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Maine Lobstermen's Community Alliance

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THE YEAR IN REVIEW: 2019 PACKED WITH CHANGE, CONFLICTS

By Patrice McCarron

2019 was a year of great change for the state of Maine, the lobster industry and the Maine Lobstermen’s Association (MLA). The lobster industry greeted 2019 with much anguish over prospects for an acute bait shortage, a looming crisis stemming from the declining right whale population and a long federal government shutdown. As it turned out, bait dominated the MLA’s agenda for the first part of the year but was rapidly overtaken by the right whale issue. The year also brought new pressures from aquaculture development, the re-emergence of offshore wind proposals, an abundance of tariffs, and a decline in lobster landings.

Amidst so much change, Maine’s lobster industry was fortunate to be blessed with stable leadership. Fueled by unprecedented support from all sectors of the fishing industry, Governor Mills re-appointed Patrick Keliher as Commissioner of the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) who took his oath in January. The MLA was piloted by the steady hand of Kristan Porter of Cutler, who took the helm of the organization from David Cousins in March, 2018.

The year was full of unprecedented challenges for lobstermen and industry leaders worked hard to bring a new crop of elected officials up to speed on the fishery’s priorities. Governor Janet Mills arrived in office with an aggressive agenda to address climate change, health care and the opioid crisis. The newly-elected Legislature brought a Democratic majority to both bodies and several lobstermen joined the Marine Resources Committee. Maimers also elected a new Congressman, Jared Golden, to represent Maine’s second district.

The Maine Marine Patrol Bureau and the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative both appointed new leaders last year. Jay Carroll was named as Colonel of Maine’s Marine Patrol replacing Jon Cornish, and Marianne Lacroix was named ex-cuctive director of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative, replacing Matt Jacobson. The DMR also welcomed a new director of External Affairs, Megan Ware, who previously worked at the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

2019 will be remembered for its cold spring which set the lobster fishery up for a very slow start to the season. Lobstermen experienced lower than average landings straight through the fall. Fortunately, lobster prices were stronger than average, lessening the financial sting for many lobstermen. As lobstermen pushed to make the most of their fishing days during the summer and fall, researchers published studies predicting that as environmental conditions shift from near perfect for lobsters back to more normal conditions, lobster landings will drop.

Continued on page 5

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IMAGES OF WINTER

COASTAL OUTLOOK

GUEST COLUMN: Maine’s seafood exports still robust

GUEST COLUMN: Maine lobster finds new markets abroad

MLA UPDATE

PFDS POPULAR WITH LOBSTERMEN

IN THE NEWS

INSIDE
Welcome to 2020, a new year and a new decade! This is also the tenth year that we have published Landings, the newspaper of the Maine lobster fishery. A lot has happened during those ten years. We’ve seen a remarkable peak in lobster landings in the state — in 2009, Maine lobstermen landed 81 million pounds of lobster valued at $237 million. Last year Maine landed 119 million pounds worth $485 million. Over the past decade, we’ve witnessed implementation of regulations to protect North American right whales including sinking groundlines, traveling up measures and gear marking requirements. We’ve observed changes in the Gulf of Maine as waters have become warmer, fathom by fathom, causing alteration in the distribution of many marine species, including right whales and northern shrimp. We’ve seen working waterfronts fall prey to the pressures of real estate development and fishermen strive to retain access to the water. We’ve applauded as more lobster processing businesses have opened their doors in the state and new value-added products have been unveiled. We’ve seen changes in lobster fishery leadership as the older generation have stepped down from many boards and organizations and younger leaders have taken their places.

That old expression, “May you live in interesting times” certainly applies when you consider the changes that have taken place in the lobster fishery and along the Maine coast in the past ten years. Landings provides an overview this month of the tumultuous year just past, one full of changes and conflicts for Maine lobstermen. We also turn our thoughts to what the next year will bring. Landings hears from two individuals involved in lobster exports to global markets. Colleen Coyne at Food Export–Northeast writes about pursuing new markets for Maine lobster in light of tariffs on U.S. lobster in China and the European Union. Food Export–Northeast recently was awarded more than $20 million from the federal Agricultural Trade Promotion Program to open export markets, educate seafood importers, and connect the industry to a broader range of international buyers. Coyne reports on two successful trips, to Dubai in the Middle East and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, where Maine lobster was warmly received. Jeff Bennett, senior trade specialist at the Maine International Trade Center, also references the successful trade trip to Dubai as an example of growing global awareness of Maine lobster and the state’s sustainable fishery.

While the 2018 trade dispute with China brought exports of Maine lobster to a screeching halt in that country, Maine seafood remained the state’s leading export commodity in 2019. Through October, Maine exported over $408 million of seafood products globally, led by live lobster exports. Maine lobster’s reputation for quality and the conservation standards of Maine lobstermen have helped buttress sales in the face of the sharp decline in the Chinese market, according to Bennett. We also hear this month from researchers at the Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety on the results of the Center’s multi-year project to encourage lobstermen to wear lifejackets while working. Starting this past spring, two staff members travelled more than 10,000 miles along the coasts of Massachusetts and Maine, driving two vans packed with 11 different models of lifejackets to harbors large and small. Fishermen were invited to visit the vans, try on lifejackets, and purchase them at a 50% discount. The project surpassed expectations, distributing 1,076 personal flotation devices to Northeast lobstermen. As life jackets become more comfortable and functional, Maine lobstermen are embracing a culture of safety at sea.

Offshore wind power is another issue that will be in the news this year. While the previous Maine administration strove to quash renewable energy development, offshore wind power projects have proliferated in federal waters throughout New England and the mid-Atlantic states. A task force set up by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) met in December to discuss the opportunities and challenges of offshore wind projects in the Gulf of Maine. Ensuring that fishermen’s concerns are heard and taken into consideration will remain a vital part of any future developments. Finally, we feature a selection of photographs from Owls Head lobsterman Micah Philbrook. Philbrook has been fishing from Owls Head since he was a young man and in recent years began documenting what he sees while fishing year-round offshore. Winter is a hard season for lobstermen and, as Philbrook’s photographs show, can be full of drama and beauty. On behalf of the staff of Landings, we wish you all a very happy new year!

COASTAL OUTLOOK  Thoughts from MLCA President Patrice McCarron
In 2019 Maine seafood was once again our state’s leading export commodity. It marks the 6th straight year seafood helped drive Maine’s exports. Through October, Maine exported over $408 million dollars of seafood products globally. Led by live lobster exports, Maine’s top international markets were China, Hong Kong, Canada, and the European Union. Other markets included Qatar, Australia, and Mongolia.

Trade uncertainties

The U.S. is facing many trade policy uncertainties. The new U.S.-Canada-Mexico trade agreement (USMCA) was completed in December, Canada and the European Union have signed a trade agreement, the fate of Brexit is up in the air, and U.S. trade issues continue with China. While the U.S. ended participation in the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), the remaining 11 countries forged ahead and signed the third largest free trade agreement in the world, CPTPP between Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. The eleven countries’ combined economies represent 13.4% of global GDP, approximately $13.5 trillion US.

China

Perhaps nothing illustrates the trade challenges the lobster industry is facing better than the U.S.-China trade dispute. This dispute has led to increased tariff rates for both American and Chinese importers. Once the fastest growing market for Maine lobster, the Chinese market came to a grinding halt when the Chinese retaliatory tariffs on lobsters took effect on July 6, 2018. Through October, Maine’s lobster exports to China have dropped 54%. Exports totaled $23.9 million US versus $48.3 million US for the same time period last year. While Maine lobster exports have been surprisingly resilient given all the trade challenges noted above, the Chinese market has almost singlehandedly dragged down Maine’s overall lobster exports. Year to date Maine lobster exports are down 10.9%, $290 million US versus $325.5 million US for the same period last year. Progress on talks to resolve the 17-month trade dispute with China remain uncertain. And one thing global markets hate is uncertainty.

Maine’s well-earned reputation

The good news is the reputation of our lobster industry abroad remains stellar. From the men and women on the boats to the processors and dealers shipping orders (and everyone in between), Maine’s lobster industry enjoys the well-earned reputation as a hardworking, sustainable fishery with a long heritage. This will always be good news no matter what current challenges the industry faces.

A recent U.S. seafood mission to the Middle East underscored the importance of the lobster’s reputation. In September, lobster processors and dealers from Maine participated in a U.S. Northeast seafood trade mission in Dubai, organized through Food Export Northeast. The group toured local supermarkets and fish markets, met one on one with buyers and distributors from the Middle East region, and co-hosted a cooking demonstration and evening reception for local government, distributors, and media. Maine lobster took center stage with an education seminar complete with traps, gauges, and an interesting discussion about how best to determine a lobster’s sex. The Middle East represents another in a growing list of regions with an increased appetite for Maine lobster. The solid reputation Maine lobster and its fishery has around the world was clear to everyone.

Here’s to fewer uncertainties in 2020!
China and the EU (European Union) are major foreign markets for the American lobster. The lobster industry now finds itself caught in the middle of a perfect storm with trade tariffs creating barriers to both lucrative export markets. At Food Export–Northeast, we’ve heard from many in the Maine lobster industry that they are bracing against this headwind and need support to weather the storm. As a leading resource for food producers in New England, we want industry professionals to know that we’re in their corner. We are ramping up efforts in traditional markets, while also developing new overseas markets and opportunities for suppliers to connect with international buyers.

Weekly Promotions – Uncovering New Opportunities

Food Export–Northeast recently sought out more than $20 million in funding from the federal Agricultural Trade Promotion Program (ATP). With these funds in hand, we are directing a significant portion to new multi-year efforts to open export markets, educate seafood importers, and connect the industry to a broader range of international buyers.

Increased Funds – Uncovering New Opportunities

A sizeable portion of the funding has been dedicated to expanding our signature cost-sharing program, the Branded Program, to conduct more foreign promotion activities. All eligible suppliers accepted into the program receive a 50% reimbursement for costs tied to international marketing activities, such as trade show participation, social media and advertising in foreign markets, in-store retail and food service promotions, point-of-sale materials, and freight costs to send samples. Additionally, this funding allows our organization to spearhead a variety of awareness-building efforts with international buyers. In fact, as mentioned below, trade education events have been taking place worldwide throughout 2019 to educate seafood importers about American lobster, with more planned for 2020.

Collaborating to Tell the Story of American Lobster – New Collateral and Video

Dubai Trade Mission and the Maine Lobster Industry

Most recently, the Food Export–Northeast seafood team held its first in-market trade mission in Dubai. During the three-day event, American lobster suppliers and processors from Maine met face-to-face with buyers from several countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

A highlight of the mission was the product showcase. At that event, Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative Ambassador Harvester Brian Rapp gave a dynamic, interactive presentation — complete with trap, buoy, and gauge — about how the U.S. commercial lobster fishery has been managed sustainably during its 150-year history. The 70 buyers and chefs in attendance also watched a cooking demonstration and sampled dishes featuring American lobster.

Participating seafood suppliers walked away with a better understanding of the market and reported good buyer interest. New relationships were formed with 20 Dubai distributorships and $800,000 in sales were made. Future sales may be potentially $1.8 million annually.

Although it’s too early to predict the long-term sustained sales impact, the event represents a good initial step for expanding this market. There are many opportunities to grow lobster sales in Dubai and the GCC countries. Now that the door has been opened, we will continue to open it wider by adding more promotional and educational events in this market in 2020.

Collaborating to Tell the Story of American Lobster – New Collateral and Video

Telling the story of American lobster through a variety of mediums and resources helps to educate and build awareness with potential buyers. To assist this important storytelling, we’ve created two new resources for our in-market representatives and industry suppliers.

The first is a print brochure called the American Lobster Products Guide. It has been developed to educate buyers about the quality, value, and versatility of American lobster. This resource covers everything potential overseas buyers need to know, from the history of lobstering and sustainable harvesting practices to taste, shell types, and product forms.

With the help of the Maine Lobster Dealers’ Association, we also produced two short videos. The videos showcases the steps U.S. lobster suppliers take to ensure their high-quality products arrive safely overseas and what importers need to do to keep the product at its peak once it arrives and before distribution to their end customers.

These updates represent just a few of our collaborative efforts to open export markets and build new relationships with buyers for the American lobster industry, activities that are at the core of what we do. It’s a collaborative effort and we want Maine’s lobster industry to know they can call on us for support.

Recent Promotional Activities

We recently participated in two separate restaurant weeks in Germany – one in Berlin and one in Hamburg. At the Berlin event, which had a Roaring Twenties theme, 59 restaurants participated. In Hamburg, 11 restaurants were actively engaged in the city’s event, which was brand new and centered around the theme “Shall We Eat Meat?” Between the two events, 30 of the restaurants served American lobster. Both events built on last year’s U.S. lobster roll promotion in Berlin, and the plan is to use this successful format again in the future.

Vietnam is another export market that Food Export–Northeast is focusing on to build awareness of American lobster. Vietnam is a high seafood consumption country, but demand is outpacing what the country itself can supply, making it a potentially strong market for American lobster. As in other regions, we are creating a country-wide, multi-pronged promotional effort using social media and promotions at the retail store and foodservice levels. Just this month we hosted our first food-service event at Golden Gate’s King BBQ in Ho Chi Minh City where chefs crafted dishes featuring American lobster.

Food Export–Northeast is developing further opportunities for lobster exporters to engage with foreign buyers in 2020 and utilize our funding support to enhance their presence in overseas markets. To further assist with foreign buyer relations, we are producing new educational materials and conducting lobster promotions in restaurants and retail stores to generate consumer awareness and demand for American lobster.
ings would gradually decline over time. This was not news for lobstermen since no one expects lobster landings will increase forever.

**Lobster Bait**

The early months of 2019 were consumed by discussions of how the lobster industry would cope with the looming bait crisis. At the start of the year, NMFS was considering two alternatives to reduce the herring quota, resulting in either a 51% or a 70% reduction compared to 2018. The MLA urged NMFS to set the quota higher and phase in reductions in future years. Ultimately NMFS selected the most precautionary option, reducing the 2019 herring quota to a meager 15,065 mt.

The New England Fishery Management Council then redefined overfishing to be more consistent with the 2018 benchmark herring stock assessment, and further reduced the herring quota for 2020 and 2021 to 11,571 mt, a staggering 77% reduction from 2018. The 2021 specifications likely will be revisited following a new stock assessment scheduled to take place in 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes in Herring Quota</th>
<th>2020/2021 Quota</th>
<th>2019 Quota</th>
<th>2018 Quota</th>
<th>Reduction from 2018 to 2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,571</td>
<td>15,065</td>
<td>49,900</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Area 1A</td>
<td>3,344</td>
<td>4,354</td>
<td>27,743</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 1B</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>2,639</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 2</td>
<td>3,217</td>
<td>4,188</td>
<td>8,200</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 3</td>
<td>4,513</td>
<td>5,876</td>
<td>11,318</td>
<td>50%</td>
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If New Brunswick weir fishery landings are below the trigger on Oct 1; 1,000 mt will be added back to the Area 1A ACL. The SEC recommends 9,931 mt quota in 2020 and 2021.

To prepare for the drastic cuts in herring quota, DMR organized several meetings with herring and menhaden fishermen to ensure fair access to the resource for all segments of the fleet. Maine adopted rules requiring state water vessels to report daily via email and adopted reduced landing limits for Maine’s mobile and fixed gear fishermen.

On the menhaden front, Maine’s goal was to provide fishing opportunities for all sectors of the fleet to maximize access to the state and episodic quotas and to seek quota transfer from other states if menhaden were abundant in Maine waters. The MLA advocated to maintain opportunities for small boats in the menhaden fishery by setting lower daily landing limits.

DMR’s rules for the state’s 2019 quota-based menhaden fishery included strict reporting requirements and daily and weekly vessel landing limits. The small-scale fishery was required to report monthly and store fish in barrels or totes, but maintained its 6,000 pound daily landing limit and ban on sale or transfer of fish to other vessels. Fixed gear harvesting was subject to the same daily and weekly landing limits as the mobile gear fishery and the state re-instated a personal use regulation for hook and line harvest. Maine fished into its state quota quickly, but the Commissioner was successful in transferring quota from several other states and gaining access to the full episodic quota greatly increasing Maine’s menhaden landings.

In an effort to further diversify Maine’s lobster bait supply, DMR spent considerable time exploring options to allow new sources of carp to be fished as bait in the lobster fishery, however, these ultimately were not approved. The DMR did approve two significant new baits sources, Gulf of Mexico menhaden and whole blackbelly rosefish from Uruguay. The slower pace of fishing, diversification did approve two significant new baits sources, Gulf of Mexico menhaden and whole blackbelly rosefish from Uruguay. The slower pace of fishing, diversification

**Right Whales and the Lobster Fishery**

The right whale issue took center stage for the MLA during 2019. No issue has come close to the complexity and importance of the proposed right whale regulations during the MLA’s existence. While the year kicked off with some good news — seven calves were born in 2019 — the year closed with bad news. Ten cases to 1 case)

The right whale issue took center stage for the MLA during 2019. No issue has come close to the complexity and importance of the proposed right whale regulations during the MLA’s existence. While the year kicked off with some good news — seven calves were born in 2019 — the year closed with bad news. Ten cases to 1 case)

The only known U.S. entanglement in 2014 did not occur in Maine gear but moved from right whales. When the dust settled, it became clear that the risk reduction goal and corresponding rules contemplated by NMFS were over-reaching and could have devastating impacts on Maine’s lobster fishery and communities. The MLA did a deep dive into NMFS’ data to better understand which fisheries and gear were involved in right whale entanglements. The MLA’s research revealed dramatic findings:

- **Confirmed U.S. fishing gear does not exceed PBR (0.2 from 2013 to 2017)**
- **Since 2010, ropes of diameter ≥ ½” or greater represent 79% of the rope removed from right whales.**

Based on these findings, the MLA sent a letter to NOAA Chief Chris Oliver in August withdrawing support for the TRT consensus agreement and raising strong concerns that NMFS had not based its management action on the best available data. While it was clear that Maine lobstermen ultimately would have to reduce vertical lines and consider options on weakened rope, the bigger challenge became how to scale those measures appropriately to address the

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<tr>
<td>6 (1 M, 4 NSI)</td>
<td>E8-98 (MA)</td>
<td>E8-98 (MA)</td>
<td>E8-98 (MA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 (1 NSI)</td>
<td>E8-98 (MA)</td>
<td>E8-98 (MA)</td>
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**entanglement risk to right whales by 60% and phase in reductions in future years. Ultimately NMFS selected the most precautionary option, reducing the 2019 herring quota to a meager 15,065 mt.**

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actual risk posed by the fishery — not the arbitrary 60% reduction goal stipulated by the Agency. This remains a challenge.

This new information does not mean that Maine is off the hook in identifying management measures to help right whales recover. The species is in decline and Maine must take responsibility for its role. However, the MLA has continually stressed that regulating U.S. fishermen will not prevent right whales from dying in Canada and applying U.S. regulations only to lobstermen will not solve entanglement problems in this country.

The MLA has been active on several other fronts on the whale issue. The MLA attended the annual meetings of the Ropeless Fishing Consortium and North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium, giving a presentation on the MLA’s position on right whales at the latter. The MLA attended the three day peer review gathering on DMR’s decision support tool, raising many concerns over the model’s ability to accurately assess management proposals to protect right whales. The MLA submitted written comments highlighting MLA members’ concerns through all formal rulemaking actions, including scoping and the Marine Mammal Protection Act’s (MMPA) List of Fisheries, and submitted several formal letters to NOAA and the media. The MLA has also worked closely with Maine’s Congressional delegation, NMFS and DMR, to keep each informed of MLA members’ concerns as the right whale rules progress. The MLA is conducting a survey of its members and will submit its own whale plan to NMFS early in 2020.

In June, the DMR held industry meetings and presented an array of risk reduction options to lobstermen with extremely aggressive strategies to remove 50% of vertical lines. Based on feedback from lobstermen, DMR announced in November a scaled-back plan with new trawl minimums based on distance from shore, weak points in endlines and gear marking. The revised plan does not propose measures for gear fished in Maine’s exempt waters. The revised DMR plan was greeted with some support, but also raised a host of safety, operational and economic concerns from lobstermen.

The MLA voted not to support DMR’s plan. In a written statement, the association noted its decision was based on concern that DMR’s plan “seeks reductions that exceed the documented risk posed by the Maine lobster fishery as demonstrated in MLA’s analysis of NMFS data” (see August 31 Letter). The MLA conducted a thorough analysis of fishing gear removed from entangled right whales which revealed that lobster is the least prevalent gear. The MLA is also concerned the state’s plan creates unresolved safety and operational challenges for some sectors of the lobster industry.”

The whale issue will remain a significant challenge for MLA and its members in 2020 and beyond. To ensure that MLA members’ concerns are both heard and addressed, the MLA will continue to arm itself with data, work with its talented legal team, and work closely with the MLA Board and members to effectively articulate the safety, operational and economic challenges that the various whale-related regulations will pose for lobstermen. The MLA will continue to argue our case through the regulatory process, the courts, with federal agency staff, DMR and our elected officials. We will continue to educate the media and the public about all that Maine lobstermen have done to protect right whales in the past and are doing today to keep the Gulf of Maine safe for the species.

Right Whales and Maine Lobster in 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April</th>
<th>DMR holds three industry meetings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>DMR releases draft risk reduction goal and TRT process plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>DMR letter to NMFS regarding concerns over risk reduction goal and TRT process plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>DMR letter to NOAA with comments from TRT consensus agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>NMFS holds four scoping meetings in Maine</td>
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MLA Expands Legal Defense Team

In October, the MLA officially welcomed Jane Luxton to its Legal Defense Team. Luxton, a partner in the Washington, DC office of Lewis Brisbois, joins MLA’s long-standing attorney Mary Anne Mason, who has led MLA’s legal effort since June 2017. Luxton has served in prominent positions in the federal government, including general counsel for NOAA from 2007-2009. The MLA’s stellar team is implementing a multi-pronged strategy to champion the interests of Maine lobstermen and ensure that management efforts are effective in reversing the decline of the right whale population. As part of this effort, the MLA in an intervenor in the court case brought against NMFS by the conservation community and remains the only party from Maine with a presence in the case.

ASMFIC Sets Lobster Control Date: NMFS proposes same in August

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFIC) established a lobster and Jonah crab fishery control date of April 29, 2019 for the current federal and state permit holders and any potential new entrants to the fishery that eligibility to participate in the commercial fishing in the future may be affected by the person’s or vessel’s past participation and associated documentation of landings, effort, and/or gear configuration prior to the control date. NOAAs is conducting rulemaking to adopt this date for federal waters lobstermen. This means that any new entrants to the fishery after April 29, 2019, may be treated differently than those with fishing history prior to that date.

DMR rope study

The MLA continues to partner with DMR on the department’s rope study, which includes a gear survey to obtain baseline data on rope size and gear configurations fished by lobstermen, testing the functional breaking strength of vertical lines in use in the fishery, and understanding the strain vertical lines are under when hauling under various conditions. The survey had responses from Maine, 139 responses from Massachusetts, 57 responses from New Hampshire, 13 responses from Rhode Island, and 11 responses from offshore fishermen. DMR tested the relationship between rope breaking strength, diameter, rope...
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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Sonington, 367-2731
2nd VP: Darin Delano
Friendship, 542-7241
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Craig Stuart, Long Island, 829-2109
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Chris Welsh, Kennebunk, 205-3993

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Board of Directors' Meeting Schedule
All meetings take place in Belfast, unless otherwise indicated.

January 8, 3:00 p.m., Darby’s restaurant.
March 6 MLA Annual Meeting
9 a.m., Samoset Resort

MLA DIRECTORS MEETING SUMMARY

The MLA board met on December 10 in Belfast. Patrice McCarron updated the board on MLA’s extensive work on the whale rules. Immediately following the November board meeting, the MLA announced that it did not support the state’s whale plan because the risk reduction goal goes too far. The MLA will draft a survey to seek input from members to be used to propose an alternate whale plan. The MLA supports the DMR submitting the state’s plan to NOAA for analysis but believes it is very important for the Association to submit an alternate plan for analysis.

The MLA Board had an in-depth discussion on the draft survey to solicit input from MLA members on alternate whale rules. The survey will be distributed in late December, and results will be reviewed by the board at the January meeting.

The MLA submitted written comments to NOAA on the Marine Mammal Protection Act’s List of Fisheries. The MLA requested that the agency acknowledge the minimal interactions between Maine lobster gear and right whales and the decline in lobster-related entanglements since the implementation of the whale rules. NOAAs categorization of each commercial fishery in its List of Fisheries is used as the basis to manage interactions with marine mammal species.

The MLA attended two important whale meetings in November: the Ropeless Fishing Consortium and North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium. The Ropeless Fishing Consortium announced receipt of a three-year grant of $900,000 from a private foundation to continue development of ropeless fishing technology. The meeting showed the work of eight companies working to develop ropeless fishing technologies. Significant progress has been made on developing acoustic releases for ropeless traps and inflatable bags, however, implementing this technology at a broad scale remains a significant challenge. Most of these systems are being developed for field trials by small groups of fishermen in distinct geographic areas. Several fishermen who have conducted local field tests report that many issues remain unresolved. FMI: www.ropeless.org.

The North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium convened for two days with updates on research and policy related to right whales. During the meeting, Patrice McCarron presented the MLA’s concern over the development of new whale protection rules and the industry’s strong opposition to the lobster industry being solely targeted. McCarron presented data showing that NMFS is not addressing known sources of serious injury and mortality (such as Canadian fishing gear, other U.S. commercial fishing gear and ship strikes) and showed that entanglement rates in U.S. lobster gear have declined significantly since 10. Other presentations included updates on right whale population trends, U.S. and Canadian management efforts, right whale surveillance and monitoring, and efforts to monitor and present ship strikes and entanglements in the U.S. and Canada. FMI: www.narwc.org.

The MLA attended the peer review of NOAA’s decision support tool held over three days in November in Woods Hole, MA. NOAA contracted the Center for Independent Experts to do the review, which selected three independent scientists to review the modelling tool. The peer review meeting included a thorough presentation of Northeast lobster fishing effort data, Northeast right whale data and distribution model, and modelling and methods to develop a measure of the risk posed by different types of trap/pot gear based on rope size and trawl length. A draft report was expected in December 2019. FMI: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/event/peer-review-right-whale-decision-support-tool.

The Maine delegation sent a letter to NOAA on December 4, once again expressing concern over the impacts of the developing whale rules on the Maine lobster fishery. The MLA expressed its strong objection to NOAA’s website on right whales and entanglement, which the MLA believes unfairly targets the lobster industry. The MLA provided the delegation with an in-depth analysis of the misinformation and other deficiencies of the website, which they included in their letter to NOAA.

Patrice provided several additional updates to the board. NOAA has implemented Amendment 8 to the federal harbor management plan. This is the final action that will change the method for setting the herring quota and ban midwater trawlers within a 12 nautical mile buffer from the shore and within 25 nautical miles of Cape Cod. This is the federal implementation of the management plan passed by the New England Fishery Management Council in October 2018.

The Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management (BOEM) will hold its first Gulf of Maine Offshore Wind Task Force meeting in December to discuss the region’s goals and begin planning for offshore wind development in the region. The MLA is a member of RODA (Responsible Offshore Development Alliance) to ensure that MLA members are well represented as offshore wind development planning progresses.

The MLA is seeking member nominations to serve a three-year term on the MLA board beginning March 2020. The MLA Directors will finalize the slate of nominees in February for presentation to the membership at the Annual meeting in March.

The next MLA Directors meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 8 at Darby’s in Belfast; this date will be confirmed in January. The MLA Annual meeting will be held on Friday, March 6, during the Maine Fishermen’s Forum at the Samoset Resort.

ROPELESS FISHING UPDATES


EdgeTech: uses acoustics to releaseroveatow in a trap on bottom.
Teledyne Marine: developing acoustic transponders, releases and modems
DBV technology: developing a sub-sea Ris system using acoustics and lift bags
Desert Star: developing acoustic releases for stowed rope bags
WHOI/NEAg: developing acoustic releases for large spools of stowed rope
SMELTs: developing lift bags for deployment on traps
Ashore: developing acoustic release for trap with stowed rope.
Lobsterlift: developing acoustic release to inflate a buoy.

Continued on page 8
The SeaWorld & Busch Gardens Conservation Fund has pledged $900,000 over the next three years to be used to test fishing gear that is non-lethal to whales. "Whales and sea turtles commonly entangle in ropes that connect crab or lobster traps on the sea floor to buoys on the sea surface. These ropes allow fishermen to haul their traps to the sea surface, and the buoy allows fishermen to locate gear. Removing this end line from trap and pot fishing gear will significantly reduce or even eliminate entanglements. There are promising prototypes available for evaluation by scientists, regulators and fishermen, but few resources for proper testing of these systems," SeaWorld wrote in its announcement. "Support by the SeaWorld Conservation Fund will be used to evaluate the cost, the operational impact to the fishermen and the safety for the whales, as well as advance public awareness of the issues."

### HERRING LANDINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Quota 2019</th>
<th>% 2019 Quota Landed YTD</th>
<th>Cumulative Catch 2019 YTD</th>
<th>Landings at this time last year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A</td>
<td>5,184</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>4,690</td>
<td>25,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>2,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4,062</td>
<td>117%</td>
<td>4,737</td>
<td>6,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5,700</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>3,145</td>
<td>9,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15,574</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>12,712</td>
<td>43,330</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The area 1A fishery closed on November 26, 2019 when NOAA Fisheries projected that 92% of the area 1A herring quota had been harvested. The period 4 (November and December) fishery which opened November 3 was allocated 366 mt. The quota was increased by 1,000 mt because the New Brunswick weir fishery landed less than 4,000 mt through October 1, 2019. The fishery was allowed two consecutive landing days starting on November 3.

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to these fine businesses, the MLA's Keeper members!

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Bowdoin College
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Chapman & Chapman
Chase Leavitt
Coastal Documentation
Conary Cove Lobster Co.
Cousins Maine Lobster
Crazy Lobster & Shellfish
Cushing Diesel, LLC.
Downeast Boat Co.
F.A. Peabody Insurance
Farrin’s Boathouse
Fineskind Scenic Cruises
First National Bank
F. W. Thurston Co. Inc.
Georgetown Fishermen’s Cooperative
Grundens
Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation
Guy Cotten, Inc.
Infab Refractories Inc.

In 2018, ASMFC’s Northern Shrimp Section extended the existing moratorium on commercial fishing through 2021. The three-year moratorium was in response to continued low levels of biomass and recruitment. The results of the most recent stock assessment indicate that the northern shrimp stock in the Gulf of Maine was depleted in 2018, with spawning stock biomass (SSB) at extremely low levels since 2013. Shrimp data collected in 2019 includes the summer shrimp survey, 2018 NEFSC fall survey data, and the 2019 ME-NH spring inshore data. The 2019 NEFSC fall survey data are not yet available. Data and analysis from 2019 indicate no improvement in the status of the shrimp stock. Indices of abundance, biomass, and spawning stock biomass reached new time-series lows. Recruitment was well below the 2018 level and the third-lowest in the time series. Environmental conditions continued to be unfavorable for northern shrimp.
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### Offshore Commercial Type I Life Vest

- 50/45 grade reflective tape. Light loop and whistle attachment. 32 lb buoyancy.
- $313.60
- Adult Universal Order 748930

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### IMPERIAL USCG APPROVED

#### Adult Universal Cold Water Immersion Suit

- Retro reflective tape. Wide legs for easy donning. Snug fitting face seal. Includes bag and whistle.
- KVS:1409.A
- Order 743829

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### Aquaculture Supplies

#### Fish Baskets

- Plastic with handles and holes for draining. Approximately 1 bushel capacity.
- $19.99 ea
- Green Order 763280
- Orange Order 118243

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### Hairless Salted Pig Hide Lobster Bait

- NOW IN STOCK!
- 5/16" Black Shock Cord
  - 43¢/ft $103.99 500 ft Spool
  - 43¢/ft $114.56 500 ft Spool
- 500 ft Spool

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### Electric Rope Cutting Guns

- 100 Watt
  - Order 127675 $32.82 ea
- 120 Watt
  - Order 73663 $36.19 ea

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### Offshore Commercial Type I Life Vest

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- Green Order 118243

---

### Long Line

- #7 twist cord. Sold in 1000 ft reel.

---

### Fuzzy Rope

- 1/2" black. Sold in 1200 ft coils. For use in mussel farming.
- AD: FIBS8K Order 763256

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### Lantern Nets

- Aquaculture lantern nets, for use in scallop farming.
- Description
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  - 4mm / 7 liter Order 756970
  - 9mm / 5 liter Order 763278
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MLA Seeks Nominations for Board of Directors

MLA Members -- Don’t miss your opportunity to influence the future of your organization and your industry!

Overview of MLA Board
• Maximum # of Board members: 21
• Current Board: 21 members
• Number of Directors with Terms expiring: 7
• Average age of MLA Board: 50
• Youngest MLA Board member: 26
• Oldest MLA Board member: 71

NOMINATION Requirements
• To make a nomination, you must be an MLA member in good standing.
• All nominees must hold a Maine lobster license & be an MLA member in good standing.
• Feel free to nominate yourself, or someone else.

Nominee Information (must be MLA member)
Name: ____________________________
Fishing Port: ______________________
Zone: ______ Town of residence: ______
Please let us know how this nominee could contribute to the MLA Board: __________________________________________________________________________

Person submitting nomination (must be MLA member)
Name: ____________________________
Lobster Lic. #: ____________________

Mail your nomination to the MLA office: MLA, 2 Storer St, Ste 203, Kennebunk, ME 04043
Or feel free to call in your nomination to 967-4555 or email: patrice@mainelobstermen.org.

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### MLA Member Discount Directory

#### Vessel Insurance
- **Smithwick & Mariners Insurance**
  Falmouth, ME -- Discounted vessel insurance plus 5% discount with proof of CG approved Drill Conductor course w/in the last 5 years. Wooden boat, Builders coverage, no lay up period, discounted electronics deductible, and automatic coverage of researchers and more! Call Scott Smithwick 207-370-1883

#### Lobster & Seafood
- **Crazy Lobster & Shellfish**
  Portland, ME -- 20% off the entire site: www.crazylobstershellfish.com
- **Cape Porpoise Lobster**
  Cape Porpoise, ME -- 10% off picked lobster meat. 800-967-4268
- **Winter Harbor Fishermen's Coop**
  Winter Harbor, ME -- 10% off picked lobster meat. 207-963-5887

#### Accounting
- **Back River Tax Accounting**
  Brunswick, ME -- Free initial consultation and review of previous tax returns. 207-607-7118

#### Automotive
- **Newcastle Chrysler-Dodge-Jeep**
  Newcastle, ME -- 3 years of oil changes (total of 12) for all vehicles, cars and trucks, when you purchase a new or used vehicle. 207-563-3959

#### Bait
- **Bessy Bait, LLC**
  Seabrook, NH -- $5 discount per drum on multiple drum purchases (must show current MLA card). 603-300-2846

#### Boat Builders/Repairs
- **SW Boatworks**
  Laponic, ME -- $1000 discount for hull or top. on a 38' CB or 44' CB. 207-667-7427

#### Electronic Equipment
- **Navtronics, LLC**
  York, ME -- 5% off of purchases. 207-363-1150

#### Fuel
- **Atlantic Edge Lobster**
  Boothbay Harbor, ME -- Fuel discount for MLA members. 207-633-2300

#### Fishing, Marine & Industrial
- **Hamilton Marine**
  Southport, Boothbay, Portland, Southwest Harbor, Jonesport, ME -- Discounts available to commercial fishermen.
- **North Atlantic Power Products**
  Exeter, NH -- 10% discount on parts and service. 603-418-0470

#### Hotels
- **Hampton Inn, Ellsworth**
  Ellsworth, ME -- 10% discount on all stock items for MLA members. 603-474-7194
- **Hampton Inn, Downtown-Waterfront**
  Portland, ME
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  Rockland, ME
- **Residence Inn by Marriott**
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#### Hydraulics
- **Coastal Hydraulics**
  Seabrook, NH -- 10% discount on all in stock items for MLA members. 603-474-7194
- **Hews Company, LLC**
  South Portland, ME -- 10% off hydraulic components & Cable Craft cables. 207-767-2136

#### Legal Services
- **Law Office of Crystal Tarjick**
  Port Clyde, ME -- 10% off all legal services for MLA members. 207-691-2633

#### Lawns, Landscape & Equipment
- **Penobscot Marine Museum**
  Searsport, ME -- Free admission for MLA members.
- **Maine Maritime Museum**
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- **Mount Desert Oceanarium**
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#### Propellers
- **New England Propeller Inc**
  Plymouth, MA -- Discounts on marine propeller, shafting, and related items, sales & repairs. 508-746-8804
- **Nautilus Marine Fabrication, Inc.**
  Trenton, ME -- 5% Discount on propeller reconditioning. 207-667-1119

#### Refrigeration Services
- **Applied Refrigeration Services**
  Windham, ME -- $250 off new installations. 207-893-0145

#### Safety Training & Equipment
- **Liferaft Services, LLC**
  York, ME -- 5% off liferaft repack with proof of MLA membership. CAN be combined with other promotions. 207-363-2200
- **McMillan Offshore Survival Training**
  Portland, ME -- 25% discount on USCG Drill Conductor training. 207-338-1603

#### Show your MLA card to receive great discounts at these fine businesses!
By MLA staff

In late January, lobstermen, seafood dealers, scientists and others from the United States and Canada will gather in the New Brunswick city of Moncton for the Lobster Town Meeting organized by The Lobster Institute at the University of Maine. This is the 16th time the two-day event has occurred since its inception in 2004. “It is an industry-wide gathering of lobstermen and other interested parties that come together to discuss the status of the lobster resource (Homarus americanus) and the business of lobstering — from the perspective of the fisher,” according to a press release from The Lobster Institute. The event, which takes place January 24-25, will allow fishermen to get a more complete picture of the current state of the lobster industry in Canada and the U.S. and of future challenges.

The Lobster Town Meeting will start with welcoming remarks by Dr. Rick Wahle, executive director of The Lobster Institute, and Annie Tselikis, executive director of the Maine Lobster Dealers Association. Topics for the first day include “Lobster Processing in North America,” “Lobster Marketing Techniques,” and “North Atlantic Right Whales.” On the second day participants will hear a session on media relations before taking part in a discussion on challenges and opportunities in the lobster fishery on both sides of the border. Panels invited to the meeting include representatives from Inland Seafood, Tangier Lobster, the Cranberry Isles Fishermen’s Cooperative, the Maine Department of Marine Resources, and the Maritime Fisheries Union of New Brunswick.

The major sponsor for this year’s Town Meeting is UNI Financial Cooperation, a Francophone credit union based in New Brunswick. Other sponsors include the Maine Department of Marine Resources, Maine Sea Grant, University of Maine Office of Research, University of Maine Canadian-American Center, Shediac Lobster, and the Lobster Council of Canada.

DMR HIRES AMBER LISI TO LEAD SCALLOP RESEARCH

The Department of Marine Resources recently hired Amber Lisi to lead research efforts for the state scallop fishery.

For the past year, Lisi has served as a fisheries research technician for the Marine Fisheries Field Research Group (MFFRG) at UMass Dartmouth’s School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST). She oversees undergraduate lab technicians and graduate students who were conducting at-sea and laboratory research on the Atlantic sea scallop, Placopecten magellanicus, and the Patagonian scallop, Zygoclymenys patagonica. The research focused on the use of high-resolution imagery to assess population dynamics, including spatial distribution, local abundance, global abundance, life-history parameters, and habitat.

Her responsibilities also included serving as chief scientist for multiple at-sea surveys, providing quality control for image analysis, assisting with grant proposal writing and reporting, and presenting research at international conferences and to the public. Lisi received a Bachelor of Science degree in Marine Biology from the University of Rhode Island in 2012 and a Master of Science degree in Marine Biology from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth in 2017.

As the lead biologist for Maine’s sea scallop fishery, Lisi is responsible for the coordination, implementation, and participation in the sea scallop survey, sampling, and assessment program. She will coordinate the surveying, sampling and analysis of the inshore and offshore components of the state’s scallop resource and supervising seasonal fishery independent dredge surveys, in-season surveys, monitoring of the scallop commercial catch and effort while also maintaining the scallop sampling database. Lisi will serve as a member of the New England Fisheries Management Council’s Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT).
modifications, and number of seasons fished. Results show that both di- ameter, rope modifications, and number of seasons fished significantly im- pact breaking strength. Rope diameter and presence of knots and splices have the strongest influence on breaking strength, followed by the number of seasons fished. The project team also mentions that many different lines are under while being hauled in varying fishing conditions and gear configurations. Eleven fishermen have participated to date. Based on the initial research findings, vertical line strain is most affected by the combi- nation of traps per trawl and the depth in which the gear is set.

DMR is continuing to test various rope modifications that would meet a weak rope standard, if required under the whole plan. These include vari- ations of different rope diameters, knot and splice configurations, and implementing weak devices into rope such as swivels, dogbones or other weak links. The MLA is also partnering with DMR to field-test time tension line cutters as a potential alternative to weakening endlines.

**Gear Marking**

In 2019 DMR finalized new gear marking requirements to be implemented by September, 2020. MLA members voiced strong support for Maine lob- stermen to mark vertical lines differently than other states. Under Maine’s new gear marking rules, lob- stermen fishing in Maine’s ex- empt waters are required to place a 12” purple mark in the middle and bottom of the line and a 36” mark at the top. Gear in fished Maine’s non-exempt waters must be marked with three 12” purple marks at the top, middle and bottom of the, a 36” mark within in the top two Fathom of the endline, with a 6” green mark in the top gear marking.

**Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative**

The MLA continues to support and collaborate with the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative (MLMC). The MLA is in regular communica- tion with the Collaborative to ensure that messaging on emerging issues is tightly coordinated. The MLA directs the many media calls received through our office to the Collaborative for vetting and response. The MLA worked closely with the Collaborative to develop a proactive campaign to communicate the facts about right whales and the Maine lobster industry. Through this effort, the Collaborative launched an information hub, www. rightwhalesandmaine.com, which features facts about the Maine lobster fishery's efforts to protect right whales, as well as videos highlight- ing the industry’s whale conservation efforts.

The MLA has also supported the evolution of the MLMC’s marketing plan for Maine lobster. The 2020 workplan shifts away from its chef- and con- sommer-driven focus to also encompass supply chain initiatives.

**129th Legislature, First Session**

MLA staff and board members weighed in on many lobster bills during the First session of the 129th Maine Legislature. The Marine Resources Committee considered an array of lobster bills on issues including the amount of time on the waiting list, grey zone fishing hours, the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative funding structure, and marine debris. In the end, only a few of these bills made it into law, including a bill to clarify how the temporary medical allowance works, a bill for a pilot program to al- low grey zone lobstermen to fish 24 hours during September and October, a bill to allow Class III license holders to take up to four unlicensed crewmem- bers, and a bill to allow Monhegan student license holders to fish during the closed season. The lobster waiting list bill was carried over to the next session in January 2020. Several important bills of interest to the lobster in- dustry were passed outside the Marine Resources Committee. These include a bill to prohibit offshore oil and natural gas drilling, the Governor’s Climate Change bill, and a bill directing the Maine State Planning Board to seek out the necessary time to seek out potential workable solutions to meet the Tier 4 standards through 2024 for vessels with non-metal hulls up to 50 feet in length. This will allow Maine’s boat builders and marine engine manufacturers the necessary time to seek out potential workable solutions to meet the Tier 4 requirements. However, the MLA is not optimistic that affordable, operation- ally feasible solutions will be available given the lack of progress to date, or war- ranted given the low level of emissions from this marine engine sector.

**Aquaculture**

The MLA remains supportive of Maine’s aquaculture industry as an important segment of the state’s working waterfront. Many lobstermen are diversifying into aquaculture, which is a good fit for many fishermen and coastal communities. However, the MLA has expressed its concerns over the rate of growth in the aquaculture industry, siting aquaculture leases that are greater than 10 acres in size, and the movement towards consolidating existing leases into larger footprints. The MLA believes the state must ensure that the aquaculture permitting process adequately consults existing users as one means of regulat- ing the pace of aquaculture expansion.

The MLA is also monitoring the development of two land-based recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS) in Belfast and Bucksport. Whole Oceans is mov- ing the pace of aquaculture expansion.

**Maine’s off shore wind task force**

In response to the re-emergence of interest in off shore wind development in the Gulf of Maine, the MLA has joined RODA (Responsible Offshore Development Alliance) to ensure the association is prepared to effectively represent our members interests on this issue.

**Lifefloats for Lobstermen**

There were a few bright spots for the lobster fishery in 2019. Topping the list was the Lifefloats for Lobstermen project. In April, two fieldwork coordinators with the Northeast Center for Occupational Safety and Health began an eight- month adventure, travelling in two vans from port to port along the Maine and Massachusetts coastlines. The vans carried 11 models of personal fl otation de- vices (PFDs) available for purchase at a 50% discount. The vans visited 53 ports over 26 days to train and educate the gearmen on the project and give lobstermen an opportunity to try on and purchase lifefloats. The project surpassed expectations, distributing 1,076 lifefloats to Northeast lobstermen. The MLA was the Center’s partner in Maine.

**Tier 4 Engines**

The MLA’s work in collaboration with Peter Emerson of Mack Boring and Parts to help lobstermen comply with the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Tier 4 engine emissions requirements was successful in late summer, the EPA promised delaying this requirement until 2021.

The MLA testified on behalf of MLA members in support of EPA’s proposal in September at the public hearing in Bath and submitted written comments in support of the agency’s proposal to extend the implementation time to imple- ment the Tier 4 engine emission standard. The MLA comments state, “The current Tier 4 marine diesel engine emission standard is a mismatch for the Maine lobster fleet. Over the short-term, the MLA supports the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) proposal to phase in the implementation of the Tier 4 standards through 2024 for vessels with non-metal hulls up to 50 feet in length. This will allow Maine’s boat builders and marine engine manufacturers the necessary time to seek out potential workable solutions to meet the Tier 4 requirements. However, the MLA is not optimistic that affordable, operation- ally feasible solutions will be available given the lack of progress to date, or war- ranted given the low level of emissions from this marine engine sector.”

**Membership Benefits**

While policy and advocacy are the bread and butter of MLA’s work, the MLA also strives to offer a meaningful membership program to lobstermen. The MLA maintains a robust portfolio of benefits for its members including the MLA’s vessel insurance program, monthly newspaper, weekly email updates on relevant news, weekly lobster, bait and fuel prices, and business discounts.

**What’s next?**

As we’ve done since 1954, the MLA will continue to pursue its mission to ad- vocate for a sustainable lobster resource and the fisherman and communities that depend on it. The MLA has been in business for more than 60 years, a sign of its value to Maine’s lobstering communities. That so much can be accom- plished in a single year with only two employees is an indication of the dedica- tion of the MLA’s board of directors and staff.

Please take some time to consider all that the MLA has done on your behalf during this past year. And I hope to see you at the Annual Meeting in March!
SAFETY AT SEA TAKES A LEAP FORWARD

By Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety staff

Commercial fishing is one of the most dangerous occupations, and the East Coast has the highest number of commercial fishing fatalities in the United States. For New England commercial lobstermen, falls overboard are the most frequent cause of death. Researchers at the Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety (NEC) have been working to change that, one lifejacket at a time.

Based in Bassett Healthcare Network’s Chamberlain Center in Fly Creek, NY, the NEC is one of 11 agricultural centers across the country designated and funded by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Serving a 12-state region from Maine to West Virginia, the NEC promotes health and safety research, education, and prevention activities in the high-risk areas of farming, commercial fishing and logging.

Since 2016, NEC researchers have evaluated barriers that lobstermen experience when considering wearing lifejackets. In April, researchers embarked on a campaign to distribute lifejackets from two vans travelling from port to port along the Maine and Massachusetts coastlines. The “Lifejackets for Lobstermen” vans carried 11 models of personal flotation devices (PFDs), available at a 50% discount. The selection was the culmination of more than 550 lobstermen giving guidance over the course of three years on the “ideal” working lifejacket.

“The fishermen have guided all of our research, telling us what would help and, equally importantly, what wouldn’t work.” said Rebecca Weil, a research coordinator for the study. Two fieldwork coordinators navigated 10,000 miles up and down the coastline, parking the vans at 53 ports for a total of 159 days to promote the project and give lobstermen a chance to try on and purchase the lifejackets. The project surpassed expectations, distributing 1,076 PFDs to Northeast lobstermen.

“We all know someone that hasn’t come home. Most of us know many.” said Weil. “At least one life has already been saved, and that makes all the effort worth it.”

One Cohasset, Massachusetts, lobsterman told researchers at one of the vans’ port stops, “We all know someone that hasn’t come home. Most of us know many.”

The project has been so successful that Fishing Partnership Support Services, a non-profit fishing industry health and safety organization, will be continuing the work of Lifejackets for Lobstermen in 2020. As part of Fishing Partnership’s free courses on safety and survival at sea, one of the vans will be used to provide fishermen the opportunity to learn about the importance of lifejackets, the options available to them and the chance to purchase lifejackets at the same 50% discount.

“We couldn’t have done this without all the community support and we are so excited to see it continue.” noted Jessica Echard, a research coordinator. NEC has been collaborating on this project with Fishing Partnership Support Services, Maine Lobstermen’s Association, Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association, McMillan Offshore Survival Training, and the Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen’s Association.

See images and follow the vans’ journey from port to port on the project’s Facebook page, @life-jacketsforlobstermen. Preliminary study findings were reported in an article written by NEC and Bassett Research Institute researchers and published in the October issue of the Journal of Agromedicine. The project was also featured in the April issue of Forbes magazine as well as by a wide variety of television, radio, print and online media sources throughout New England.

The Lifejacket Project Team wants to thank all the fishermen, families and communities who are making safety such a priority. Manufacturers who made this all possible were Mustang Survival Systems, Kent Safety Products, Hyde Sportswear, Stormline Gear, Hero Water Wear, Coleman/Stearns, Spinlock, and West Marine. While many retailers helped us along the way, special thanks go to Downeast Fishing Gear, Hercules SRL, and Brooks Trap Mill for being integral to the project’s success.
best areas for offshore wind development, resulting in 15 leases in the Atlantic extending from Massachusetts to North Carolina. Through these leases, at least a dozen projects are slated for development through the 2020s.

BOEM is responsible for giving the green light for any offshore wind development. However, the development of Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) resources requires coordination and information exchange among the states. As part of the planning process, BOEM convenes a regional task force to coordinate planning efforts among regional, state and federal governments, to exchange data and information and to discuss concerns. This is a formal process which takes place through the established BOEM regulatory framework. Task Force membership is limited to federal, state and local governments, but the public is encouraged to attend and participate. The Task Force’s role is advisory; all decisions ultimately are made by the Secretary of the Interior.

There are four phases to establish an operational renewable energy project.

- Planning and analysis (up to 2 years): to develop, refine and optimize lease areas and includes the task force, call for information and nominations, area identification, and environmental reviews.
- Leasing (1 to 2 years): to issue a lease and includes proposed sale notice, final sale notice, auction, lease issuance.
- Site assessment (5 years): allows a lessee to conduct a site characterization (geophysical, geological, biological surveys), and create a site assessment plan to assess wind resources (through a meteorological buoy or tower).
- Construction and operations (2 years, +25): this phase includes construction and operation plan, facility design report, fabrication and installation report, and decommissioning plan.

The Maine delegation to the Offshore Wind Task Force was led by Dan Burgess, director of the Governor’s Energy Office. Burgess highlighted the significant energy and economic opportunities for Maine presented by offshore wind yet stressed the importance of protecting Maine’s natural resources and the fishing and maritime industries. According to Burgess, “Any potential development must fully consider all commercial fishing and maritime interests as well as habitat and natural resources and seek to minimize impacts and maximize compatibility.”

Planning for offshore wind development is not new to Maine. Planning began more than ten years ago when Governor Baldacci created Maine’s Ocean Energy Task Force. In 2009, the Maine Legislature passed laws to streamline and coordinate state permitting for renewable energy technology and to implement the recommendations of the Ocean Energy Task Force.

During that time, BOEM received an unsolicited request for a commercial wind development lease off the Maine coast from the Norwegian company StatOil, but the project was ultimately withdrawn in 2012 due to lack of political support in the state. As a result of Maine’s early offshore wind planning efforts, the University of Maine has developed 40 patents for concrete hulls to deploy floating turbines, created the Maine AquaVentus project and garnered more than $50 million in grants from the federal Department of Energy.

Not everyone who spoke at the Task Force meeting championed offshore wind development. Terry Alexander, a 40-year veteran fisherman from Maine and board member of RODA (Responsible Offshore Development Alliance), expressed concern over the impacts offshore wind development might have on the fishing industry. RODA is a coalition of fishing interests that coordinates with scientists and policy makers to minimize conflicts between proposed offshore wind development and fisheries. RODA’s executive director Annie Hawkins said that her research indicates that floating wind projects result in large no-fish areas for fishermen because floating platforms take up more space than non-floating platforms. Alexander noted that proper siting of any offshore developments will be critical.

During closing discussions, members identified a list of concerns which need to be addressed before projects can take place. Everyone stressed the need for more information and for a process to effectively engage the public and the fishing community. Hannah Pingree, director of Maine’s Office of Innovation, noted the importance of getting feedback from fishermen early and often, but also the urgency of moving the process forward. “[The Task Force] needs to make something happen in the next couple of years,” she said.
The first right whale calf of the winter migration season was spotted in late December off the coast of Georgia. Aerial survey teams with Clearwater Marine Aquarium spotted a mother-calf pair, said Allison Garrett, a spokeswoman for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Scientists tentatively identified the mother by her number in the New England Aquarium Right Whale catalog as #3560, a first-time mother born in 2005, Garrett said.

GMRI GETS GRANT TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO SEAFOOD

The Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI) received a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture in December to improve local access to seafood in New England. The grant of $480,000 will be matched by GMRI with $125,000 in funding and staff time. The funds will be invested in smaller ports in New England in order to improve supply-chain logistics. GMRI program manager Kyle Foley said that the project is largely focused on improving the cold-chain logistics at multiple ports in the region. Access to ice has been identified as the first important issue among the ports.

SCALLOP QUOTA DOWN SLIGHTLY

The New England Fishery Management Council approved Framework Adjustment 32 to the Atlantic Scallop Fishery Management Plan in December. The new specifications will result in 52 million pounds of projected landings in 2020, lower than 2019’s projection of more than 57 million pounds. While lower than 2019, the projection is still higher than average, with an expected vessel value of $487 million. The biomass of scallops in the region remains high, however low recruitment led the Scallop Advisory Panel to support a conservation approach for the 2020 season. Surveys indicated that the highest density of scallops was in the Nantucket Lightship South area, with estimates of 35,000 metric tons in the area.

GILLNET CLOSURES TO PROTECT RIGHT WHALES ANNOUNCED

On December 16, NOAA announced the closure of the Nantucket Lightship and Closed Area I Groundfish Closure Areas for gillnet gear to comply with a recent Court Order. All gillnetters must remove their gillnet gear from these areas as soon as possible, consistent with safe vessel operations. On October 28, 2019, U.S. District Judge Boasberg ruled in favor of Conservation Law Foundation on the need to prohibit gillnet fishing in the former Nantucket Lightship Groundfish Closure Area and the Closed Area I Groundfish Closure Areas in order to protect North Atlantic right whales. The judge wrote that, “humans have brought right whales to the brink of extinction.” After the Order was issued, NOAA notified gillnetters in these areas on November 1 that all gillnet gear needed to be removed from these two areas and that we would be issuing a formal rule closing these areas.

GEAR INNOVATION SUMMIT IN FEBRUARY

Canada’s Department of Fisheries and Oceans will hold a gear innovation summit on February 11 and 12, 2020, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. According to DFO, reducing gear interactions with marine mammals and decreasing the frequency and impact of abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear are fundamental and immediate challenges facing harvesters both here in Canada and around the world. New programs, methods and technologies are required to meet these challenges.

The Gear Innovation Summit will provide opportunities to explore and look at new technology and practices that work best to foster sustainable fishing practices. The meeting will bring together harvesters, technical experts, Indigenous partners, academia, non-government and government agencies at the regional, national and international levels. Discussions will assess a range of technological options, both short- and long-term, to reduce the likelihood of large whale entanglements. More information is available at https://www.goregister.ca/main/login. Username: halifax; pass: innovation2020. Registration closes January 10, 2020.

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By Melissa Waterman

You often hear of a man passing on his skills and ultimately his business to his son, but it’s not that frequently we hear of a woman doing the same, and to her daughter. Yet that is exactly what Susy Ellis of Spruce Head did with her daughter Lexy this year.

With her partner Nancy Payne, Ellis started Coastal Documentation, a vessel documentation services company, 36 years ago. Payne sold her portion of the company in 1985. The business provides recreational and commercial boat owners assistance in registering their boat with the Coast Guard’s National Vessel Documentation Center, as well as obtaining federal fishing permits and FCC radio licenses. After more than three decades helping others thread their way through a wilderness of forms and paperwork, Susy decided to retire. And youngest daughter Lexy, 26, was there to take over.

“I have watched her [Susy] practically since I was 1 year old. I helped Mom afterschool to file paperwork and other things. I would listen to her on the phone and I picked things up,” Ellis said. She worked with her mother throughout 2018 learning the finer points of the documentation and permit application processes and when January, 2019 came around, Lexy was ready.

“This is a great job. You couldn’t find it anywhere else in the country,” she said. “It’s a local business, you get to meet Maine boat owners and help fishermen.”

Commercial vessels of 5 net tons or greater must have Coast Guard documentation; pleasure vessels of the same displacement may be documented but are not required to be. Coast Guard documentation provides a history and record of the builder for the vessel owner. Specifically, if one sells of the same displacement may be documented but are not required to be. Coast Guard documentation provides a history and record of the builder for the vessel owner. Specifically, if one owns or transfers a vessel, the new owner is responsible for ensuring that their vessel is documented. The Coast Guard will look at the application but if anything is missing, it’s sent back to the bottom of the pile. It can take a long time,” she explained. Once a vessel is documented, however, it’s a relatively easy process to renew the certificate each year.

Ellis also handles federal fishing permit applications and transfers, an equally complicated arena. “It’s hard to move a permit [around boat owners],” she said.

Making sure that all the information and support materials are included in an application calls for an attention to detail, and Ellis is one of the best in the business. “You guys support our local lobstermen. If lobstermen don’t fish then I am out of job. Keeping them on the water is the best thing for all of us,” she said.

 Lexy Ellis, left, and her mother and Coastal Documentation’s founder, Susie Ellis. Photo courtesy of L. Ellis.
Fishing in the winter is hard. The temperature, the wind, the onset of sudden and brutal storms, all make lobstering during a Maine winter a hazardous way to make a living. But as these photographs by Owls Head lobsterman Michah Philbrook show, there is stark beauty in the cold as well.