we make sure that we tackle other topics that are important to your daily lives. For instance, we continue to have a health insurance Navigator on staff to help lobster families figure out how to obtain affordable health insurance for themselves. We are proud to offer member benefits such as our discounted vessel insurance plan through Smithwick & Mariners. The board stays closely engaged with our vessel insurance program to ensure that we offer the best coverage for our members. Recent changes have included an optional lay-up period for insured vessels and coverage for researchers carried on a vessel included in your P&I insurance.

There are other benefits of membership that are easy to take for granted: we continue to send our monthly paper, Landings, to all lobstermen, and MLA members receive our weekly email news roundup and the lobster, bait and fuel price report. This year we organized a trip for members to the Boston Seafood Show so that Maine lobstermen could see how their lobsters stacked up in the global markets. If you have an idea about other benefits we could offer, please let us know.

We can’t turn back time, but we can fight to keep you fishing. There’s a lot of complicated management issues right now at the state, regional and federal levels that affect what you do on the water and you can be darn sure there will be more in coming years. You can tear your hair, grumble over your coffee in the morning, and complain to your buddies as much as you want. But to make change, to alter the patterns that regulators may want to set for you and your children requires organization. For 62 years the MLA has been standing up for Maine lobstermen in ways large and small. Right now we need your support. We do a lot with the staff that we have and our dedicated board, but we are stretched mighty thin!

If you are an MLA member — thank you! And please encourage others in your area to support us. If you are not yet an MLA member, I hope you will consider joining. We hope someday that all lobstermen in the state will see the value in supporting the MLA.

Happy spring — and good luck getting ready for the season! As always, stay safe on the water.
Join lobster health expert Jean Lavallée at one of the upcoming workshops during the week of April 18. MLA received rave reviews on Lavallée’s presentation during the MLA Annual meeting, so we’re bringing him back! If you are a lobsterman, sternman, dockworker or anyone who handles lobster for a living, this is a great opportunity for you! You will learn about the unique biology and physiology of the lobster, and how lobsters experience stress as they are hauled from the ocean floor and move through the supply chain.

Dead lobsters aren’t worth anything. Weak lobsters aren’t worth as much as they could be. So come learn some fascinating facts about the critter you rely on to pay your bills, and some easy, common sense practices to lower the stress on lobsters! MLA will announce the final schedule in early April. Call the MLA office or visit the MLA website or Facebook page for more details.

When?  Zone F and G: Monday, April 18  Zone D and E: Tuesday, April 19  Zone B and C: Wednesday, April 20  Zone A: Thursday, April 21
Where? Central location in each zone; TBA
Cost? These workshops are FREE!
Register: Pre-register to get a free hat! Contact Andi 967-4555 or andi@mainelobstermen.org. Walk-ins are welcome!

Dead lobsters worth zero. Weak lobsters not worth enough. Healthy lobsters: priceless! Learn some fascinating facts about lobster and easy ways to keep the stress on lobsters down and value up!

Lobster Quality Workshops with Dr. Jean Lavallée
Are your lobsters stressed out? Calling all captains, sternmen, dockworkers and other lobster workers

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

LD 1503 An Act to Amend Lobster and Crab Fishing License Laws
The Marine Resources Committee approved the final language for LD 1503 in mid-March and unanimously reported out the amended bill on March 22. The bill was amended to include the following provisions:

Student Program
• Student lobster licenses may be issued to person who is between age 8 and under age 23 and is enrolled as a student at least half time. Breaks between school enrollment cannot exceed six months.
• Student license holders under age 18 who complete all requirements of the Apprentice Program may obtain a commercial license (status quo).
• Student license holders under age 20 who complete all requirements of the Apprentice Program and received a high school diploma or GED may obtain a commercial license.
• Student license holders under age 23 who begin logging time before age 18 and complete all requirements of the Apprentice Program, are enrolled in and meeting the requirements of a half-time course of study at an accredited postsecondary institution, and maintain status as a student since before age 18 and in each licensing year thereafter, may obtain a commercial license.

Waiting List
• The DMR shall maintain two separate waiting lists – one for new entrants to a zone who have completed the Apprentice Program and the other for those who seek to transfer to another zone. DMR shall adopt rules to manage the zone transfer waiting list.
• The DMR must verify at least once every three years that each person on the waiting list wishes to remain on the list. DMR will attempt to contact those on the waiting list by mail, telephone or email. If a person doesn’t respond within 60 days of the initial contact, DMR will send a notice via certified mail. Any person who doesn’t respond within 30 days of the date of the certified notice will be removed from the waiting list.
• Any person who did not respond to the notice in a timely manner because that person was on active duty with the Armed Forces of the U.S. or National Guard may be placed back on the list the same position.
• DMR shall determine the number of new entrants for limited entry zones by April 1st of the licensing year.

Zone Councils and Exit Ratios
• Lobster zones may base exit ratios on licenses retired or the greatest number of trap tags purchased in any prior year, up to the zone maximum, associated with the license retired.
• Lobster zone councils may recommend that an exit ratio based on tags retired be applied retroactively.
• Lobster zones must post an agenda at least seven days in advance if they are to consider any action which would affect someone’s ability to get a license, such as exit ratios.

Island Limited Entry Program
• Persons wishing to fish on an island in the Island Limited-entry Zone Program may apprentice in any zone.
• An island may establish an Island Limited Entry Program if a referendum is supported by a majority of Class I, II and III license holders.

LD 1563 An Act Implementing Pay Increases for Certain Law Enforcement Employees to Aid in Recruitment and Retention
In late March, the Governor put forward LD 1563 as a mechanism to bring pay standards for some members of Maine’s law enforcement agencies, including Maine’s Marine Patrol, up to standard to help agencies recruit and retain quality employees. Maine’s DMR is one of the state’s smallest agencies and is charged with overseeing the entire coast. It operates on a very small budget, despite which it has been efficient and effective in its work. A long-standing struggle for the DMR has been recruiting and retaining marine patrol officers. The bill was amended to include the following provisions:
Th e full slate was nominated and seconded from the floor; the vote was unanimous in favor. Cousins thanked the membership for nominating the candidates for the board and participating in the election. Cousins warmly thanked retiring board members Elliott Thomas of Yarmouth and Jay Smith of Nobleboro and Criehaven for their many years of service to the MLA.

U.S. Coast Guard safety examiner Kevin Plowman updated members about the 2015 Coast Guard Reauthorization Act, newly signed into law by President Obama. Contrary to information released by the Coast Guard last year, the new law requires no changes to existing life raft requirements. Mandatory safety systems will be required for vessels greater than 65 feet. New life raft requirements will be drafted by the Coast Guard, but the timeline is unknown.

Patrice McCarron introduced Dr. Jean Lavallée, a Prince Edward Island lobster veterinarian, who addressed the members on the impact of handling on lobster quality. According to Lavallée, Canada and the U.S. lead the world in lobster landings. Since lobsters move through the supply chain alive, a percentage of the product is lost due to mortality. The shrink rate in the two countries is typically between 8% and 15%. In pounds, that shrink rate is equivalent to the entire annual landings of other countries such as Australia, Nicaragua, and Chile.

The economic model for the fishery is based on landing a high volume so many people just take the shrink rate as a matter of course. But in Australia, where the fishery is based on quality not volume, profits are strong.

Lobsters don’t recover quickly from stress, unlike most humans. “It’s a death of despair.” This effort causes stress to the lobster. Another key aspect of lobster biology is the molt. Lobsters will dehydrate themselves prior to molting to shrink their size and get free of the shell. “When that happens the proteins in the blood go up closer to molt,” Lavallée explained. Just before the molt, a lobster ingests lots of water to expand and crack its shell. It will remove calcium from the old shell prior to the molt and then store that as a nodule in its stomach. One quarter hour so it can remove the ammonia.

“Every lobster should be held in two hands, given a pat on the back and a kiss,” Lavallée joked to the audience. “Then the quality of the lobster later on will be there. A lot will not be downgraded and buyers will get a better price for them.”

Lavallée then turned to why lobsters are so susceptible to high shrink rates. The answer lies in its biology and physiology. Simply put, lobsters have weird systems. Its stomach is behind its head. Its heart is on its back. It has one nerve which comes to an end and then disperses blood through all the tissues. So when a lobster is hurt, it will bleed easily. Happily, it also clots very quickly. “So when you V-notch a lobster, keep it in a tote for a while, at least 60 seconds, before you put it in a tank. That will help the clotting reaction,” Lavallée said.

Lobsters live in the cold waters on the bottom of the ocean. So, it’s not surprising that it is stressed when it is taken out of the water. To minimize stress, a lobster held out of water should have wet gills and stay cold. It will then go dormant. Lavallée recommends holding them in a chilled tank aboard the vessel and then slowly draining it. Once it’s drained, the lobsters should be kept chilled. “It isn’t operating at 100% efficiency but it’s good enough to stay alive for two or three days in the crisper of your refrigerator,” Lavallée said. Out of water, however, the lobster will build up ammonia levels in its blood and tissues. To remove that odor, Lavallée said, just put the animal in salt water for a half hour so it can remove the ammonia.

Lobsters do not like to get warm. “They are cold blooded so if the environment gets warmer the lobster heart beats harder to move blood to the gills and dissipate heat.” This effort causes stress to the lobster. Another key aspect of lobster biology is the molt. Lobsters will dehydrate themselves prior to molting to shrink their size and get free of the shell. “When that happens the proteins in the blood go up closer to molt,” Lavallée explained. Just before the molt, a lobster ingests lots of water to expand and crack its shell. It will remove calcium from the old shell prior to the molt and then store that as a nodule in its stomach which it then reabsorbs after molting to build up its new shell. A lobster’s quality is like a one-way fuel tank, Lavallée said. Once its vitality is gone, it’s impossible to replenish. Stressing the lobster diminishes its quality. Stress can come from hauling the trap from the bottom too fast or when the lobster is removed from the trap, transferred to a tank or later to a truck. Stress can come from low oxygen levels in the boat’s storage tanks, warm air or water temperatures, too much ammonia in on-land tanks, lower salinity levels due to melting ice or rain, or stress from being in a box with other lobsters. “If you have 600 pounds of lobster in a 400 gallon tank, it will take just 15 minutes for all the oxygen to be gone from that tank,” Lavallée said. “It must be aerated.”

Lobsters do not recover quickly from stress, unlike most humans. “It’s a death of a 1,000 cuts, a snowball effect,” Lavallée said. It is important to be aware of the cumulative effects of stress on the lobster as it moves from the ocean through the supply chain. To determine the quality of a lobster, Lavallée looks at the animal’s blood protein levels, vigor, shell condition, wounds and lesions. In an ongoing study, he and his colleagues examined 2,191 lobsters caught on 47 Canadian boats both on the boat and at the dock. They uncovered a number of factors that affect lobster quality. Lobster baited with fresh mackerel bait fared worse than lobster trapped with other baits. Tossing a lobster rather than placing it in a tank or crate makes it three times more likely to have loss of vigor. Lobster landed on rainy days were six times more likely to be weak. Lobster kept in water warmer than 55°F had a significant loss of vigor and more injuries.
MAINE LOBSTERMEN’S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

Continued from page 9

A member of the audience asked what effect misting the crates on board the boat has on lobsters. Lavallée explained that lobsters store salt water in their gills chambers when they are taken out of the water. “When they think they are going to go back in the water, they release the water from their gill chambers. So misting lobsters can trick them into thinking they are heading back in to water. That’s not good,” he said. Lavallée noted he had not tested lobsters held with misting systems in place in Maine.

Lavallée also noted that soft-shell lobsters typically will lose weight under stress. “If they are bumped or cut, they will reduce weight by 1% to 3% per 90 pound crate. That translates to about $10 per crate,” he said. “Not much for one crate but think of all the years of crates you’ve hauled!”

In closing Lavallée urged lobstermen to treat lobsters like eggs and to use common sense. “Use one hand, one lobster. Haul as slowly as possible. Bring the trap up smoothly, don’t hang it or drag it along the washboard because you can snap off legs,” he said. “Lobsters are animals. Treat them with respect.”

HYDROGRAPHIC SURVEY OF PENOBSCOT BAY

NOAA plans to conduct a hydrographic survey of Penobscot Bay in the near future. This survey is part of NOAA’s ongoing mission to keep nautical charts up to date. MLA has communicated concerns from local lobstermen that the survey should be conducted during the winter months to minimize gear conflict. MLA will keep the industry updated as NOAA’s plans to survey Penobscot Bay evolve.

Bottom surveys of the coast date back to 1807 when President Thomas Jefferson signed a mandate ordering a hydrographic survey of the nation’s coast. Today, NOAA’s Office of Coast Survey mission is providing nautical charts to the maritime community for safe passage into American ports and along 95,000 miles of U.S. coastline. NOAA conducts hydrographic surveys to update its suite of over a thousand nautical charts. Depending on the charting requirement, NOAA uses either multibeam and side scan sonar to survey the sea floor.

NEW ENGLAND FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

There are two issues of extreme importance to the lobster industry currently under consideration by the New England Fisheries Management Council—herring management through development of Amendment 8 and potential impacts to lobster fishing areas through a management plan under development to protect deep sea corals.

The Council is developing Amendment 8 to the herring plan to establish a long term strategy (control rule) to guide how the herring quota (acceptable biological catch or ABC) will be established in future years. Amendment 8 to the herring plan has three major goals: 1) to account for the role of herring in the ecosystem, including its role as forage; 2) to stabilize the fishery at a level designed to achieve optimum yield and 3) to address localized depletion in inshore waters. While the herring stock is considered to be in good shape—it is not over fished and overfishing is not occurring—there is potential for Amendment 8 to result in a reduction in quota.

The Council is holding an important workshop May 16 and 17 in Portland to gain widespread input from stakeholders on how to determine the amount of quota available to the herring fishery in the future. Since herring is the primary bait source for the lobster industry, lobstermen are strongly encouraged to attend this meeting!

The Council is also developing an Omnibus Deep Sea Coral Amendment. The purpose of this amendment is to designate deep-sea coral zones and implement fishing restrictions necessary to protect the corals within those zones. The Council has proposed several deep sea coral zones in the Gulf of Maine including areas near Mt. Desert Rock, Western Jordan Basin, Outer Schoodic Ridge, Central Jordan Basin and Lindenkohl Knoll. The coral amendment is still in draft form so any potential fishing restrictions associated with coral zones have not yet been developed. MLA is closely monitoring the coral amendment since several of the coral zones overlap with important lobster fishing grounds.

Many thanks to these fine businesses, the MLA’s Keeper members!

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Weirs Motor Sales Inc.
William Coffin & Sons
Williams CPA Group LLC
Worcesters Lobster Bait

Mount Desert Rock

Outer Schoodic Ridge
The Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative joined other members of the industry at the recent Seafood Expo North America in Boston, where they hosted the Maine Lobster Pavilion. The expo is North America’s largest seafood exposition and over 20,000 buyers and suppliers attended. In total, 20 Maine based companies exhibited, with 6 companies in the Pavilion.

In addition to the Expo, the MLMC held their annual reception attended by industry representatives, fishermen, buyers and political officials. Both the Expo and the reception were successful, generating sales leads and awareness around our industry.

Special thanks to reception sponsors: Cape Seafood, Cozy Harbor, Garbo Lobster, Greenhead Lobster, Inland Lobster, Maine Coast and Maine Fair Trade Lobster.

“Because it matters

“In this day and age, joining the MLA should be second nature. Every year it seems our industry is attacked with more pressure from many different places for stricter regulations. I feel it’s time for young lobstermen to take a stand and support an organization whose only agenda is protecting the Maine Lobster Fishery. The MLA has greatly surpassed my expectations for constant diligence in protecting my future. That’s why, at 25 years old, I support and will always support the Maine Lobsterman’s Association.”

– Dustin Delano, Monhegan

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Photo courtesy of Dustin Delano.
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Seabrook, NH — $5 discount per drum on multiple drum purchases (must show current MLA card).

**Coastal Hydraulics**
Seabrook, NH — 10% discount on all in stock items for MLA members.

**Commercial Fisheries News**
Deer Isle, ME — Discounted annual subscription rate for $18.75 with MLA membership noted on check.

**Craig’s All Natural**
Durham, NH — 10% discount on all Victoinox cutlery.

**Friendship Trap Company**
Friendship, ME — 5% off list price on traps purchased at the Friendship store. Cannot be combined with other discounts.

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**Law Office of J. Scott Logan, LLC**
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**Maine Camp Outfitters**
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**Maine Design Company**
Appleton, ME — 10% discount to surveys on lobster boats. Must be an MLA member & mention this listing to get discount.

**Maine Lobstermen’s Association**
Kennebunk, ME — 10% off MLA merchandise.

**Maine Maritime Museum**
Bath, ME — Free admission to MLA members.

**McMillan Offshore Survival Training**
Belfast, ME — 10% discount on USCG Drill Conductor training.

**Midcoast Marine Electronics**
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**Mount Desert Oceanarium**
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Community Health Options will bill you for the premium on a monthly basis. Payment for the premium is due on the first day of each month via check, money order, debit card, or automatic withdrawal. Once you have set up your online account you will be able to make monthly payments online through the Member Portal.

Anthem has an online billing and payment feature as well. Anthem's ePay-Bill online payment system accepts only MasterCard and Visa credit cards. You can also set up an automatic monthly bank withdrawal or simply mail a check or money order to the address on your monthly bill. Whichever method you choose to make your payment, be sure it is paid in a timely manner each month. Otherwise, you may risk losing your coverage!

Once you make the initial payment, your insurance company will send you an identification card in the mail with your plan's information. You may also be able to get an electronic, printable card from your insurer's Web site as a temporary card. The card contains the information relevant to your plan and coverage such as your plan number, group number, and contact information for the company. Always take your card with you to all doctor's appointments.

The next step in the process is to choose a primary care physician (PCP) if you do not already have one. Be sure your PCP accepts your insurance plan. If you are choosing a PCP for the first time, you will want to refer to your insurance company's list of "in-network" doctors. Then call the doctor's office and make sure the doctor you select is accepting new patients. If your PCP is not in-network, your insurance company will not cover as much of your medical costs; you will end up paying more each time you visit the doctor. In-network doctors have agreed to accept your particular insurance company's contracted reimbursement rate as payment for their medical services.

After choosing your PCP and verifying that he or she is accepting new patients, you will want to schedule your first appointment. Under the Affordable Care Act, no matter which plan you choose, you receive a free annual wellness visit every year. During this appointment, your doctor will ask you routine questions about your health, take your vital signs, and may run routine tests to check for diseases. When you go to this appointment, you will want to bring:

- A photo ID
- Your health insurance card
- Your family medical history — the doctor will ask about it
- A list of any medications you are taking
- Any questions you have for the doctor — it helps to write them down so you don't forget.

After your appointment, follow any instructions that your doctor gives you. It is important to fill any prescriptions prescribed by your doctor. Take your medicine exactly as your doctor told you to; dosage and timing are printed on the bottle. If you get sick or injured during the year, you can make an appointment with your PCP to be checked out. Going to an in-network doctor is much less expensive than going to the emergency room, so unless it is a life-threatening situation, it is better to see your own doctor.

YOU HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE. NOW WHAT?

By Alisha Keezer

Alisha Keezer is the MLA’s health insurance Navigator.

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THINGS TO KNOW WHEN YOU ARE ON THE WATER
By Ann Backus, MS

Note to parents: This article is for the children. Please share it with them!

Hey kids! Are you headed out lobstering this summer? Perhaps you are going out as an occasional sternman or in your own boat. Here’s some knowledge you should have before you go.

Where’s your center of gravity?

“Don’t rock the boat! Don’t stand up in the boat! Don’t overload the boat!” I am sure you have heard adults say these things. Understanding the concept of stability is the key to successful boat handling. Here is a tabletop exercise you can do to experiment with stability and finding the center of gravity on a boat.

Materials: One 6” square of light card stock (even a cereal box), scissors, pencil, a plastic straw cut to 4 inches or so, a few paper clips, rubber bands, and a sticker (optional) for decoration.

Directions: Draw diagonal lines from the corners of the square. At the point where the lines cross, use the tip of a scissors to make a small hole for your straw. Make sure the straw can turn freely, but that the hole is not too big. Cut the square into a boat shape. (See Figure 1.)

Now put your straw through the hole and place your boat on the table. Is the boat stable? It should be because the straw is through the center of gravity. Next put a rubber band on the smoke stack. Anything different happen? Add some paper clips to the deck close to the smoke stack. What happens? Is the boat still stable? It should be stable because you have not put too much extra weight above the center of gravity and you have kept the weight you added close to the center of the boat. (See Figure 2.)

Now you can experiment with stability by placing your paper clips on the smoke stack, on the side of the boat, or on the bottom of the boat, or by loading up your smoke stack with rubber bands. I added one paper clip to the starboard side of my boat (viewed from the stern) and the boat capsized. It happened so fast!

Conclusion: Whether you are putting people or fishing gear or both in your boat, remember to load evenly — balance the weight on each side of the center of gravity. Keep people low in the boat. If people are standing or traps are piled high they add weight above the center of gravity. That spells trouble. These concepts are much more important for small skiffs and derbies than for 25-foot lobster boats, but are still important for everyone to understand.

Keep yourself afloat

One thing you must have and use while at sea is a personal flotation device (PFD). There are several categories of Coast Guard-approved PFDs. The Type I lifejacket is for extreme conditions. The Type II is a PFD which will keep a person face-up. So Type II is probably what you should have.

Inflatable PFDs have a CO₂ cartridge within them. Inflation of the vest happens either by a pull-tab you tug or automatically when the PFD hits the water. These PFDs are easy to work in. For young people, the size of PFD is determined by the weight of the person, not by his or her chest size as in adults. That is why when you look in the catalog you will see weights given for those vests that are sold for children to wear.

A quick math exercise: To figure out how much flotation you will need in your PFD, multiply your weight by 0.10 (10%). Example: If you weigh 80 pounds you need 8 pounds of flotation. Perhaps you are up to 8 pounds light, but a lot more is unnecessary.

Another thing you should think about is the type of sunglasses you wear. Exposure to the sun’s UVA and UVB rays can cause changes in the lens of your eye, which over time can result in cataracts that cloud your vision. In sunglasses, brown or copper-colored lenses and wrap-around glasses are best because they block the high-energy blue light that is also damaging to the eye.

Note to parents: This article is for the children. Please share it with them!

By Ann Backus, MS

Ann Backus is an instructor in Occupational Safety and Director of Outreach at the Harvard School of Public Health.
SAFETY AT SEA MEANS BEING PREPARED

By Alisha Keezer

Commercial fishing continues to rank at, or near, the top of the list of riskiest occupations in the United States. Recent fishing vessel disasters highlight the need to ensure that fishermen are adequately prepared for both the predictable and the unpredictable dangers at sea. This increased emphasis on safety coupled with advanced boat designs, structures, and gear has done much to make an inherently dangerous occupation safer.

In 1988, President Reagan signed the Commercial Vessel Safety Act, establishing regulations applicable to all uninspected commercial fishing vessels, whether documented or state-registered. The specific regulations were based upon type and length of vessel, area of operation (distance from shore), number of personnel onboard, whether the vessel is documented or state-registered, and the date of the vessel's construction. In 1991, the law further required that there be a certified drill conductor to conduct monthly drills for vessel crew. These drills comprise fire fighting, abandon ship, flooding, and man overboard exercises. The person who conducts these drills is required to take the Coast Guard-Approved Drill Conductor course.

When the course first began, it was a five-day course. The Coast Guard quickly learned that the five-day schedule was not effective. A condensed one- or two-day course was approved and quickly became the norm. For many years, the safety courses were few and far between. There also was a lack of enforcement in regard to course completion. The single survivor from the scallop boat Northern Edge, which sank in December of 2004, attributed his survival to the safety training he received. With heightened media interest in at-sea safety, politicians began to scrutinize Coast Guard requirements in place.

One key area of focus has been the Coast Guard-Approved Fishing Vessel Drill Conductor course. This course is required to be taken by anyone who conducts drills on a vessel. The course taught by a safety instructor applies to all vessels, regardless of size or type.

The course requires completion of monthly drills, including fire fighting, abandon ship, flooding, and man overboard exercises. It also includes a review of safety regulations and procedures. The course is designed to prepare fishermen for emergencies and help them stay safe on the water.

Recent fishing vessel disasters, such as the Lady of Grace and Lady Luck, have highlighted the need for better safety training and preparedness. The Maine Lobstermen’s Association (MLA) has been instrumental in improving safety training for fishermen.

The MLA encourages lobstermen to attend one of the safety training programs being offered throughout the state. For MLA members the MLA vessel insurance program offers a 5% discount when he or she completes any Coast Guard approved Fishing Vessel Drill Conductor course or has done so within the past five years.

For many years, the safety courses were few and far between. There also was a lack of enforcement in regard to course completion. The single survivor from the scallop boat Northern Edge, which sank in December of 2004, attributed his survival to the safety training he received. With heightened media interest in at-sea safety, politicians began to scrutinize Coast Guard requirements in place for fishermen. As a result, Drill Conductor Certification emerged.

“With the recent sinkings of the Lady of Grace and Lady Luck, more interest is focused on safety at sea and what can be done to reduce accidents and fatalities. In my opinion, safety is an attitude, and even though a fisherman is certified after taking an emergency preparedness class, he must pay constant attention to issues like icing, stability, crew fatigue and other signs that have been documented to create accidents,” said John McMillan of McMillan Offshore Survival Training in Belfast. “Every person on board should be trained to think safety and recognize potential threats and take necessary steps to prevent an emergency.”

Maine recently passed a law affecting student lobster license holders, lobster apprentice program participants, and everyone on the zone waiting lists. People in each category are required to take a Coast Guard-Approved Drill Conductor course before receiving a lobster license. When crews are familiar with survival gear and prescribed actions to be taken it’s more likely that they can respond rapidly to emergency situations.

Captains or individuals in charge are mandated by regulation to ensure that these drills are conducted once per month. In order to conduct these drills, you must have taken the USCG-Approved Drill Conductor course taught by a safety instructor appointed by the local Coast Guard.

“When fishing, you have to be prepared for the unexpected. Captains should take the drill conductor courses and conduct the monthly emergency drills aboard their vessels,” said Patrice McCarron, Maine Lobstermen’s Association (MLA) executive director. “Training and drills keep everyone safe on the water.”

In 1994, the MLA encourages lobstermen to attend one of the safety training programs being offered throughout the state. For MLA members the MLA vessel insurance program offers a 5% discount when he or she completes any Coast Guard approved Fishing Vessel Drill Conductor course or has done so within the past five years.
KEEPPING A LOBSTER HAPPY IS NOT COMPLICATED

By Sarah Paquette

"Lobster quality." I’m sure you have heard this phrase numerous times, no matter what part of the lobster industry you are in. Lobster dealers want healthy, lively lobsters in their tanks because they ship better. Chefs want healthy lobsters with all their legs and claws to serve to customers, and customers want to know that their lobsters are high-quality and have been sustainably harvested.

What is a quality lobster? At The Lobster Co. in Kennebunkport, co-owner Mike Marceau said he classifies lobsters on strength, size, and shell quality. “Once you’ve handled a few lobsters, you start to know which ones are full of life and which ones aren’t,” he said. The more lively the lobster, the better its chances of surviving its trip to consumers.

In 2012 the town of Stonington received federal rural development funding to support a pilot study of onboard handling practices conducted by Penobscot East Resource Center. The study was documented in an informational video, “Stonington Lobster: Creating a Quality Brand,” produced by Stonington’s Opera House Arts. The video highlights six best practices to help land quality lobsters.

“Stephanie Nadeau, co-owner and sales manager, also emphasizes the importance of good handling, particularly avoiding multiple temperature changes (33 out of every 100). Best handling practices were able to reduce injuries to lobsters by over 70%.”

Mike Marceau inspects the lobsters. S. Paquette photo.

Lobster Handling – One hand, one lobster. It might feel slower, but avoid grabbing multiple lobsters at once. This will reduce the damage to each lobster, again, resulting in a more valuable product.

Lobster Handling – Carefully break the trap over the toe-rail. This will reduce the damage to any legs or claws sticking out of the trap. A lobster with all of its appendages will sell for more than a damaged lobster, which will go to a processor.

Crating Lobsters: Good Placement – Carefully place lobsters in the crate, making sure none are upside down or facing the opposite direction. The sharp horns on the lobsters can easily puncture the underside of another lobster and cause it to bleed out. If lobsters are facing each other, their predatory instincts will kick in and they will want to push other lobsters away. This could cause damage to the lobsters.

The results of the pilot study were favorable, according to a 2013 press release from Penobscot East Resource Center: after sampling 1,008 lobsters over 28 days, researchers found that the lobsters landed onboard vessels showed injury; the percent-age change once, “she said. “Last summer, with the intense heat we had, the death rate was higher than ever. We have to absorb that loss, which ultimately affects the boat price in the long run.”

Marceau wants lobstermen to understand that it all starts with them and the way they handle lobsters on their boats. “If I could tell the guys on the boats one thing, it would be to take good care of your lobsters,” he said.

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The MLA strives to be valued by all Maine lobstermen for working tirelessly to maintain a sustainable lobster resource and an economically viable fishery.

Experience that counts

1960’s and 70’s
- Persuaded managers that lobster traps are the only gear to catch lobsters, keeping draggers out.
- Convinced Congress to exempt Maine lobster crew from payroll taxes, saving lobstermen thousands of dollars each year.

1980’s and 90’s
- Swayed managers to accept Maine’s core conservation practices of v-notching, maximum 5”, and minimum 3 ⅛ gauges.
- Fought to prevent unlimited dragging of offshore lobster through 100/day, 500/trip limits.

2000 and 2010’s
- Fought for stable bait supply by protecting the inshore herring fishery and acoustic research to measure the size of the herring stock.
- Pushed for an area-based approach to Whale rules keeping 70% of Maine waters exempt from whale regulations.
- Continued the fight to keep draggers from landing lobster in Maine.

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Dustin Delano, age 25
Monhegan

I am a member because I want to be up to date with what’s happening in the industry that supports me. I think it’s important for young fishermen to be involved with this stuff, we are the ones that are in it for the long run.

John Tripp, age 27
Spruce Head

Be part of the future. Join the MLA and connect.
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Port Clyde, "he said. "Those water temperatures aren't going to budge in the next four months."

"Right now we are forecasting that there's a 50% chance it will be an extremely early season and that the shed will be about three weeks early [at press time, the chance had risen to 68%]. We will be updating this forecast regularly," Pershing said (to see those updates, go to http://www.gmri.org/our-work/research/projects/gulf-maine-lobster-forecasting).

OCEAN ACIDIFICATION A REGIONAL ISSUE
By Melissa Waterman

A few years ago no one really spent much time thinking about the ocean growing more acidic. After all, oceans are pretty big. What could possibly cause such vast areas of the globe to change chemistry?

Carbon dioxide, C02 in the atmosphere enters the ocean dissolved in rain or snow. The ocean is considered a carbon dioxide sink; it can absorb large amounts of dissolved C02, for periods of time. According to scientists, the world's oceans have been absorbing up to 25% of the C02 produced globally. But just that, an acid. Large amounts of it alter the ocean's pH by eating up the carbonate ions. "Water fluoridation is an example," Hare said. "According to the literature, the productivity of winter flounder [the ability to produce young] goes down when dissolved C02 mixes with water (H2O) to form carbonic acid. Carbonic acid is just that, an acid. Large amounts of it alter the ocean's pH by eating up the carbonate ions in the water. Unfortunately, creatures such as crabs, shellfish and lobsters make their shells from the calcium carbonate in the water.

Global ocean pH has declined by 0.1 since the industrial revolution, which means an increase in acidity of about 30%. It is projected to decline by an additional 0.3 over the next century unless carbon emissions are cut back sharply. Professor Joe Salisbury from the University of New Hampshire spoke about the implications of an acidifying ocean at the Maine Fisherman's Forum. "It doesn't matter if the C02 is coming from human activities or from phytoplankton blooms," he said. "It's C02, phytoplankton, when they die, emit C02 as they decay. He also noted that the freshwater entering the Gulf from its many rivers tends to be more acidic than freshwater rivers in the western United States. Researchers point to two main factors that contribute to the Gulf's vulnerability: cold, fresher water from the Labrador Current, and the high volume of fresh water from rivers and streams flowing into the Gulf. These variables increase the Gulf of Maine's sensitivity to ocean acidification because cold, fresh water more readily absorbs carbon dioxide, leading to faster rates of acidification. In addition, precipitation and freshwater discharge into the coastal ocean are predicted to increase in the future, further increasing the Gulf's acidification sensitivity.

Port Clyde lobsterman Gerry Cushing asked Salisbury when the Gulf will reach a critical level at which time lobsters will no longer be able to live here. That point is not coming any time soon, Salisbury responded. Although the Gulf is warming rapidly, it is not acidifying as rapidly as other marine regions. "The Gulf of Maine is acidifying at half the rate of the world's oceans," Salisbury said. "We don't know why yet. It may be that we simply don't have enough data to do a rigorous statistical analysis." He speculated that the difference might be due to the fact that the Gulf's waters are still very cold, thus are less likely to take in additional C02, which would lead to increased acidity.

While numerous studies have linked more acidic water to negative impacts on shellfish, few studies have looked at its effects on lobsters. Daniel Small, from St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, reviewed the scientific literature related to ocean acidification. "There have been no studies on adult lobsters or lobster reproduction," he said.

Lobsters may be more tolerant of increased acidity but as yet, little is definitively known, Small continued. "Animals want their pH to be consistent. Lobsters can regulate the pH in their bodies if it rises in the water. But it costs them energy to do so," he said. That effort can have indirect and subtle effects on the animal overall.

"It is likely that the energy for survival comes from energy that could be used for reproduction and growth. But that's only a theory," Small said. Lobsters are very sensitive to any changes in their environment as they move through their developmental stages. A 2012 study of lobster larvae found that the larvae may be most sensitive to decreases in pH due to the frequent molting required during their development. As they transition to the juvenile stage, their energy demands are enormous. That's when, Small hypothesized, it's likely to see the effect of increased pH.

"They are putting their energy into balancing the pH in their blood and tissues, not into growth. So the odds are you will see smaller lobsters with smaller gonads and decreased reproduction," Small said. But, he noted, not all areas of the Gulf of Maine are the same; in one area the water may be more sensitive to dissolved C02 than in another.

The topic of ocean acidification is getting attention, not only in Maine, but throughout New England. The Maine Legislature set up a commission in 2014 to look at the impacts ocean acidification may have on the state's marine species. In 2015 the commission released its report which called for more research on ocean acidification and how it will affect the state's seafood industry. The report also recommended reducing carbon dioxide emissions, among other ways to limit ocean acidification. In New England, the Northeastern Regional Association of Coastal and Ocean Observing Systems (NERACOOS) has organized a new association called the Northeast Coastal Ocean Acidification Network (NECAN) to synthesize regional ocean acidification science.
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND MARKETING BOARD TAKES SHAPE

Members of the new Lobster Fishers of Prince Edward Island Marketing Board were elected and installed immediately after the P.E.I. Fishermen’s Association annual meeting on March 29. The new board has 12 members in total, from two each of the six local associations. The collection of the new levy begins at the start of the spring lobster fishery in May. The board is the group that will be responsible for creating a marketing campaign for Island lobster, using money from the new levy being collected this year.

MIXED NEWS FOR GROUNDFISHERMEN

NOAA and the New England Fishery Management Council proposed 2016 quotas for the northeast groundfish fishery which starts May 1. The proposal includes updated catch quotas and fishing limits for the fishery’s 20 groundfish stocks — including cod, haddock, haddock and more — for the next three years. Georges Bank cod will see a 62% reduction from last year in the allowable catch, reducing the total catch limit to 762 metric tons of Georges Bank cod in the 2016 fishing year. This translates into an approximate 95% cut in the Georges Bank cod quota since 2012. The total catch limit for Georges Bank haddock, by comparison, is 56,068 metric tons — an increase of 130% from a year ago. The update also includes a 30% increase from last year in catch for Gulf of Maine cod, and increases of 130% for Georges Bank haddock and 28% for pollock. Redfish will see a 14% decrease, but the total catch limit for 2016 is 10,338 metric tons — much greater than most other species.

SEN. COLLINS URGES FUNDING FOR SAFETY TRAINING

Senator Susan Collins spearheaded a letter from six U.S. senators to the Delegation wrote. “We urge you to engage in immediate efforts to ensure the continuation of safe and responsible import of live Maine lobsters, consistent with the EU’s World Trade Organization (WTO) obligations,” the Delegation wrote.

In the letter, Maine’s Congressional Delegation highlighted the critical importance of the nearly $200 million trans-Atlantic lobster trade to economies in Maine and in Europe. “It is in the best interest of all parties involved to maintain this sector of trans-Atlantic trade that supports so many Mainers and their families. Our lobstermen have heeded calls by President Obama to build export markets. We now need your help to ensure that the EU does not erect unjustified barriers to these markets,” they wrote.

EAVESDROPPING ON WHALES IN THE GULF OF MAINE

Scientists of Northeastern University in Boston and colleagues have developed a way to track eight species of marine mammals, mostly whales, that gather to feast on shoals of spawning herring on Georges Bank. The animals’ behavior has been mapped for the first time on a large scale thanks to an innovative approach to underwater listening. “We're the first to simultaneously map vocalizations of so many species,” says Purnima Ratilal. Ratilal and her colleagues first deployed a line of underwater microphones known as hydrophones in 2006, tracking herring schools. The array was roughly 200 meters long, with 160 hydrophones positioned at varying intervals along its length. When towed behind a research boat, it allowed the researchers to instantaneously monitor acoustic signals across an area 100,000 square kilometers in size (about four times the size of Massachusetts). Later they adapted the technique to listen for whale sounds. The data allowed the researchers to acoustically track mammals’ movements through the Gulf of Maine and across time.

NOVA SCOTIA COUNTS THE U.S. AS MAJOR TRADING PARTNER IN 2015

According to Industry Canada, Nova Scotia exported $5.4 billion (CD) of goods and services outside of Canada during 2015 – a figure unchanged from the previous year. The U.S. remained by far the province’s most important trading partner, with Nova Scotia selling $3.8 billion worth of goods to the U.S. during 2015. Next came China ($422 million), the U.K. ($121 million), France ($88 million) and the Netherlands ($84 million.) Rounding out the top 10 trading partners were Japan ($78 million), Turkey ($68 million), Mexico and South Korea ($66 million each) and Hong Kong ($59 million). Top export items in 2015 were lobster and crab, bringing in $1.2 billion and overtaking tires, which were valued at $1.1 billion.

LOBSTER BUYERS REQUIRED TO TAKE HANDLING CLASS

Nova Scotia lobster buyers will have to take a lobster handling course this spring to have their licenses renewed, the provincial fisheries minister declared in mid-February. Proper handling of lobsters should mean fewer crustaceans lost, said Fisheries Minister Keith Colwell. The fisheries department notified buyers that their 2017 license renewals will be tied to completing a formal lobster handling course. Jerry Amirault, president of the Lobster Processors Association of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, said he welcomes the course, whether or not it’s mandatory.

The safety and survival of our commercial fishermen are of the utmost importance, and we fully support the expansion of safety training requirements,” the senators wrote. “We are concerned, however, that the high costs of this required training will fall entirely on the fishing families in our states who continue to experience tremendous financial strain.”

The signatories were Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), Sen. Angus King (I-ME), Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA), Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA).
larly the soft-shell lobsters that dominate the fall season, means improving handling practices on the boat as well as on the wharf. The Stonington Lobstermen's Cooperative has two buying stations on the harbor from which they move an astonishing volume of lobsters each year. "It's all manpower, to get the lobsters from the tanks to the crates and on the scale and into the truck," she said. The cooperative's new $20,000 conveyor belt runs into our cooler. So the lobsters don't have to be lifted, are loaded five high onto a pallet and then moved on a truck with the forklift," explained Roy Trundy, the co-op's manager. But after that, Trundy continued, a conveyor belt takes over. A 40-foot conveyor belt attached to a hoist moves lobsters at the co-op's main buying station; a shorter, fixed conveyor belt operates at the second site downtown. The co-op decided to buy conveyor belts about ten years ago. "It all works very well. There's no way we could operate without it with the volume of lobsters we land here. We'd be hoisting lobsters all day," Trundy said. "I timed it. We can load ten 90-pound crates to the pallet in just over a minute with the belt." At the smaller but still busy Winter Harbor Cooperative, office manager Susan Soper spoke highly of the cooperative's new $20,000 conveyor belt. "The belt runs into our cooler. So the lobsters come in there and then get stacked on the pallets and into the truck," she said. The community members realized they needed the conveyor belt as landings in the area started to go up. Because of the region's large tidal range, lobster crates due to be shipped the next day could be sitting in the mud at a particularly low tide overnight. "That's not great for the lobsters," Soper said dryly. With an increasing number of crates full of lobsters at the end of a day, the waters surrounding the co-op's dock simply became jam-packed. "It was too crowded at night. It's not a pretty sight," Soper said. The conveyor belt allows the crates to move directly from the water to a cooler, then to a waiting truck each day.

The Spruce Head Cooperative, on the other hand, moves a high volume of lobsters but without the benefit of a conveyor belt. "The crates come out of the water two at a time using a hydraulic lift, are loaded five high onto a pallet and then moved on a truck with the fork lift," explained general manager Tom Armbrrecht. The co-op has landed more than two million pounds of lobster during the past four years. "Mayday: Crisis in the World's Oceans," talk by Colin Woodard, 7 p.m., GMRI, Portland. FMI: 228-1699.

May 17
NEFMC Herring Workshop on setting future quotas for herring, Holiday Inn by the Bay, Portland. FMI: www.nefmc.org.

May 28-29
Alewife Fish Ladder Restoration Festival, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Damariscotta Mills.
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AWARDS NIGHT AT THE MAINE FISHERMEN’S FORUM
Numerous awards were presented at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum in early March. At top left, Marine Patrol Officer Jeff Turcotte receives the MLA Officer of the Year award. At bottom left, MLA Board member Bobby Ingalls receives the MLA Golden V-Notch Award. At bottom right, fisherman Andy Mays receives the first DMR Award of Excellence from DMR Commissioner Patrick Keliher.
Photos courtesy of Mark Haskell Photography.

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