What to Do About Bait Supply?

By Melissa Waterman

Lobstermen throughout New England are concerned about the supply and cost of fish species used for lobster bait in the coming years. Haddock bycatch restrictions put in place by the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) caused the overall supply of that bait to constrict. In 2016, the Department of Marine Resources (DMR), and later the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), put measures in place to ensure a consistent supply of herring through the summer and (all months. Lobstermen complained loudly about the result-

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Another Good Year for Maine Lobstermen

By Melissa Waterman

It’s almost become commonplace: Maine lobstermen once again broke a record for the pounds of lobster landed, hauling more than 130 million pounds in 2016, according to preliminary data from the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR). That makes five years in a row with more than 120 million pounds landed each year. Not only did the total number of pounds increase compared to 2015, but the value of those lobsters went up as well. The overall landed value jumped by more than $30 million while the average per pound value remained over $4 for the second year in a row, at $4.07.

Continued on page 19

Coral Zone Measures Moving Fast

By Melissa Waterman

Terry Stockwell, Department of Marine Resources (DMR) external affairs director and vice-chairman of the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC), addressed a very interested audience at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum about the Council’s proposed Deep-Sea Coral Amendment, which would place four areas of the Gulf of Maine off-limits to fishermen. Two of those areas — Outer Schoodic Ridge and Mt. Desert Rock — are fished by Maine lobstermen.

The goal of the proposed Amendment is to protect deep-sea corals from existing and future harm from com-

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Photo courtesy of the Maine Lobster Festival.
By the time you read this issue of Landings, it’s likely that the heavy snow of March will have disappeared from large parts of Maine. But not necessarily. April is a fluky month, full of ups and downs of temperature and weather. It is the in-between month of spring that makes the warmth of May even more appreciated.

This month Landings offers a brief recap of some of the highlights of the Maine Fishermen’s Forum. Based on difficulties experienced in 2016, lobstermen are concerned about the availability of herring for bait as the lobster season gets underway this year. The topic was the subject of a presentation by officials from the New England Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission at the Forum. Another issue discussed (and argued about) at the Forum was the proposal by the Council to place certain inshore areas of the Gulf of Maine off-limits to lobstermen and other fishermen due to the presence of deep-water corals. Mt. Desert Rock and Outer Schoodic Ridge are both fished by Downeast lobstermen; closures would present an economic hardship, as many lobstermen pointed out at a session on the topic held at the Forum.

The lobster fishery continues to be the mainstay of Maine’s commercial fisheries, as preliminary data released by the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) at the Forum indicate. Lobster landings in 2016 topped 130 million pounds. The overall value of those lobsters went up as well, increasing by more than $30 million compared to 2015. The value of all Maine’s commercially harvested marine resources increased by $100 million in 2016, to slightly more than $700 million. The landed value of lobster was $533,094,366, which represents 73.9% of the state’s total figure.

The MLCA invites you to support Maine’s lobster industry. Donations of $25 or more include a subscription to Landings.®

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I hope you enjoy this issue. And we welcome your ideas, comments and feedback.
By Hugh Reynolds
President, Greenhead Lobster Co.

As an exporter of Maine lobsters, I would like to welcome President Trump as our new leader. Whether you support him or not, it is time that Americans realize that the attack and oppression against American business must end. I fully support his campaign promise to rid the country of senseless and useless regulation. President Trump, I welcome you to the Maine lobster industry and would like to point you in the direction of NOAA to begin your work.

Before I layout my grievance with NOAA, which is a division of the Department of Commerce, I want to make it clear that I am not anti-regulation. I am only against regulation that only serves to benefit the government payroll rather than the American people. For decades, the lobster industry has been thriving as the result of sensible and forward-thinking conservation and regulation.

When we began exporting lobsters in 2004, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was in charge of issuing our export papers used to clear customs in the destination country. At that point we were able to go to the office and pick up blank health certificates free of charge and fill in the appropriate details ourselves.

In 2008, NOAA took over this responsibility, but quickly recognized issuing export papers was a revenue stream. First, they charged $50 for putting the stamp on the health certificate. Then they established a new requirement mandating a catch certificate to show the European Union and other nations that our lobsters comply with IUU (Illegal, Unregulated, Unreported) fishing regulations. For this they charged $25.

Given that the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) vigilantly enforces fishing regulations, one must question the purpose of such a requirement. It should be noted that American sea scallops have not been subject to catch certificates despite the practice of some companies of importing unregulated scallops from China only to export them to Europe as American sea scallops.

When we began exporting to China in 2011, NOAA saw a new opportunity to profit from the labor of fishermen. They decided to personally inspect every shipment to China. Making arrangements to meet a NOAA official not only delayed a shipment of live lobsters but also created a new cost. Their fee for such an inspection ranged from $125 on weekdays to $250 on weekends and holidays. This year they increased the holiday fee to $450. They quickly realized that the more inspections they conducted, the more money they could make to support their growing payroll. Go to their offices in Gloucester and you will see about 50 nice looking cars in the parking lot. On Sundays, I believe that one official can bring anywhere from $500 to upwards of $3,000 for every hour they bill.

In 2013, NOAA increased the fees for the health and catch certificates from $55 to $95. In 2014, NOAA initiated regular inspections of our facilities to determine whether our food safety was to Chinese standards. Chinese standards — really? For these visits, NOAA charges $1,200 and is able to visit multiple lobster dealers on a single morning, expanding their revenues even further.

NOAA’s regulations are not only taking money from the fishing community but they are making it difficult to conduct trade. Periodically we are forced to turn down trade because we cannot arrange an inspection. Heaven forbid if I call them on a holiday or a weekend when the overseas demand for lobsters is highest.

These are clear examples of regulations and trade restrictions that must disappear. Our friends in Canada do not have inspections and are able to fill out their export papers online for a total fee of $25 which goes directly back to Canadian Fisheries (DFO). This leads me to the next point. I would not mind paying fees if they were used to strengthen the lobster industry. The DMR is doing all the hard work while the feds are taking all the cash. Last year, our company paid NOAA over $50,000 for their services and a mere $4,000 to the state of Maine (for licenses). The Department of Commerce is picking the pockets of Maine lobstermen every day.

My concerns over the impact of senseless regulation have been growing over the past eight years. NOAA has the power to suspend exports over minor violations. Given the limited food safety issues with live lobsters, does this really make sense? When confronted with such a violation, an official suggested that the fastest way to resume exports would be an extra payment. As the government expands so does the opportunity for corruption.

My experiences as a lobster exporter lead me to ponder how many other industries face similar issues. President Trump, keep to the mission: maintain and initiate sensible regulation that benefits the American people not the government. Remove senseless regulation. A final suggestion. Consider removing the health and catch certificates.

My experiences as a lobster exporter lead me to ponder how many other industries face similar issues. President Trump, keep to the mission: maintain and initiate sensible regulation that benefits the American people not the government. Remove senseless regulation. A final suggestion. Consider removing the health and catch certificates.
by David Cousens

On the day President Trump was sworn in, all references to climate change disappeared from the White House web site. Recently we learned that the Trump administration’s proposed budget reduces funding to NOAA and to the National Weather Service satellite program; it entirely eliminates the Sea Grant program. Why does this matter? Sea Grant is to the fishing industry what the Cooperative Extension Service is to the farming industry. Sea Grant is important to all fisheries: I am only going to use the lobster industry as an example. This last year the lobster fishery was the most valuable wild-caught fishery in the United States. Yet we receive very little help from the state of Maine or the U.S. government to support research, marketing or enforcement. Fortunately, we do receive some research assistance from Maine Sea Grant. Maine Sea Grant has supported many lobster research projects over the years, including funding to monitor newly settled lobsters, a program that is now being used to predict future landings and the impacts that warmer ocean temperatures will have on the lobster fishery. This information is vitally important to lobstermen so sound management and good economic decisions can be made.

Cutting funding for the National Weather Service is very short-sighted considering the volatility of the weather and severity of our storms we’ve been experiencing. Fishermen depend on the Weather Service for accurate forecasts. Every fisherman I know uses the buoy system in the Gulf of Maine to get real-time conditions at sea. This is a matter of safety for the thousands of people who work on the ocean for their livelihood.

The NOAA satellite program is also very important to inform understanding of long-term trends in our environment. Satellite imagery of the oceans tells us so many important things, such as surface water temperatures over time, areas of cool or warm water, how these different pools of water mix, and how freshwater runoff from the major rivers affect the marine ecosystem. Satellites also have shown how fast the Gulf of Maine is warming, which is happening at an alarming rate.

One might wonder why anyone would propose to cut funding to such valuable scientific programs. The answer might be that if the current administration doesn’t want to admit that climate change is real, what better way to do that than to make the science that points out that it IS real just go away. If the federal government doesn’t pay for the satellite program that monitors current trends which happen to show how fast the environment is changing, then the data are not available to scientists or to anyone else.

The new head of EPA, Scott Pruitt, does not appear to believe in climate change, rejecting research related to “warming science” (he can’t even use the words “climate change”) and has stated there’s “tremendous disagreement on the science of human impact on the degree of warming.” We cannot allow the personal views of people within the new administration to set our country back by blocking funding for good programs and good science.

There seems to be a disconnect between what is science and what is a belief. Science is based on facts and evidence that is gathered in a non-biased fashion. Beliefs are based on what you hear or want to believe. This problem is gripping today’s society. When I was growing up, science was king. It was based on facts and it was not debatable. In the current political climate, if you don’t like the science you hire a so-called “expert” to argue its validity and cast doubt on the facts.

Climate change has been the poster child for this practice. At a time when every country in the world concurs that human actions have changed our climate and that those actions are having negative effects on the future of our planet, we in the U.S. are still having a debate on whether that’s true or not. There is strong consensus among the scientific community that human activities, such as burning fossil fuel, have made the planet warmer.

In conclusion, I guess you can tell that I’m not too impressed with the total disregard for proven science and lack of respect for our environment shown by the new administration. As someone who depends on a clean environment to make a living, I’m worried that we are trading the long-term health of our planet for short-term economic gains.

Guest COLUMN:  When is enough enough?

David Cousens is a South Thomaston lobsterman and MLA board president. MLA photo.
GUEST COLUMN: Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative in action

By Matt Jacobson

This month I am writing about what we’ve been doing — a calendar review to give you some behind-the-scenes insight. The authorizing statute for the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative (MLMC) requires that we report annually to the lobster industry at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum and to the Legislature with a presentation to the Marine Resources Committee in March.

Maine Fishermen’s Forum

It is always a challenge to distill a year’s worth of activity into one hour and present it to these two audiences. The Forum presentation was well attended with more than 100 lobstermen in the room. Staff from Weber Shandwick and I went through the current market environment for Maine lobster, the different sales channels, and the international pressures on the industry. We presented the history of MLMC marketing efforts and explained why we focus on trying to increase interest and demand during July-September when Maine’s supply is highest and price on price at every level of the supply chain is greatest.

We explained that our focus is on celebrity chefs and food media who can amplify our story and create more buzz about Maine lobster. And we talked about the intangible drivers that work to get Maine lobster on menus — sustainability, seasonality, the boat-to-table story, and lobster’s culinary diversity.

The question-and-answer period afterward was particularly interesting. Lobstermen asked about China and other overseas markets. They wanted to know about how they can help with our efforts and if their help was important (It is critical!) Inevitably, there were questions about why MLMC’s work is important and what happens if Maine does not market lobster.

The numbers show that since 1977 boat prices, adjusted for inflation, have gone down. The only change in that pattern has been when there was a year-to-year decrease in landings and since the MLMC instituted a focused marketing effort. Prices at the wholesale level reached a 10-year high over the summer of 2016. More demand and more interest means higher prices from the plate to the boat, and the whole industry benefits.

Marine Resources Committee

The week after the Forum, Frank Gotwols, Stonington lobsterman and MLMC’s chairman of the board, and I gave a similar presentation to the Marine Resources Committee. The questions from the Committee were wide-ranging.

Some were pointed questions about the program, its cost, and its efficacy. In the statute which created the MLMC, the Legislature asked it to “promote and market” Maine lobster. We measure demand via monitoring the stories that we place in various media, carefully tracking social media for both our activity and organic activity (people talking about us without us prompting them), and traffic to our Web site. For example, in 2016, more that 40,000 people clicked on links to wholesalers from our site after searching for a lobster product to buy. We also measure interactions with chefs and their use of Maine lobster in their menus plus how they talk about it to media and social media followers.

The complexity of the supply chain makes it incredibly difficult to measure direct sales data: it just doesn’t exist anywhere except at the dock. And while dock price matters in Maine, it isn’t a very good indicator of consumer demand in the restaurant or in the supermarket.

PRWeek U.S. Awards

Soon after our appearance before the Marine Resources Committee, I accompanied Weber Shandwick staff to New York City and the annual PRWeek U.S. Awards. These are the most prestigious awards in the public relations industry, and the MLMC and Weber Shandwick were nominated to receive the award for the Best Promotional Event for our “Maine After Midnight” events. We were up against Kellogg’s and American Greetings and others — the big boys! While we didn’t win, to be recognized as one of the five best public relations events in the entire country last year was gratifying. The Maine lobster industry can be proud of not only our results, but that the MLMC is being recognized by the most prestigious organization in public relations.

Weber Shandwick did not come away empty-handed. Our partner was named the U.S.’s best PR agency for an unprecedented third straight year. Maine lobster is the best, and we are being represented by the best agency in the country.

Boston Seafood Show

I write this during the first day of Seafood Expo North America (formerly known as the Boston Seafood Show). The show attracts more than 20,000 people and features 4,000 different vendors competing for attention. It is an important event, and the MLMC hosts a reception for seafood dealers. Governor LePage attended as well as many companies and their customers. Deals are set here for the year. Buyers are putting pressure on Maine dealers and processors to lock in supply and prices for 2017.

But it isn’t a fair fight! These buyers are huge companies: Sysco is a $50 billion in annual revenue company. The cruise ship lines make more than a billion dollars in revenues too. Even Applebee’s generates more than $4 billion per year. The Maine story is not as important to these larger players as price and volume.

So we are taking our story further down the supply chain, to those who value the sustainability, the seasonality, the stories of fishermen, and the many ways creative chefs are using lobster. And we never stop! MLMC is already pitching these stories to media who will generate articles this summer. We have planned our “Maine After Midnight” events for Dallas, Chicago, San Francisco and New York and have signed up more than 30 lobstermen to accompany us. We have a lot going on — and the year is still young!

Matt Jacobson is the executive director of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative.

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Donald Young

Executive Director
Patrice McCarron
patrice@mainelobstermen.org

Navigator
Alisha Keizer
alisha@mainelobstermen.org

Membership Director
Andi Pelleriou
and@mainelobstermen.org

Maine Lobstermen’s Association
2 Storer St., Suite 203
Kennebunk, ME 04043
207.976.4555
www.mainelobstermen.org

Board of Directors’ Meeting Schedule
All meetings take place at Darby’s Restaurant, Belfast, unless otherwise indicated.
April 4, TUESDAY, noon.
May 3, 5 p.m.
June 7, 5 p.m.

The end of winter and beginning of spring is a time of change. The ocean is waking up, the croscuses are coming out, and Mainer’s are slowly emerging from their winter hibernation. The shift of the seasons is a time when we look around, take stock of what needs to be done, and get at it!

A lot of changes are coming to Maine lobstermen, and many of them are coming from Washington D.C. The federal government under President Trump has proposed alterations in everything from the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to the Department of Commerce; many of those changes could pose challenges to Maine lobstermen. Whether you love Trump or hate him, it’s important that we all pay attention and think about how new policies will affect our industry. Whether it is budget cuts, changes to health insurance or new directions on trade, Maine lobstermen will notice.

Among the proposed cuts to the Department of Commerce budget are severe reductions in the National Weather Service’s environmental satellites. Lobstermen and other fishermen depend on sound weather reports each day they go out to sea. Those reports come from data sent by these satellites. It seems a little short-sighted to gut a program that basically saves lives. Fortunately, the budget cuts slated for the U.S. Coast Guard have been withdrawn.

The proposed Commerce budget also eliminates the Sea Grant College Program. Sea Grant was started in 1966 as the ocean-based counterpart to the country’s Land Grant college system. Today Sea Grant operates in every coastal and Great Lakes state, fostering research relevant to that state’s needs. The Maine Sea Grant office has provided funds for research that helps lobstermen, including working with the MLA back in the 1980s on the first study of lobster migration in the Gulf of Maine. It funded research by Bob Steneck and Rick Wahle on lobster nursery areas and juvenile settlement. It supported University of Maine scientist Yong Chen in developing a new lobster stock assessment model which showed that lobster populations in the Gulf of Maine were not overfished. More recently, Sea Grant has provided funding for the MLA’s International Lobsterman Exchange and lobster quality presentations by Jean Lavallee. Getting rid of Sea Grant would be a serious blow to Maine lobstermen.

Many Maine lobstermen would lose access to affordable health care under the current proposal to repeal and replace the ACA. No one likes paying loads of money for health insurance. Lobstermen have had a particularly hard time because of their constantly fluctuating incomes. One year you get tax subsidies toward your health insurance costs, the next year you have to pay through the nose. Premiums under the current ACA have been unaffordable for many older lobstermen and those in more rural areas. The bill proposed by House Republicans appears to make matters worse by increasing premium costs to people over 50 and bumping a lot of people out of the marketplace altogether. The median age of a lobsterman in this state is 50 and getting higher all the time. It will all the time, and while the removal of the mandate forcing people to buy health insurance is popular with many, it doesn’t mean a whole lot since you must pay a 30% penalty if you go without insurance and then reenter the market.

Another major change coming from D.C. is in the country’s trade agreements. President Trump pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade agreement with 12 countries surrounding the Pacific Ocean (not including China). He has also stated that he wants to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which removed many obstacles to trade and investment among the U.S., Canada, and Mexico when it was signed in 1992.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), a trade agreement between the European Union (EU) and the United States, has also stalled. Some think it is unlikely to move forward under the Trump Administration, while others are more optimistic. While we scratch our heads wondering about the fate of TTIP, Canada has already signed a free trade agreement with the EU that will largely eliminate any tariffs on Canadian seafood exported to that region. Canadian lobster already have an advantage over Maine lobster due to the currency exchange rate. Under the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), Canadian seafood products will cost less even after import into the EU. It is important to note that lobster harvested in Maine and processed in Canada is not eligible for the tariff exemption.

These are big changes that will have big impacts on Maine lobstermen. While there is still much speculation at this point on what future policies actually will be, it is prudent to ask questions. How will lobstermen be affected as they age if they cannot afford health insurance? How will research on Maine lobsters and other species be impacted if we lose Maine Sea Grant? What effect could re-opening NAFTA have on Maine’s lobster exports? What effect will the Canada-EU free trade agreement have on our industry? Can the fisheries portion of TTIP, which has broad approval, be moved forward on its own to level the playing field between the U.S. and Canada?

It is important not to lose perspective. When it comes to the national landscape, the Maine lobster industry is just a tiny fish in a big sea. The political world has certainly changed, for better or for worse, and Maine lobstermen must pay attention. MLA will continue its work to monitor these issues; we will be meeting with Maine’s Congressional delegation to keep track of activities at the federal level. Photo by M. Haskell.

There’s a lot of change happening in Washington, D.C. which may have a long-term impact on Maine’s fishing communities. The MLA will work with the state’s Congressional delegation to keep track of activities at the federal level. Photo by M. Haskell.
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MLA’S 63RD ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting was held on March 3 at 9 a.m. at the Samoset Resort in Rockport. MLA president David Cousins opened the meeting by recognizing the MLA board and staff. Cathy Billings from the University of Maine’s Lobster Institute spoke briefly about the Institute’s Rapid Response Team, a project designed to get ahead of any lobster illnesses. She asked lobstermen to send the Institute pictures of any unusual lobsters they haul this year.

President Cousins asked for a motion to accept the minutes from the 2016 annual meeting; motion was made; unanimous in favor. He then introduced the MLA board for the day; Bob Baines, Dwight Carver, Gerry Cushman, Jason Joyce, Jack Merrill, Willis Spear, and Donny Young. The vote was unanimous in favor of the proposed slate.

The MLA presented a memorial award to honor Pat White, former executive director of the MLA, who passed away in 2016. Erin Pelletier of the Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation gave a moving tribute and Patrice McCarron, MLA executive director, presented a plaque in memory of Pat White to his son Jeffery, who was joined by his wife and daughter. The award read, “His leadership, wisdom and friendship has left a significant impression on Maine’s lobster industry and his legacy will be remembered for generations to come.” The audience rose in recognition of the many contributions made by White to the entire lobster industry over the years. “Pat was one of the good guys. He is sorely missed,” said Cousins.

Patrice updated members on MLA activities and projects. She noted that the scope of policy work undertaken by MLA on behalf of the industry continues to grow. She touched on upcoming meetings relevant to right whale protection measures. Right whale calving numbers are down which will be a subject discussed at length. She also summarized the MLA’s efforts to ensure that the shortage and high prices for herring experienced by lobstermen in 2016 are not repeated in 2017 and to ensure that lobstermen are not excluded from the coral protection zones proposed by the New England Fisheries Management Council.

She recounted other aspects of the MLA’s work including ongoing assistance to fishermen who wish to enroll in health insurance through the Affordable Care Act, the February kick-off of the second Lobster Leadership Institute, the March Happy Healthy Lobster Tour with lobster veterinarian Jean Lavallee, and the MLA-sponsored trip later in March to the Seafood Expo North America.

Next Patrice provided an overview of the MLA board’s efforts to improve enforcement of Maine’s marine resource laws. The Board sent an e-mail survey out in December asking MLA members what they thought the major enforcement issues were in the lobster fishery. With those results in hand, Board members discussed the results with DMR Commissioner Patrick Keliher and Bureau of Marine Patrol Chief Jon Cornish. The Board then sent a modified email survey to all licensed lobstermen in the state. 400 lobstermen responded.

The majority of lobstermen want to see more effort put into ways to make violators pay for breaking the law. The goal is to make it not worth it to break the law. The MLA put forward the concept draft LD 575 An Act to Improve the Enforcement of Maine’s Lobster Laws, sponsored by Senator Langley. The bill proposes to improve the enforcement of Maine’s lobster laws by establishing minimum penalties as a way to deter crime, impose restrictions on violators who re-enter the lobster fishery and explore requiring those found guilty to pay restitution to the state to cover the cost of the investigation.

Commissioner Keliher announced the preliminary lobster landing figures for 2016 which broke records for pounds and value. Preliminary figures indicated lobster landings in excess of 130 million pounds, valued at over $533 million. The figure is closer to $550 million when factoring in coop bonuses.

The Commissioner then spoke about DMR’s administrative suspension procedure which was implemented in 2013. The process runs in tandem with the court process but allows the department to get offenders off the water much more quickly. The process also allow the DMR Commissioner certain flexibility in terms of the length of license suspension. There has been a rise in convictions through the administrative suspension process. Col. Jon Cornish then thanked lobstermen for supporting his Bureau and Marine Patrol Officers. Lobstermen in the audience asked Commissioner Keliher and Col. Cornish specific questions pertaining to the suspension process and to the prevalence of drug use among fishermen.

Just prior to the close of the meeting, Sen. Angus King addressed the audience. He spoke about the need to hear from lobstermen about what they are seeing on the water as the Gulf of Maine continues to warm and the current stagnant situation in Washington.

A drawing was held to raffle off lobster traps and safety gear generously supplied by Brooks Trap, Friendship Trap, Brazier Trap, and McMillan Offshore Safety. The lucky winners were: Ethan Mao, Sonny Beal, Jay Smith, Sam Rosen, Willis Spear, Jamien Hallowell, John Tripp, Chris Moore and Sue Smith.

The MLA presented a memorial award to the family of Pat White during the MLA annual meeting. This was the first annual meeting since Pat passed away last spring. “His leadership, wisdom and friendship has left a significant impression on Maine’s lobster industry and his legacy will be remembered for generations to come. He is greatly missed,” said MLA board president David Cousins. MLA photo.

The MLA presented a memorial award to the family of Pat White during the MLA annual meeting. This was the first annual meeting since Pat passed away last spring. “His leadership, wisdom and friendship has left a significant impression on Maine’s lobster industry and his legacy will be remembered for generations to come. He is greatly missed,” said MLA board president David Cousins. MLA photo.

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The Committee only 25% of lobster gear to be fished outside a home zone, implementing most voted unanimously “Ought not to Pass” on both bills. The DMR has pledged to work more closely with Zones B and C lobstermen to identify solutions to this issue which has become a major enforcement concern for the department. The MRC killed LD 113 An Act to Stabilize Lobster Bait Prices, sponsored by Rep. Alley of Beals, which proposed ideas aimed at stabilizing the price of lobster bait. The DMR, MLA and several representatives from the herring industry opposed this bill because the Legislature does not have the jurisdiction to address the issue since bait species are managed through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the New England Fishery Management Council. There was also concern that the concepts put forward likely destabilize the bait fishery.

Several bills are still in process. A public hearing was held for LD 704 An Act to Give the Department of Marine Resources Flexibility with Licensing in the Herring Fishery, sponsored by Rep. Parry of Arundel. This bill would allow the DMR Commissioner to establish different landings limits for herring fishermen who recorded landings of herring in Maine prior to January 1, 2017. The public hearing was held on March 13; work session took place on March 22.

The Committee took public testimony on March 22 on two bills addressing marine debris. LD 703 An Act to Address Marine Debris Resulting for Commercial Activities, sponsored by Rep. Devin of Newcastle, is a concept bill to address the problem of marine debris resulting from commercial activities such as commercial fishing and aquaculture. LD 705 An Act to Prevent Marine Debris, also sponsored by Rep. Devin on behalf of the DMR, proposes to prohibit possession of materials used to package lobster or crab bait, including the plastic wrapping and cardboard cartons, on a lobster vessel, and prohibits the discarding or abandoning of these materials into the ocean. Violation of this provision is a civil violation, with a fine of $250.

LD 922 An Act Directing the Commissioner of Marine Resources to Investigate Conditions of Sheepscot Pond Related to a Management Plan for Anadromous Fish Species, sponsored by Rep. Pierce of Dresden, also went to public hearing on March 22. This bill proposes to open and keep operational the fishway on the Sheepscot River in Palermo from April 15 to June 30 annually and to study the Sheepscot Pond for the purpose of developing a management plan for anadromous fish species.

A concept draft, LD 473 An Act to Create Pathways to Enter Alternative Marine Industries, put forward by Rep. Alley, proposed to allow a person who has completed a lobster and crab fishing apprenticeship to enter a lottery to be allowed to enter the herring fishery in a lottery in which they would not be able to fish in the herring fishery in the lobstering off-season. While there was support for the sentiment of this bill, no one testified in favor of it at the public hearing. The Committee was due to vote on this bill on March 22.

LD 252 An Act To Improve Safety in the Disposal of Expired Marine Flares, sponsored by Rep. McCreight of Harpswell, proposes to establish within the Department of Public Safety programs for the collection and disposal of expired marine flares and for public education regarding expired marine flares. The public hearing was held on March 13 and work session scheduled for March 22. The MLA worked with Sen. Langley to put forward LD 575 An Act to Improve Enforcement of Maine’s Lobster Laws, based on feedback from an industry-wide survey on enforcement. This concept draft would establish minimum penalties for certain lobster violations as a deterrent to violating the law. It also explores requiring lobster license holders found guilty of violating marine conservation laws to pay restitution to the state. In addition, lobster license holders convicted of marine resource violation(s) resulting in a license suspension who re-enter the lobster fishery would return as a new entrant and have a vessel monitoring system aboard the vessel. The public hearing was held on March 6. The bill was well received, with most speaking in favor of the need for a strategy to improve how the state enforces our existing laws. However, the Maine Lobstering Union opposed the bill, stating, "If you were to listen to all the proposed ideas in this bill, I would not blame you if you thought that we really were all criminals! WOW!!!" Only three lobster-related bills have not yet printed: LR 743 An Act to Make Technical Changes to Maine’s Marine Resources Laws; LR 750 An Act Regarding Enforcement of Marine Resources Laws and Suspensions of Marine Resources Licenses; LR 751 An Act to Extend the Time for an Appeal of License Denial for Military Members. Two additional bills were submitted but are not expected to move forward: LR 1348 An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding Marine Resources and LR 1743 An Act to Incentivize Private Investment of Lobster Processing in Maine.

Bills can be tracked online through the Legislature’s Web site at www.legislature.maine.gov. An update on the activities of the Marine Resources Committee is distributed weekly. Contact the Marine Resources Committee clerk, Julia Brown at 287-1337 or email Julia.Brown@Legislature.Maine.gov to get on the distribution list.

Will marine license fees increase?

At press time, the question whether marine license fees will increase by approximately 30% is still under debate by the Legislature. However, the Governor announced at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum that he no longer supported an increase in marine license fees to fill the DMR’s $600,000 budget gap. In February, the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Marine Resources and Committees held a joint public hearing to take public testimony on the DMR’s budget proposal to increase marine license fees. The MLA testified that it does not agree with the premise that a flat-funded budget scenario is necessary and strongly opposed looking to the industry to fill that gap.

In March, the DMR has removed its request for a 30% increase in marine license fees, and instead proposed to fund its budget gap through the General Fund. The Department has requested that it keep 30% of the General Fund portion of license fees, to be deposited into a special fund within DMR. The DMR has calculated that this would provide approximately $660,000 in funds without increasing license fees. “If DMR is not successful in receiving funding to support [this special fund], we do anticipate there will be significant impacts to public health and safety, conservation of marine species and Maine’s fishing economy. The Department will need to eliminate two Marine Patrol Officers, a lobster scientist, and will need to make many other adjustments to programs that will impact other coastal fisheries. We will be left in a position where we cannot effectively monitor change, rather than take action to respond to those changing conditions. Efficiencies with data entry will also not be realized and we will no longer be able to support staff intensive monitoring work necessary to support real-time management actions, such as those we have used in the scallop fishery for the last few years,” DMR stated publicly.

The Marine Resources Committee has supported the Department’s request, with a few members recommending that DMR keep 50% of the General Fund portion of license fees. It recommended this budget to the Appropriations Committee.
The MLA Board took this issue to heart. The MLA’s consistent philosophy has been to be proactive on issues in order to get ahead of them. In this spirit, the MLA identified enforcement issues as a priority for 2017. It is important to note that the MLA does not believe that this is a widespread, rampant problem. Rather, the board recognizes that the rewards for cheating are great and wants to address it while the problem still lies with a minority of the fishery. It is very difficult to get Maine lobstermen to agree on much, but the MLA board found that most lobstermen agree that enforcement of our lobster laws needs to improve.

As the MLA Board delved deeper into exploring this issue, it was guided by three points of consensus: 1) that all lobstermen deserve to work on a level playing field; 2) penalties are not severe enough to deter illegal activity and; 3) the current system gives cheaters all the tools they need to continue cheating. From there, the board generated a long list of issues that could be addressed, ranging from abuse of replacement tags, fishing sunken trawls, night hauling and carrying large crew to how to make penalties severe enough to deter these crimes.

The MLA met with Commissioner Keliher, policy director Deirdre Gilbert, and Colonel Cornish to discuss a range of issues and potential approaches to deter crime and better enforce the laws. The board then conducted an email survey among the MLA membership to get feedback on these issues. Using this initial feedback, the MLA narrowed down the list of issues then conducted a second electronic survey, this time distributed industry-wide. The survey was sent to all lobstermen with an email address (~3,100) and was posted on Facebook. We received 400 responses, a 13% response rate. This input served as the basis of the concept draft bill presented to the Marine Resources Committee as LD 575.

Two of the issues in the second survey – the number of people fishing aboard a lobster boat with a Class III license and potential changes to curb night hauling – are not included in LD 575. While these two issues are a growing concern for the lobster industry, they were not a concern for the majority of those who responded to the survey.

Three items are included in LD 575: establishing minimum penalties, putting limitations on violators who re-enter the fishery and a requirement for restitution if convicted.

Minimum penalties are included as a way to finetune the penalty structure to ensure that penalties are severe enough to deter lobstermen from violating the law. In contrast to setting a defined penalty, a minimum penalty approach would allow the Commissioner some flexibility and discretion to adjust the penalty to fit the circumstances of each case under the Administrative Suspension process.

The industry identified two separate tiers under this approach: monetary penalties for those crimes where mistakes can be made, such as keeping short, over-sized, v-notched or egg-bearing female lobsters, but with higher minimum penalties for repeat offenders, and license suspension for those crimes that are deliberate by their nature, such as scrubbing lobsters, fishing over the trap limit, fishing sunken trawls or untagged gear, and molesting lobster traps.

Many in the industry have questioned Maine’s current policy that lets offenders who have served their time come back into the lobster fishery and pick up where they left off, especially when there are long waiting lists of Apprentices eager for the chance to become a commercial lobsterman. The MLA explored two ideas put forward by the industry: 1) starting violators who reenter the fishery at 300 traps and allowing them to build up 100 traps per year like a new entrant, and 2) requiring violators to install a vessel monitoring system (VMS) to allow Marine Patrol to more easily monitor activities. Both of these proposals received strong support in the survey and are included for consideration in the concept draft.

Finally, the notion of requiring offenders to pay restitution was raised as an option to explore given the significant amount of resources it takes for DMR to make an enforcement case. Given the constant struggle to keep the DMR and Marine Patrol fully funded, the MLA board proposed the idea to the industry that those convicted should pay restitution. They found this idea was very popular with the industry, and included it as part of this concept draft.

The MLA hopes that LD 575 will result in substantive changes that will deter crime on the water, improve Marine Patrol’s ability to enforce current laws, get bad actors off the water, and provide a fairer and more level playing field for all Maine lobstermen.
PAY ATTENTION! A NEW WAY OF DOING BUSINESS IS TAKING SHAPE IN WASHINGTON

Americans seem to have a love or hate relationship with the Trump Administration. Regardless of how you feel about our new President, we all must come to terms with a new way of doing business in Washington, DC. Many changes have already been made, while many others are simply proposals. It will take some time for the dust to settle and understand what this means for the lobster industry. In the meantime, stay informed. If you feel strongly about the impacts of these changes or proposals, take the time to reach out to your Congressional delegation and let them know your thoughts.

Here’s a brief round-up on some of the changes that the MLA has been monitoring that directly impact fisheries.

Funding

The New York Times reported on the President’s 2018 Budget Blueprint. It’s important to remember that this is the President’s proposed budget. It must pass Congress for any elements to be enacted. The New York Times said, “The blueprint does not include tax proposals or other revenue ideas, and outlines only proposals for discretionary spending, which is money appropriated annually by Congress. Discretionary spending makes up about a quarter of all federal spending. It does not include interest payments on the federal debt or so-called mandatory spending on large programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.”

Many of the President’s proposals hit close to home. The draft budget consistently cuts funding for all science and other programs related to climate change research across agencies. The NOAA budget would cut by 16%, including cuts to some environmental satellite programs, a $250 million reduction in coastal research, and elimination of the National Sea Grant College Program (which would eliminate Maine Sea Grant), but spares the National Marine Fisheries Service budget. The Environmental Protection Agency is facing a 31% cut. For every dollar the EPA spends, the budget is cutting funding for all science and other programs related to climate change research across agencies. The NOAA budget would cut by 16%, including cuts to some environmental satellite programs, a $250 million reduction in coastal research, and elimination of the National Sea Grant College Program (which would eliminate Maine Sea Grant), but spares the National Marine Fisheries Service budget. The Environmental Protection Agency is facing a 31% cut. For every dollar the EPA spends, the budget is cutting funding for all science and other programs related to climate change research across agencies. The NOAA budget would cut by 16%, including cuts to some environmental satellite programs, a $250 million reduction in coastal research, and elimination of the National Sea Grant College Program (which would eliminate Maine Sea Grant), but spares the National Marine Fisheries Service budget.

The overall message from DMR, based on the department’s many surveys of lobster populations, is that things are changing. That change principally is in the timing of lobsters, larvae, postlarvae, and into the deep, as well as spreading through the Gulf, and into deeper water, “Wahle explained. To determine if that is so, Wahle and Robert Russell, another biologist at DMR, talked about the results of the yearly lobster settlement index. However, he too credited warm-water temperatures with altered growth rate, “Russell said. We may need to alter the survey as the Gulf changes to capture this new behavior."

Trade

Shortly after President Trump took office, he withdrew the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). This trade negotiation sought to cut tariffs for American imports and exports to Canada, Mexico, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Peru, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and Brunei. The TPP was still under debate and had not been ratified by Congress. Pulling out does not affect the current trade landscape, but will impact trade in the future.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a trade agreement between the European Union and the United States which is under negotiation. It is unclear if it will be affected by the Trump Administration’s trade policies. In the meantime, the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) has been ratified and will eliminate tariffs on Canadian exports to the European Union, such as lobster, beginning in June. Some have suggested that the fisheries portion of TTIP has broad approval and could be moved forward on its own to reduce tariffs of U.S. exports to seafood to the EU.

Health Care

The proposal to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act was unveiled in March and met with very mixed reviews. Government analysis indicates that the proposal would raise the number of uninsured individuals by 14 million next year and 24 million by 2026. The hardest hit will be people over 50, people who earn less and rural Americans, so it would likely hit Maine residents hard. Young people who are healthy and not poor will benefit under the proposed plan, and there are significant tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans. The bill includes a 30% surcharge for anyone who lets their coverage lapse, so if you drop your insurance for any reason, it will be very expensive to get it back. The existing ACA certainly needs to be improved. However, this proposal does not appear to be a good solution for Maine and its fishing communities.

LOBSTER FLOURISHING, BUT FOR HOW LONG?

by Melissa Waterman

Kathleen Reardon, Department of Marine Resources (DMR) lobster biologist, gave a thorough overview of Maine’s lobster fishery at a Saturday morning presentation during the Maine Fishermen’s Forum in March. After DMR Commissioner Patrick Keliher announced preliminary landings data showing that Maine lobstermen harvested more than 130 million pounds in 2016, an all-time record, Reardon cautioned the audience. “It hasn’t been good everywhere,” she said. Eastern Maine has seen a rapid increase in landings since 2004, Landings in western and southern Maine have remained steady, with little increase, during that time.

The overall message from DMR, based on the department’s many surveys of lobster populations, is that things are changing. That change principally is in the timing of lobsters, larvae, postlarvae, and into the deep, as well as spreading through the Gulf, and into deeper water, “Wahle explained. To determine if that is so, Wahle and Robert Russell, another biologist at DMR, talked about the results of the yearly lobster settlement index. However, he too credited warm-water temperatures with altered growth rate, “Russell said. We may need to alter the survey as the Gulf changes to capture this altered growth rate.”

Robert Russell, another biologist at DMR, talked about the results of the yearly lobster settlement index, which provides a snapshot of the number of young-of-the-year lobster settling on the ocean floor. Once again it appears that settlement numbers are down throughout the Gulf of Maine. “But does the warmer water mean more available habitat?” Russell asked. Juvenile lobsters don’t survive in water less than 53°F. (12°C.). Water temperatures at 20 and 50 meters routinely have been above 53°F. during the past decade, thus lobsters can spend longer amounts of time in preferred water temperatures and may grow faster. “We may need to alter the survey as the Gulf changes to capture this altered growth rate),” Russell said.

In some sites 2016 had some of the lowest settlement numbers on record,” said Rick Wahl, post-doctoral research professor at the University of Maine’s Darling Center and originator of the lobster settlement index. However, he too credited warm-water warming with expanding suitable habitat for juvenile lobsters. “It may be that we have not seen a decline but instead they are settling over a broader area and into deeper water,” Wahl explained. To determine if that is so, Wahl and DMR scientists are starting a project setting out passive post-larval collectors at sites at the far eastern and western southern of the coast to better understand settlement in deep water (greater than 30 feet).

But the existing settlement figures do predict a decline in landings in the future, Wahl continued. “The correlation between settlement numbers and landings..."
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Atlantic Edge Lobster
Boothbay Harbor, ME -- Fuel discount for MLA members.

Propellers
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Attention Maine Lobstermen

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) has begun an Industry-Based Trawl Survey for Gulf of Maine cod (cod IBS). The survey area includes federal waters off the coast of Maine, specifically in lobster zones: E, F, and G. The survey starts on April 1st, 2017 and ends on July 31st, 2017, and will continue again from October 1st, 2017 through January 31st, 2018. Tow locations will be announced monthly on MA DMF website, social media, and the MA DMF listserv. To receive real time text message updates of the survey go to the MA DMF Website and sign up or call Bill Hoffman at 978-282-0308 ext 106. Additionally, daily announcements of activity will be broadcasted on VHF channel 16. In order to avoid gear conflicts, MA DMF respectively requests that fixed gear be temporarily removed from the tow locations during survey times.

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ing increase in prices. Many are worried that such a situation may occur again this year.

The NEFMC is in the midst of completing Amendment 8 to its herring management plan; it presented an update on its work during the Maine Fishermen’s Forum on March 3. Currently herring fishermen operate under a three-year stock assessment (completed in 2015) and quota allocations set for the 2016–2018 fishing seasons. Through Amendment 8, NEFMC is re-evaluating the Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) formula to ensure that the ecological role of herring in the marine environment is accounted for. The ABC control rule determines how much herring is available for commercial harvest. The Amendment also will address the problem of localized depletion of herring. Localized depletion is a reduction of population size, independent of the overall status of the stock, over a relatively small spatial area as a result of intensive fishing. There is concern that midwater trawl fishing inshore reduces the availability of herring, negatively impacting groundfish, tuna, whale-watching and other industries.

Deirdre Boelke, fisheries analyst at NEFMC, summarized the process for completing Amendment 8. In 2016, the Council reviewed documents relevant to herring management and developed specific alternatives that address the ecological role of herring. It then held two workshops with stakeholders in May and December, 2016, using Management Strategy Evaluation techniques to incorporate public input early in the regulatory process. Based on feedback from those meeting, the Council took four types of ABC control rules off the table: constant catch; conditional constant catch; biomass-based for five years; and those meeting, the Council took four types of ABC control rules off the table: constant catch; conditional constant catch; biomass-based for three years with restrictions. The Council now will focus on analyzing annual and three-year-based control rules. Regarding localized depletion of herring schools, the Council is considering “a wide range of alternatives,” said Boelke, including a six-nautical-mile closure off Cape Cod during the early summer months is the presence of haddock, which feed in similar locations as herring. NEFMC allows a certain amount of haddock to be caught as bycatch by herring fishermen. Last fall, the Council voted to increase the haddock bycatch limit from 1% to 1.5% through Framework 56 of the Groundfish Plan. If approved, in 2017, the haddock bycatch cap will increase to 801 metric tons, compared to 512 metric tons in 2016.

Megan Ware, staff at ASMFC, presented an overview of menhaden regulations. Amendment 3 to the Menhaden Fisheries Management Plan is based on single species reference points, which means that the stock is managed based on fishing mortality and spawning stock health. The total allowable catch for menhaden is allocated among the states based on each state’s average landings from 2009 to 2011. Maine receives less than 1% of the total allowable catch; the bulk goes to Virginia for fish oil and New Jersey for bait harvesters.

“One question about menhaden is whether the single species reference points take into account the ecological role of menhaden,” Ware said. “The second question is whether the allocation is fair and equitable.” These concerns prompted the ASMFC Menhaden Board to review Amendment 3 to the menhaden plan. “The draft will have different reference points,” Ware continued, “and a wider range of allocation methods.” Methods being looked at include a coastwide quota, a regional quota, different state quotas, and quota based on fleet capacity, among others. In addition, Amendment 3 may include changes to the time period used to make menhaden allocations to the states. “It could be 1985–1995, 1985–2016, or a weighted average based on 1985–1995 and 2012–2016,” Ware said. The Amendment is being drafted by ASMFC; public hearings are expected to be held from August through October 2017, with a final action in November.

Terry Stockwell, external affairs director at the Department of Marine Resources and vice-chairman at NEFMC, reviewed the 2016 herring season. “There were above-average landings at the beginning of the season which led DMR to institute emergency measures on July 9 to slow down landings,” he said. Those measures included a limit on how much herring could be landed and when, plus restrictions on the use of carrier vessels. To prepare for next year, in October 2016, ASFMC began development of an Addendum to its herring management plan which, Stockwell said, is very much like DMF’s 2016 emergency rules. The public comment period for the draft Addendum began on February 8 and ends on April 7. The ASFMC’s Herring Section will review the public comments, select final management options and present those to ASFMC at its May meeting.
merical fishing activities. The Amendment does this by identifying large areas of the Gulf (deeper than 300 meters), canyon areas along the edge of the Continental Shelf, and several seamounts as protected zones. It also pinpoints areas closer to shore — the two named previously as well as Jordan Basin and Lindenkohl Knoll — as possible protected areas.

Gear restrictions would be put in place in these zones. According to Stockwell, two approaches are being considered. The first would prohibit fixed and mobile bottom-tending gears. The second would prohibit just mobile bottom gears. Transiting across the zones is allowed. The object of both is to make sure that no fishing gear is in contact with the seabed where there may be corals. NEFMC is considering two possible exemptions to the first approach: to exempt the red crab fishery and/or to exempt other trap fisheries.

“We [DMR] told the Council that we believe lobster and crab fisheries should be exempted from these two coral protection areas,” Stockwell said. At its January meeting, however, NEFMC decided it was too early in the process to make that exemption. Council members asked for more information on the economic value of Outer Schoodic Ridge and Mt. Desert Rock areas and possible community impacts of the proposed closures.

Stockwell was interrupted by Andy Mays, a lobsterman and scalloper from Southwest Harbor. “We’re stuck again in a reactionary mode,” he said, venting the frustration of many in the room. “What is the data that makes this necessary?”

Stockwell explained that the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act revision in 2006 gave the Council discretionary authority to identify and implement measures to protect deep sea corals in New England. Instead of incorporating coral protections in its Omnibus Essential Fisheries Habitat Amendment, the Council decided to draw on that authority to create an independent plan specifically for deep-sea corals. It did so quickly. “This process is moving very fast,” Stockwell added.

The DMR took three approaches to assessing the economic impact of the proposed closures: estimating total revenue by distance from shore; estimating combined average values, days fished, number of boats in the area and percent of total income; and estimating percent of total area against total income. “Part of the problem is that we assume equal productivity on every piece of bottom [in a lobster zone] but it could be that these areas [the proposed closed areas] are three times more productive than other parts of the zone,” Kathleen Reardon, DMR biologist, said. Assuming that fifty boats draw approximately 50% of their income from lobstering within each of the two coral protection areas, DMR came up with a $4 million value.

Reardon explained that gathering relevant data on how those areas are used by fishermen is critical. There is no data that directly reports landings or value for the areas proposed for closure. The department drew on Maine dealer and harvester logbook data and the few Vessel Trip Reports available for those areas to generate an estimate of the economic impact, but, said Reardon, “the data are fuzzy. We need better data from you. We need to know where you fish.”

To complicate matters further, the Outer Schoodic Ridge coral protection area is also an area that appears to have a high co-occurrence of right whales and lobster traps, according to a computer model created in 2010. Lobstermen in the audience peppered Reardon and Stockwell with questions. David Cousens, president of the Maine Lobstermen’s Association, called for lobstermen to give DMR the data that it needs. “We need data from everyone.

Carla Guenther, from the Penobscot East Resource Center (now the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries) noted that the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council had chosen to exempt lobster fishing from its deep-sea coral zones primarily because the depths are so great that no one actually fishes there. In the case of Maine, lobstermen are active in the areas and closures will have a financial impact. “If they [the Council] have given us the opportunity to make an economic argument against it, we should do it,” she said.

Stockwell emphasized that the Council’s clock on final approval was ticking. “In March there will be public workshops in New Bedford and Portsmouth. Then the Habitat Committee will meet in March and may select a preferred alternative. The Council meets in April when it may choose its preferred alternative. Then there will be public hearings if they do choose,” he explained. The DMR has scheduled meetings along the coast to get input from lobstermen in order to speak with one voice to the Council. “DMR’s position is that there should be a complete exemption for lobster gear,” Stockwell said.
If you don't have a health insurance plan there are still some options available to you for getting health care. Maine's community health centers (better known as sliding-scale clinics) deliver quality primary care regardless of your ability to pay. Payments are based on your household income. Maine Clinics also provide basic medical services. The clinics typically offer services only to people with no health insurance or those who are within certain income limits. They may be open to walk-ins only at certain times of the week. Based on your income, you may receive free care or pay on a sliding scale, so that your fee for services is based on your ability to pay. These fees are reduced for those who have lower incomes with less money to spare for health services.

In addition, every hospital in Maine must offer hospital care regardless of ability to pay, typically called charity care. Each hospital has its own income guidelines. If you have hospital expenses, speak to the hospital billing office to learn if you qualify for the program. Some hospitals have programs that cover a wide range of services, including doctor's visits and prescription drugs.

Prescription drug costs can be expensive but here in Maine there are programs such as MaineCare, Med Access, and ME RX Plus which can help residents pay for prescription drugs. The programs base their fees on household size, income, and sometimes assets. For an application, contact your local Department of Health and Human Services office or call 1-866-796-2463. If you are not eligible for these programs there are other ways you can get help paying for your prescriptions. In many cases when you talk to your doctor about your situation, he or she may be able to provide you with free samples.

Many drug companies have discount programs that offer a discount on certain drugs. Most programs require that you are without health insurance. For more information about this go to www.needymeds.org.

Have you heard about $4 generics? An easy way to save on prescription costs is by buying generic drugs. Generic medications are usually cheaper than brand-name drugs and may make it easier to find discounts. Many large retail store pharmacies have started providing generic medications for only $4, regardless of your income and insurance status.

If you would like more help finding any of these clinics, apply for some of the programs listed above, or finding cheaper prescriptions, call me at 207-967-455 or email me at alisha@mainelobstermen.org.

Alisha Keezer is the MLA’s health insurance Navigator.
The total value of Maine’s lobster fishery was the highest among the state’s commercial fisheries, at $533,094,366. Adding in dividends paid by 14 of Maine’s 19 lobster co-ops, the overall landed value of Maine’s lobster fishery reached $547,249,010.

Zone C posted the highest lobster landings with over 33 million pounds, followed by Zone A with over 28 million, Zone D with 24.5 million and Zone B with more than 18 million pounds. Landings in the western zones showed slight increases over previous years with Zone E landing 7 million pounds, Zone F nearly 15 million and Zone G just under 5 million pounds.

"The historic landings reflect the hard work of our harvesters to build and sustain this fishery," said Maine Department of Marine Resources Commissioner Patrick Keliher. "The exceptional value is the result of growing demand by consumers who appreciate both the quality of Maine lobster and the long-standing commitment to sustainable harvesting practices that characterize this fishery."

Demand for lobster is up

The strong price for Maine lobster reflects a continued increase in demand for Maine lobster. In 2016, Maine lobster held steady on price despite an increase in supply. There continues to be an increase in demand from Asian consumers. In 2010, Maine sold just $100,000 worth of live lobster to China. In 2016, that figure increased to more than $27.5 million. The jump in export value in 2016 was dramatic — slightly more than $10.2 million of lobster was sold in 2016, that figure increased to more than $27.5 million. The jump in export value in 2016 was dramatic — slightly more than $10.2 million of lobster was sold in 2015.

In addition, China lowered its tariff on seafood imports in January. The country’s tariff on lobster fell from 15% to 10%. "Any reductions in the cost of doing business, like tariffs lowering, is always helpful," Jeffrey Bennett, senior trade specialist at the Maine International Trade Center, said in a recent interview in the Portland Press Herald. "But probably more important is the market and demand. It’s still a good market in China."

But a growing appetite for Maine lobster in this country is also having a significant positive influence on the market, explained Matt Jacobson, executive specialist at the Maine International Trade Center, said in a recent interview in the Portland Press Herald. "But probably more important is the market and demand. It’s still a good market in China."

Atlantic herring also jumped in value, in part due to demand for the bait fish by lobstermen at a time when herring were in short supply last year. Landings dipped by nearly 11% while value increased by more than $5 million, hitting $19,019,337.

Maine’s softshell clam industry dropped from second place in 2015 to third in 2016 with an overall value of $13,656,386. The decline in overall value reflected a 13.4% decline in per pound value as well as a 20% decline in pounds landed.

"One significant factor that contributed to the decline in softshell clam landings was a closure of harvest areas between the Canadian border and Mount Desert Island associated with Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning (ASP) late in the season," said Kohl Kanwit DMR Bureau of Public Health director.

"While we can take this moment to celebrate the great value of Maine’s marine resources, we cannot lose sight of the signs of change," said Commissioner Keliher. "The agency and the industry must not only work to safeguard our iconic lobster fishery but also work together on solutions that ensure the health and resiliency of all Maine fisheries."

Other species

The value of all Maine’s commercially harvested marine resources increased by $100 million in 2016, to slightly more than $700 million. Lobster comprised 73.9% of that figure.

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Maine's elvers once again commanded a top price during the brief spring fishery. Elvers were valued at $1,430 per pound. In 2016, elver fishermen caught 9,400 pounds of the 9,688 pound quota, for a total value of $13,466,828, an increase of more than $2 million from the previous year.

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Lobster landings continued from page 1

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But a growing appetite for Maine lobster in this country is also having a significant positive influence on the market, explained Matt Jacobson, executive director of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative. "China and other overseas markets are important, but they only make up a small portion of the demand for Maine lobster," he noted. "Where we see great potential is continuing to drive demand at home, focusing efforts on key culinary markets that are still unfamiliar with the product we harvest."

Other species

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By Shelley Wigglesworth

Greg Havener is a fifth-generation lobsterman born and raised in Friendship. He fishes on his 32-foot Holland boat, The Emily. "My father Wayne still lobsters today at age 87. My grandfather Stillman, great-grandfather Chester and great-great-grandfather Lewis all lobstered. Our oldest son Andy is also a full-time lobsterman and his three children all go lobstering in the summer," he said.

Greg’s wife Pat grew up in Waldoboro with a lobstering connection of her own. Her great-grandfather Sherman Jameson was a lobster buyer in Friendship who bought local lobstermen’s catch from his lobster smack, the Foster D. Pat followed her interest in medicine and had a career as a registered nurse for forty years. But then, in 2012, things changed. That year the price for lobster plunged due to a surge in landings earlier in the season.

"During 2012, we participated in the Trade Adjustment Assistance program for lobstermen and that encouraged us to think of other ways to market Maine lobster," Havener recalled. "That summer members of their family came to visit in Friendship. "Their dogs were climbing on the picnic table trying to eat the lobster that we had served. That is where the idea for making dog treats flavored with lobster came from, and Friendship Lobster Treats LLC [now Gourmet Maine Lobster Crackers] was formed," she said.

After experimenting in her home kitchen and coming up with a recipe that worked and dogs loved, Pat began selling her dog treats at the Rockland farmer’s market. "The best thing I did was become a vendor at the farmers’ market. I had the support of the other vendors and got to hear the feedback from customers."

It was the customer feedback that prompted Havener to expand from her popular dog biscuits to lobster crackers for people. "In addition to customers asking for gluten-free dog treats and treats for smaller dogs, people would always say 'The dogs are lucky, I wish you made a treat for people.' Greg was the one who came up with the idea for crackers and encouraged me to create a recipe," she said.

After much trial-and-error testing in the family kitchen, Havener came up with a cracker that she and Greg both liked. Although she is reluctant to disclose too many recipe details, she did share a few. "We start with the lobster Greg and our family catches. The cooked lobster meat is then ground in a food processor and from there we make the dough. It is rolled thin, cut and baked. We make it a point to use Maine-made butter, New England flour and Maine sea salt," Havener said.

Not long after its humble beginnings at the Rockland farmers’ market, in March 2015 the company entered the New England-Made Giftware and Specialty Food Show with its Gourmet Maine Lobster Crackers. "At the show we won Best New Product Specialty Food," Havener said. "After that we were overwhelmed with the response and orders. We had a plan to build another kitchen in our walk-out basement for the business but of course it got delayed and so we scrambled to fill as many orders as we could. The kitchen eventually was finished and the business has been growing ever since."

Today, Gourmet Maine Lobster Crackers now employs one person part-time to keep up with orders, though they call on family members to help as needed in the kitchen. It is word of mouth, literally, that Havener believes has made the product so successful. "We have found that having customers sample the product makes for good sales," she said. "We go to events and shows where we offer samples and sell the crackers. We continue to sell at the Rockland farmers’ market, in small stores and on-line through Etsy and Amazon. Recently the company began offering the crackers in bulk to caterers and local restaurants. "Last summer The Pearl here in Rockland served our crackers as an appetizer with Vinalhaven Smoked Lobster Dip. We continue to grow and we couldn’t be happier about it," Havener said.
BUT IT’S ONLY A LITTLE PUNCTURE WOUND!

by Ann Backus, MS

You might not think it’s a problem but puncture wounds in the marine environment can be life-threatening.

How do fishermen, especially those who are not hook fishermen, get puncture wounds? I bet you know the answer already—from spines on rockfish, fish scales, lobster claws, crab shells, and other marine life.

So you have a puncture wound from a rockfish. It’s a busy day on the boat. There’s no time to stop to wash off the area or find a Band-aid. You just put on your gloves and get back to work. Well, not so fast. If this puncture had been caused by a nail in your workshop and you had received a tetanus shot in the last ten years, I might say OK, back to work for now. But puncture wounds in a wet environment are very different.

I was reminded of the seriousness of puncture wounds at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum this year when two fishermen told me about wounds they had received from rockfish spines. They described in detail how their hands and wrists swelled up and then the infection spread up their arms. They wondered what caused such a severe reaction.

Let’s try to sort this out. There are numerous bacteria that live happily in water, whether fresh or salt. Some of these bacteria are versatile and can survive both on and in marine creatures as well as in human tissues and blood.

How is this possible? On the one hand, ocean water has five times more chlorine and three times more sodium than blood. On the other hand, the pH (a measure of the acidity or alkalinity of a substance) of the ocean and of blood are somewhat similar, with the average pH of ocean water around 8.1 and the pH of blood being 7.3. A pH of 7 is neutral, so both ocean water and blood are slightly alkaline.

Most bacteria need oxygen to thrive but they get it in different ways. Some bacteria are facultative anaerobes, meaning that when oxygen is available they will use it for their metabolism. If they are in an oxygen-poor environment, however, their metabolism switches to become anaerobic. This means they can live in nearly any sort of water environment, whether on the surface of your skin, in your soft tissues or in your blood.

Finally, in order to survive in our bodies bacteria need to tolerate our body temperature of 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit or 36.5 degrees Celsius. One likely bacteria that could have infected the two fishermen is Aeromonas hydrophila (meaning “loves water”). The environment under which A. hydrophila thrives is consistent with the conditions in the human body. A. hydrophila can cause septicemia in humans, also known as sepsis. This is a blood stream infection which can spread quickly throughout the body, infect organs and result in septic shock—a sudden loss of blood pressure.

Septicemia is very serious. The signs are swelling near the puncture wound, swelling that continues up the leg or arm, and red stripes developing and moving in the direction of the heart. These symptoms must not be ignored. They indicate a life-threatening condition, and getting medical attention is imperative.

A. hydrophila is known to be resistant to the antibiotic ampicillin, a form of penicillin. The preferred antibiotics for treating this bacterium are cephalosporins and fluoroquinolones. The health provider, however, needs to make the call as to which antibiotic to use.

What actions should a fisherman or anyone getting a puncture wound in a marine or freshwater environment take? Immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water. If an antibacterial soap is available, use that. Cover the wound well and avoid further exposure to water as it may contain more strains of bacteria. Most importantly, monitor the wound carefully for swelling and seek medical attention if swelling occurs. The development of swelling and red stripes can happen quickly, so if you are on an extended fishing trip, plans should be considered for medevac if swelling occurs. Lastly, be sure to explain to the medical professional what you think caused the puncture wound; not all physicians are familiar with unusual bacteria such as A. hydrophila.

Of course, preventing a puncture wound is the best protection. Keep your heaviest gloves on when handling fish and other creatures you pull from your traps. Take care out there!
**FEDERAL FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR SEAFOOD PROJECTS IN PROVINCES**

The Atlantic Fisheries Fund, created by the Canadian federal government in 2016, will have a $325-million budget, according to Fisheries Minister Dominic LeBlanc. The Fund is designed to boost the region's seafood industry. Seafood industry representatives expressed excitement at the prospect of funds being available to help sell more of their products. Geoff Irvine, executive director of the Lobster Council of Canada, called it great news for his group. “From what I’ve seen it covers all of the major challenges we have — innovation, [research and development], marketing, marketability, all these types of issues,” he said. The federal government has made clear that it won’t be setting stringent limits on what is eligible for support, instead working with the provinces to see what makes the most sense in each area.

**FISHERMEN, LOBSTERMEN SUE TO REMOVE MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT**

The Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association, Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen’s Association, Long Island Commercial Fishing Association, Garden State Seafood Association and Rhode Island Fishermen’s Alliance filed a lawsuit in March to challenge the creation of a national monument off the coast of New England. President Obama created the monument in September, 2016, using his executive authority under the Antiquities Act. The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument is made up of nearly 5,000 square miles of underwater canyons and mountains. The groups said creation of the monument was a “unilateral” action by Obama that is bringing economic distress to fishermen and their families. Though the Antiquities Act allows presidents to designate parcels of land controlled by the federal government as national monuments, the plaintiffs say the high seas are not included.

**CHINA’S APPETITE FOR U.S. LOBSTER CONTINUES TO GROW**

China imported over $108 million in lobsters from the U.S. last year, overtaking the previous record set in 2014 at $90.2 million. Chinese importers bought over 14 million pounds of American lobsters in 2016, which was also a record compared to 13.1 million purchased the previous year. China is not the only country in Asia with an appetite for American lobster. Lobster imports to South Korea grew from less than $5 million in 2010 to nearly $28 million last year, while shipments to Vietnam increased from $142,940 to more than $31 million in the same period. Lobster sales to China are not slowing down in 2017. More than 1.7 million pounds of lobsters worth $14 million were exported from the U.S. in the first month of 2017.

**NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF LOBSTER**

The Island Institute recently published the first edition of Waypoints: Community Indicators for Maine's Coast and Islands. The report offers the public accurate data about island communities in a simple, easy-to-use format. The report's data reflect the crucial role the lobster fishery plays in Maine's coastal economy. While lobster landings and value have increased over the past two decades, those of other fisheries have decreased. The combined value of five of Maine's wild-caught fisheries in 1995 was $180 million. By 2015, it had increased to $512 million, but $495 million of this revenue came from lobster.

**THEM ALWAYS GET THEIR MAN (OR MEN)**

Royal Canadian Mounted Police in New Brunswick charged four people in March in connection with the theft of $1 million worth of frozen lobster last year. The theft took place on July 1, Canada Day, 2016. Police say a transport truck was stolen from Eco-Technologies Ltd in Caraquet, New Brunswick, which was then used in the theft of a refrigerated unit of lobster from LeBreton and Sons Fisheries Ltd. in Grand-Anse. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police believe the theft of the lobster to be connected to a larger crime ring that is targeting cargo shipments in both Quebec and New Brunswick.

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**A Note from the North**

By Bernie Berry  
President, Coldwater Lobster Association

Two recent announcements concerning the Atlantic Canadian fishery have invigorated the whole fishing sector. These initiatives, by the provincial and federal governments, focus on lobster marketing, sustainability and innovations.

First, the Nova Scotia government announced a branding program to promote Nova Scotia seafood worldwide. Nova Scotia exported $1.8 billion CAD worth of seafood in 2016. Prince Edward Island also has geared up a marketing and promotional program for lobster that will expand this year.

On March 10, the Canadian federal government announced a $325 million Atlantic Fisheries Fund to be shared by the Atlantic provinces and to be used for marketing, sustainability, infrastructure and innovation.

From a harvester's point of view, this is all good news. Of course, the devil is in the details but it is a welcomed initiative from both levels of government, recognizing the fishing industry as the major contributor to the economic viability of local fishing communities and to provincial and federal coffers.

We hope to work with provincial and federal officials to develop plans and proposals to build more capacity and profits for all in the industry while maintaining a sustainable lobster fishery.
What might Maine’s lobster fishery look like in the future?

By Melissa Waterman

Mackenzie Mazur grew up in Halifax, Nova Scotia, within sight and sound of the ocean. She was intrigued by the relation between people and the sea and so, after high school in Massachusetts, enrolled at the University of Maine to study marine biology. Mazur, now 23, is a Ph.D student at the University of Maine.

"We don't know what to expect in the future," Mazur explained. "This is an exploratory tool to look at the dynamics of the industry." In the computer model, each individual lobster is given a certain probability of successfully passing through each stage of its life history. The model incorporates data from the newest Atlantic States Marine Fishery Commission’s lobster stock assessment, released in 2016, to account for environmental and commercial fishing processes, such as molting, bearing eggs, dying from natural causes, being caught or V-notched, and protected from harvest due to size.

"In the simulator, each process can be manipulated individually to see how one process can affect the whole fishery," Mazur said. While the model does not include changes in water temperature, those changes are reflected in different life processes plugged into the computer program, such as an increased rate of growth to legal size due to warmer water. "I am also interviewing lobstermen to learn more about how they have dealt with changes in the fishery over the years," Mazur added.

By tweaking different variables, such as an increase in predation or V-notching rates, Mazur hopes to explore what Maine’s lobster fishery may look like in the future. "I will simulate different fishing effort levels and estimate the profitability of those different fishing effort levels as well," she explained. "My hope is that these simulations can be used as a tool for exploring the effects of potential social and ecological change and to prepare for the future in the fishery." Mazur plans to have preliminary results of her research available to share with lobstermen within the year and to complete her degree in two years. "I’m very excited to see what the results might be," she said.
THE MAINE LOBSTERMEN’S ASSOCIATION AWARDS AT THE FISHERMEN’S FORUM

Steve Train, a lobsterman from Long Island in Casco Bay, received the Maine Lobstermen’s Association’s Golden V-Notch Award at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum Saturday night banquet in March. The Award recognizes the tireless effort and leadership of a lobsterman to maintain a sustainable lobster resource and fishery. (From left, David Cousens, MLA board president; Steve Train; Patrice McCarron, MLA executive director. M. Haskell photo.)

Marine Patrol Officer Brandon Bezio received the MLA’s 2017 Marine Patrol Officer of the Year Award. Bezio serves in the St. George-Warren Patrol. The award is an annual recognition of Marine Patrol Officers who provide outstanding service in support of the Maine lobster industry. M. Haskell photo.

The MLA presented a Lifetime Achievement Award to Stonington lobsterman and MLA member Bob Williams. Williams has served as a role model for many younger lobstermen in the fishery over the years, educating them through his dedication to the sustainability of the lobster stocks and wellbeing of the lobster industry. His son John (above left) continues that tradition as a member of the MLA board. M. Haskell photo.

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