



LANDINGS

News & Views from Maine's Lobstering Community

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LOBSTER SURVEYS SHOW HEALTHY STOCK DESPITE DECREASE IN LANDINGS

By Melissa Waterman

Kathleen Reardon led the annual review of Department of Marine Resources (DMR) 2025 lobster survey findings during the DMR Science Updates session at the Maine Fishermen's Forum. The review was preceded by the department's announcement that preliminary 2025 lobster landings came in at 78.8 million pounds, a decline of approximately eight million pounds from 2024.

"Lobster abundance is down from its peak. 2025 was good but the trend is downward," Reardon said. "Change was seen most in eastern Maine zones. The other zones remain mostly stable. The 2025 catch was patchy, unpredictable."

Lobstermen throughout the coast found that the decrease in landings and increase in operating costs made the season challenging. Reardon noted that cooler water, which caused the lobster molt to occur later in the season, did not

correspond to higher prices paid at the dock. "This year price did not follow the law of supply and demand," she said drily.



A multitude of environmental and economic factors influenced lobster landings in 2025. MLMC photo.

The number of trips taken by lobstermen in 2025 also trended downward. According to DMR's Marissa DeCosta, lobstermen took 21,000 fewer fishing trips in 2025. "There was an overall decline in trips, most notably in Zone G through D," she said. The raw value of the 2025 lobster landings was \$461.4 million, comparable to the value of the catch in 2008 when adjusted for inflation. Overall landings were down by 10% and adjusted value was down by 20% compared to 2024.

Heather Glon and Robert Russell reviewed 2025 larval survey and settlement data. DMR has conducted larvae sampling for the past eight years and settlement sampling for the past 26 years. Lobster larvae density in 2025 is down compared to 2024. The number of stage 4

Continued on page 3

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LOBSTER AGAIN MAINE'S HIGHEST VALUE FISHERY

DMR press release

In March the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) released preliminary data that Maine's commercial harvesters earned \$619,053,489 in 2025, which was the 14th consecutive year commercial fishery earnings surpassed \$500 million.

Maine lobstermen landed 78.8 million pounds in 2025 and again topped all other fisheries with an overall landed value of \$461,384,405. The boat price was \$5.85 per pound, the third highest boat price on record.

However, while the boat price and overall value for lobster remained relatively high, inflation took its toll on the industry. "When adjusting for inflation, the overall value of lobster in 2025 was more in line with the value earned in 2008," said DMR Commissioner Carl Wilson.

"The impact of inflation on fishermen in 2025 not only challenged their bottom line but, when combined with market uncertainty due to tariffs and a late molt that limited access to new shell lobsters, it may have caused many to change fishing behavior, including limiting trips," said Wilson.

In fact, according to DMR's landings program, Maine lobstermen took over 21,000 fewer fishing trips in 2025 than in 2024, a nearly 10% decline in fishing effort. "This combination of factors likely contributed to the decline from 2024 to 2025 in the lobster harvest of more than eight million pounds and a decrease in the overall value of more than \$75 million," Wilson said.

Continued on page 4

Inside

Page 2
COASTAL OUTLOOK
Thoughts from the MLCA president

Page 5
MENHADEN FISHERY
CHANGES IN BILL

Page 6
WOMEN IN FISHERIES:
Amalia Harrington

Page 7
FEDERAL FISHERIES
STAFF AT THE FORUM

Pages 8-13
MLA UPDATE

Page 17
FISHERMEN'S SAFETY
THEME AT FORUM

Page 22
IN THE NEWS

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COASTAL OUTLOOK

Thoughts from MLCA President Patrice McCarron

It's not quite summer, yet you can feel a new warmth in the air this month. April is when Mainer's along the coast prepare for the busy months to come, getting the wharves and boats in order, gear ready, and all the other tasks necessary for a new fishing season. It won't be long before the summer crowds are here clamoring for Maine's signature seafood!

This month's *Landings* provides comprehensive coverage of the Maine Fishermen's Forum, which happened in March. This year's Forum did not disappoint. It was well attended and offered an amazing trade show, diverse seminar offerings, and the perfect atmosphere for the industry to reconnect.

The Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA) Annual Meeting kicked off the Friday seminars to a standing room only crowd. The MLA announced its new Board Chairman, Sonny Beal of Beals Island, as the head of the organization. The MLA welcomed Eugenio Piñeiro Soler, the Assistant Administrator of NOAA Fisheries to address its membership. Mr. Soler, a commercial fisherman from Puerto Rico, told the audience "You have to protect your culture and way of life. Once you lose it, it is not coming back."

Maine Department of Marine Resources' (DMR) presented its annual lobster life cycle survey updates which came as no surprise to lobstermen attending the session. As Kathleen Reardon, DMR lead lobster biologist said what lobstermen already knew, "Lobster abundance is down from its peak. 2025 was good but the trend is downward." Multiple surveys of lobsters — from larval stage to harvest — indicate that the population is healthy but no longer at the peak abundance levels of 2016.

DMR announced the state's 2025 lobster landings which dropped in 2025 due to several factors. Colder than usual water in the Gulf of Maine delayed the lobster molt last year. Lobstermen in turn delayed setting all their traps leading to a 10% decline in the number of fishing trips during the season. Lobstermen also faced high costs for bait and other expenses due to inflation, another factor that influenced how often they fished. Approximately 78.8 million pounds of lobster were landed in 2025; 87.3 million pounds were landed in 2024. Overall, 2025 landed value was \$461,384,405.

The Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative (MLMC) gave its annual report to the industry at the Forum. The MLMC uses multiple methods to get consumers to recognize Maine lobster as a premium product and to ask for it

by name. "We work to create value in a world with a lot of choices," said MLMC executive director Marianne LaCroix. One method the Collaborative used in 2025 was to introduce professional chefs and food buyers to its lobster menu tool kit as part of its continuing effort to get Maine lobster on more menus.

This year's annual question-and-answer session with federal officials was dominated by questions from the lobster industry rather than the groundfish industry, which has historically been the focus. Lobstermen questioned the panel about the use of ropeless gear, focusing particularly on safety concerns, and on the upcoming process to devise additional right whale protection rules. Due to Congressional action, the lobster fishery is compliant with both the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act until 2028. New NOAA regulations designed to protect endangered North Atlantic right whales must be in place by December 31, 2028.

Improving the health and safety of fishermen was a theme that ran throughout the three-day Fishermen's Forum. Several sessions included Liz Michaud of Green and White Hope in Machias. Michaud founded the nonprofit organization shortly after the death of her nephew, lobsterman Tylar Michaud, who went overboard while fishing alone in 2023. Green and White Hope works to ensure that fishermen remain safe while fishing and that communities are prepared when tragedy strikes. Its

motto is "Every fisherman deserves to come home."

On a happier note, MLA board member and Zone G Council Chair, Chris Welch, was awarded the DMR's Andy Mays Award by Commissioner Carl Wilson for his outstanding work organizing a voluntary industry response to protect right whales that aggregated in Jeffreys Basin in 2025. MLA's new Chairman, Sonny Beal, presented the MLA's Marine Patrol Officer of the Year award for the second time to Marine Patrol Specialist Evan Whidden who serves in the Mid-coast district. In nominating him, Sergeant Wesley Dean wrote, "In 2025, Evan logged 683 hours underway and hauled 9,421 lobster traps, making him the most productive Marine Patrol Specialist in the state and helping ensure the lobster fishery remained well monitored and effectively enforced." Congratulations Evan!

Patrice



The Maine Fishermen's Forum is for everyone in Maine's fishing communities. MLA photo.

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Surveys continued from page 1

lobster larvae, which have reached the point of settling on the seafloor, is down. Juvenile settlement numbers are also down across the coast after two years of increase. Glon noted however that there is no consistency in recent patterns to suggest a boom-and-bust cycle.

The fall and spring nearshore trawl survey data showed a general decline in sub-legal lobsters in all areas except Penobscot Bay, according to Robyn Linner. There are regional differences in the lobster fishery between the eastern and western sections of the coast in that the western region (Zones E, F and G) did not experience the sharp uptick in landings followed by a drop, as occurred in the eastern region (Zones A, B, C and D). The spring survey conducted 104 tows during the survey period; the fall survey conducted 82.

Kristyn Klemen reviewed ventless trap data, which gives information about sublegal lobster abundance. Federal areas 511 (eastern Maine) and 512 (midcoast Maine) saw an increase in sublegals while the number of sublegals in area 513 (western Maine) declined after three years of increase.

Sea sampling data showed a slight drop in sublegal lobsters throughout the coast. Eastern zones saw a drop from peak numbers; western zones are stable with only a slight decline from 2024. Sea sampling occurs year-round. In 2025, samplers took part in 200 fishing trips aboard 166 boats from 56 ports last year, measuring nearly 300,000 lobsters.

The Fishery Direct Data Program is a new collaborative research program begun by DMR in 2025 in response to a request from lobstermen to collect more data from the offshore fishery. Offshore lobstermen provide information about the size of lobsters caught in federal waters year-round from a pairing of com-

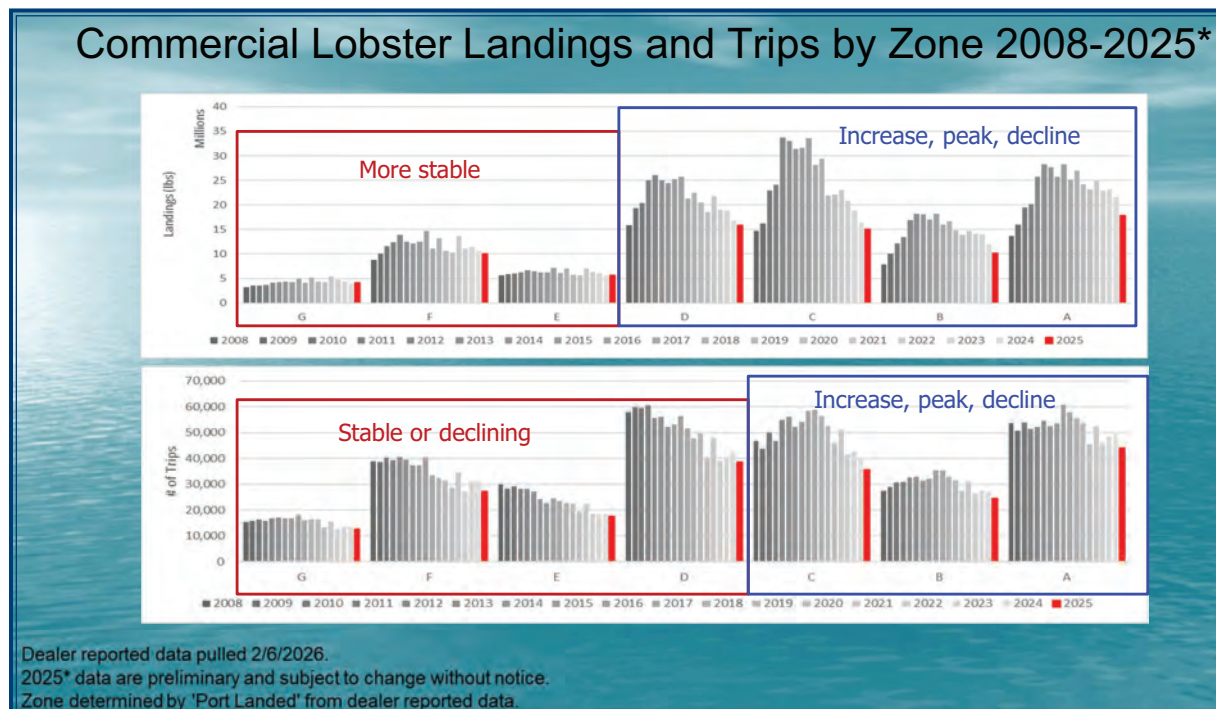
mercial and ventless traps. According to program coordinator Peter Jordan, eight lobstermen took part in the program last year, recording data from 298 trips on a Commercial Fisheries Research app. Participants commit 3 to 5 hours per month and receive compensation for their time.

The Vessel Tracking Program, which started in 2023, compiles trip data to quantify effort in the lobster fishery. All data goes to the ASCCP data warehouse, where a computer model categorizes when the boat was setting, hauling or transiting. The model then can show where fishing effort is concentrated by season. Maine vessels accounted for 69% of the vessel hours in 2024 and 62% in 2025.

Sarah Leiter, head of DMR's Marine Mammal Research Division, spoke about the department's efforts to track right whales. The division was created in 2023 and has 27 full-time staff. It conducts a passive acoustic monitoring program, visual surveys and habitat monitoring for right whales. Passive acoustic monitoring buoys are located at 26 sites along the coast. Aerial surveys and boat-based visual surveys for whales take place throughout the year. Habitat monitoring involves quarterly plankton tows to identify right whale food.

"The aggregation of right whales in Jeffrey's last year means that continuous monitoring is important," Leiter said. Last January 96 right whales congregated in Jeffrey's Basin. Leiter emphasized that no one survey program can give definitive data about the presence of right whales in the Gulf of Maine, but the surveys' combined data is providing powerful information for use by policy makers.

This presentation is available online at <https://mainefishermensforum.org/wp-content/uploads/DMR-Lobster-Science-Update-3.6.26l.pdf>.



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MLMC REVIEWS PAST YEAR, FUTURE PLANS AT FORUM

By Melissa Waterman

Marianne LaCroix, executive director of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative (MLMC), spoke about the Collaborative's 2025 accomplishments and plans for 2026 at the Maine Fishermen's Forum in March.

The MLMC was created by the Maine Legislature in 2013 and must be reauthorized every five years. The Marine Resources Committee voted in February to reauthorize but only for two years rather than five. The MLMC's eleven-person board is composed of four harvesters, three processors, two public members, and two state agency representatives; seven board seats will be open this year.

The Collaborative uses multiple methods to get consumers to recognize Maine lobster as a premium product and to ask for it by name. "We work to create value in a world with a lot of choices," said LaCroix.

As part of its reauthorization review, the MLMC evaluated its impact over the past five years. It found that awareness of Maine lobster was up among consumers. The Collaborative was particularly effective when the Covid-19 pandemic set in, stabilizing demand for Maine lobster by focusing its marketing directly on home consumers as restaurants shut down. In addition, when Maine lobster lost two sustainability certifications in 2022, the Collaborative proactively used its many media assets to educate the public and buyers about the fishery's long-standing conservation practices. After conducting a nationwide survey of premium restaurants, the MLMC found that Maine lobster now is mentioned by name on 8.2% more menus than in the past.

In 2025, the Collaborative concentrated on its menu tool kit as part of its continuing effort to get Maine lobster on more menus. "The kit gives ideas on how to incorporate lobster into different dishes. We got that out to general managers, owners and executive chefs," LaCroix said. The MLMC also conducted a

"Make it a Maine Lobster Moment" campaign through its social media outlets. The campaign promoted Maine lobster as a way to make every-day moments more special throughout the year.

For the National Lobster Day and Maine Lobster Week public relations campaign, the MLMC partnered with seven food influencers. It also invited lobster buyers and professional chefs to visit Maine and learn about the lobster industry.

"We had a good response. They learned about our story and new lobster products," LaCroix said. The MLMC had a booth at the Seafood North America Expo in Boston and held a reception for seafood buyers, which it is doing again this year.

The MLMC continued promoting the story of Maine lobster and lobstermen through multiple social media outlets. "We collaborated with Taste, an online food podcast. The podcast and article were both successful. The podcast was among Taste's top three for engagement," LaCroix said, as one example.

In 2026 the Collaborative will be evaluating its activities to determine the return on lobstermen and dealers' investment in its operation. "We are conducting an economic study, which will come out in the spring. After it comes out we will look at what we are doing strategically," LaCroix said.



MLMC board member Brian Langley, left, and executive director Marianne LaCroix at the Fishermen's Forum. MLMC photo.

In the latter half of 2026 the Collaborative will focus again on chefs and buyers to promote the value of Maine lobster, explained Ann Tessendorf, Weber Shandwick. "We will take our existing content and tailor it to specific chefs and buyers. It will be a buyer-centric program with specific focus and broader reach," she explained. The aim is to get content in front of buyers in multiple places and multiple times and to use third-party voices to speak for Maine lobster.

In addition, the Collaborative will revive its "Maine Characters" content. By using the story and images of lobstermen, business owners, and others in the industry, the MLMC hopes to make the Maine lobster brand stand apart. "Research shows that 62% of consumers are more likely to buy if they know the story of the product," Tessendorf said. Through these techniques, the MLMC will promote stewardship practices, nutritional benefits and lobster recipes to both chefs and the larger public.

"The goal is to take a proactive role in 2026, to think about what's coming. We are focusing on training spokespeople, multi-channel storytelling, and educating buyers," LaCroix said.

When asked what credentials lobstermen interested in joining the MLMC board should have, LaCroix responded, "We are looking for people in the fishery who are willing to speak up and are curious about the process of marketing."

This presentation is available online at www.maineFishermensforum.org/wp-content/uploads/Maine-Lobster-Marketing-Annual-Report.pdf.

2025 landings continued from page 1


Maine's softshell clam fishery was again the state's second most valuable in 2025 with an overall value of \$21,591,878. That is an increase of nearly \$6 million over 2024. Clammers increased their harvest by 441,578 pounds and also saw an increase in price at the dock from \$2.72 per pound in 2024 to \$3.49 per pound in 2025.

Atlantic menhaden was Maine's third most valuable fishery in 2025, earning fishermen \$18,962,057, an increase of more than \$5 million over 2024. Menhaden jumped from 26,735,331 pounds in 2024 to 31,394,325 pounds in 2025.

Maine oyster harvesters and growers continue to see increasing demand for their product, which was the fourth most valuable in 2025 at \$16,179,031. "The reputation for Maine oysters continues to grow as consumers prize their clean, briny, sweet flavor which comes from the cold, clean, nutrient-rich waters along our coast," said Wilson.

Maine scallops were the fifth most valuable commercially harvested species in 2025, earning fishermen and aquaculturists \$9,344,477. "Maine scallops continue to provide a vital winter fishery for harvesters, an emerging opportunity for aquaculturists, and a delicacy for consumers," said Wilson.

Elver fishermen harvested 7,797 pounds of baby eels in 2025 and earned \$6.9 million, making the fishery the sixth most valuable in the state.



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BILL TO EXPAND MENHADEN FISHERY TROUBLES MAINE FISHERMEN

By Stephen Rappaport, Working Waterfront Reprinted with permission

Like the schools of menhaden that roil the summer waters off the coast of Maine, a proposed law that would open that lucrative fishery to more participants has been raising turmoil among fishermen, legislators, and state regulators. Menhaden has become a significant part of the bait supply for Maine's lobster industry, especially over the past several years when herring have been in short supply.

Introduced last year by Rep. Billy Bob Faulkingham, the House minority leader and a Winter Harbor lobsterman, LD 1353 was held over for consideration until this year. In early February, the Legislature's marine resources committee voted 8-5 to recommend passage of the bill, which would ease requirements for obtaining a menhaden fishing license from the Maine Department of Marine Resources. The bill the committee ultimately approved differed substantially from the original that DMR testified against at a public hearing last April, but the changes didn't entirely assuage the agency's objections.

Current law limits issuance of a new license for menhaden — commonly called "pogies" — to fishermen who were licensed during any two of the years between 2019 and 2022 and reported landings of at least 25,000 pounds during any one of those years.

On February 19, a few days after its initial vote, the committee approved final language for an amended bill authorizing DMR to issue 2026 resident and non-resident commercial menhaden licenses to fishermen who reported landings of at least 20,000 pounds (5,000 fewer pounds) in any of the years 2019, 2020 or 2021 (a shorter time period) and who held a commercial license in at least one of those years but did not have, and would not have been entitled to, a license in 2023.

DMR is still not happy with the amended bill. According to department spokesperson Jeff Nichols, the reduced landings requirements could allow as many as 20 additional participants into the fishery, resulting in a total of 376.

"The Department's position," Nichols said, "is that rather than continue to amend the eligibility criteria, the Department should use the existing authority the Legislature has provided to create an entry system where licenses are replaced when they exit the fishery." DMR, he said, would support issuing new licenses at a 1:1 ratio as current license-holders leave the fishery once the number of outstanding licenses drops below 350.

Allowing more participants into the fishery is just what divides fishermen.

Introducing LD 1353, Faulkingham told lawmakers that the existing rule threatened "to shut out the very fishermen who helped build this fishery ... but missed one qualifying year." That was the case for fishermen such as Warren Graybill of Harpswell, who told the committee that he had the required landings "in one year, but not two out of three" needed to qualify for a license. He suggested that the amendment would allow only a few more participants into the fishery.

Initially, LD 1353 drew support from some members of the lobster industry, such as Jason Joyce of Swan's Island. He told the committee that bait was in short supply and difficult to obtain on the island where there were no licensed menhaden fishermen but there were three fishermen who had the necessary boats and equipment, and had met the 25,000-pound landings requirement in the last year that the fishery was completely open, but didn't have the two years of landings required to qualify for licenses in 2023 and later.

Joyce said allowing those fishermen to participate in the menhaden fishery would benefit Swan's Island lobstermen.

Tad Miller, a Tenants Harbor fisherman who harvests menhaden around Matinicus Island, opposed LD 1353 as introduced, arguing that the addition of as many as 20 more boats into the fishery would have a serious impact on the resource. According to Miller, fishing pressure is already impacting the menhaden in the water, where the fish are "wilder and harder to catch" than in the past.

"There's only so much fish," Miller said shortly before the marine resources committee released the text of the amended bill.

The fishery is regulated by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission which each year sets a quota for East Coast menhaden landings. It allocates a portion of that quota to each seaboard state from Maine to Florida. This year,

the quota has been reduced by 20% from the 2025 total.

Maine's quota for 2026 is 19.57 million pounds. While that sounds like a lot, in 2024, the last year for which DMR has published figures, Maine fishermen landed 25.64 million pounds of Atlantic menhaden valued at \$13.2 million. However, that hardly describes the value of the fishery to Maine.



The debate over how many fishermen should be allowed in Maine's menhaden fishery in light of a reduced quota continues. Photo courtesy of WBUR.

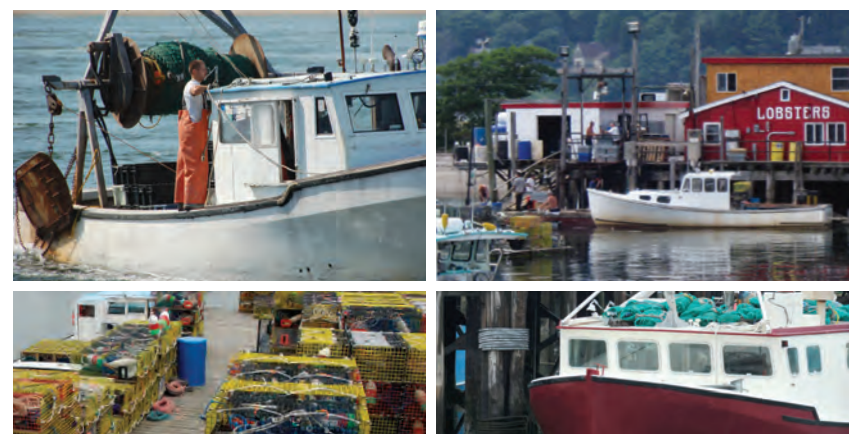
Menhaden comprise a substantial portion of the bait used by lobstermen in the state's \$528.4 million fishery. With the longstanding shortage of herring likely to continue, if the supply of menhaden were interrupted, many of the state's lobstermen might have to leave their traps on the bank rather than in the water, fishing.

Miller also said that with too many boats fishing for menhaden, the bait market would suffer, especially west of Penobscot Bay and along the Midcoast.

He's worried that new entrants to the fishery who don't already have customers for their landings will likely reduce their prices to attract buyers. That would be bad for fishermen already in the bait market, who could be forced to lower their prices to retain customers. Market disruption like that could also create "gaps" in the supply, he said, when lobstermen are most in need of bait.

He suggested that the menhaden fleet should be capped at no more than 350 licenses, with a 1:1 exit ratio for new licenses: "A lot of people will tell you it should be less than 350, and I'm probably one."

The amended bill does establish a cap of 350 on the number of commercial menhaden fishing licenses and calls for a 1:1 entry to exit ratio for new licenses. The bill also directs DMR to identify groups of fishermen who should get priority for the first available licenses and to develop an entry plan for new participants in the fishery.



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WOMEN IN FISHERIES: *Amalia Harrington*

By MLCA staff

University of Maine marine biologist Amalia Harrington knows the coast. In fact, she knows three coasts: the freshwater shores of Michigan, where she grew up, the California coast, where she attended college, and the coast of Maine, where she and her husband, a Maine native, now live.

Harrington came to Maine in 2015 to pursue her Ph.D. at the University of Maine School of Marine Sciences. As a youngster she had become entranced with the ocean. “My cousins lived on the East coast. We would visit them from Michigan and play in the ocean,” she said.

“What’s not to like about lobster? There’s really not a single person on the coast who is not touched by the lobster fishery.”

Harrington thought she wanted to become an aquanaut, someone who lived and worked beneath the sea. “I was in middle school. It was when they were exploring the deep sea vents and I saw the photos of tube worms and blind crabs,” she recalled.

Both Harrington’s parents talked with their daughter about science. “They showed me it was OK to ask questions. I always found it very interesting to find out about how things worked in the wild,” she said.



Amalia Harrington, left, and student measuring a large lobster. UME photo.

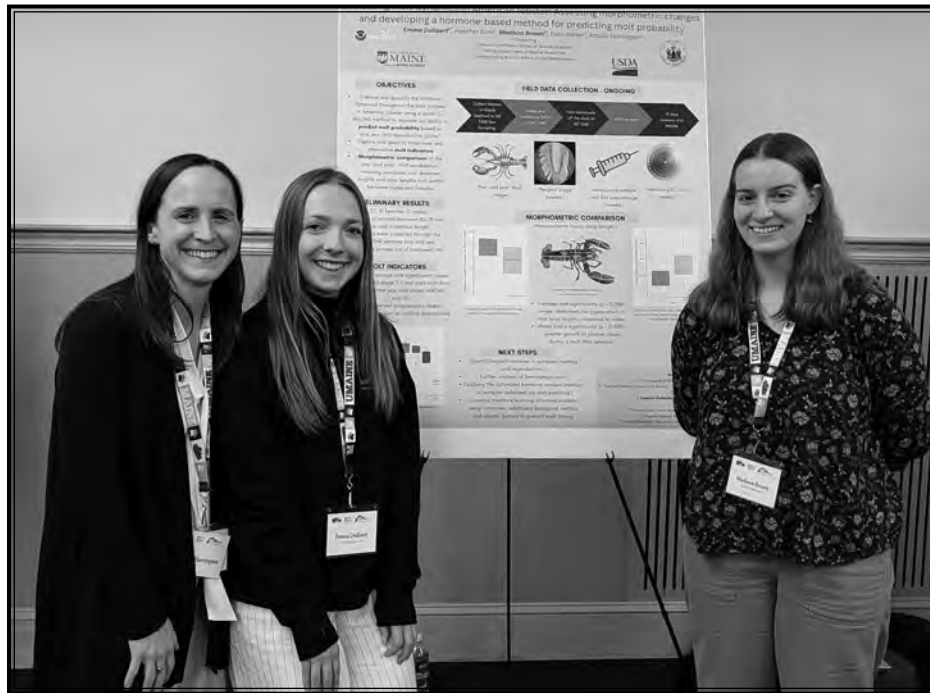
Harrington went to college at the University of San Diego where she studied marine science and went on field trips all along the coast. “I never looked back,” she laughed.

After graduation, she undertook an M.S. degree from San Diego State University. “I studied spiny lobster and human interaction. New Marine Protected Areas were being established in California and I studied habitat use inside and outside the areas in southern California,” Harrington said. “It was a fun experience to do tagging with lobstermen on their vessels and dive to study lobsters’ habitat use.”

Her university advisor had done post-doc research at the University of Maine so when Harrington had completed her master’s degree and was considering continuing going on for a doctorate, he suggested she study a different type of lobster, *Homarus americanus*.

“I wanted to focus on something different and my husband is from Maine,” Harrington explained. Harrington matriculated at the University of Maine in 2015 and completed her Ph.D. in marine biology in 2019.

Just as the world shut down in March 2020 due to the Covid pandemic, Harrington was hired by Maine Sea Grant to be the Northeast Regional Lobster Extension Project Coordinator. The position, part of the national American Lobster Initiative, focused on ways to increase the lobster industry’s resilience



Harrington, left, with University of Maine students presenting their lobster research. UME photo.

to the impacts of ecosystem change in the Gulf of Maine.

Meanwhile, at the University’s School of Marine Sciences, two long-time lobster biologists, Rick Wahle and Bob Steneck, retired in 2023. When a faculty position within the School opened, Harrington applied. “Gayle Zydlewski [director of Maine Sea Grant] was very supportive [of Harrington’s plan]. I am super glad that it worked out,” Harrington said.

She splits her time between research on lobster’s biological responses to a changing environment and teaching responsibilities, a balance that she clearly enjoys. “What’s not to like about lobster?” Harrington said. “There’s really not a single person on the coast who is not touched by the lobster fishery. Because of that there’s lots of support for research from all the sectors touched by lobster.”

Harrington particularly likes the collaborative nature of lobster research between lobstermen and scientists in Maine.

“Fishermen are super observant. Lots of great questions come directly from the industry. There’s a strong emphasis on working together,” she said.

As a professor, Harrington strives to convey her own enthusiasm for science and the marine world to her students. “To get to teach the basic principles of marine ecology is really cool. I think the best way to teach is to try something hands-on. You have to feel it and experience it,” she said.

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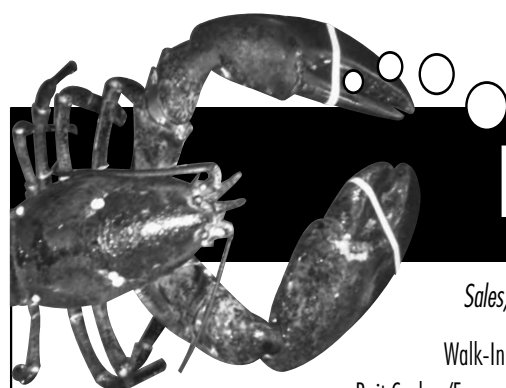
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NOAA, NEFMC LEADERSHIP MEET WITH FISHERMEN AT FORUM

By Melissa Waterman

The use of ropeless gear in the lobster fishery in order to protect North Atlantic right whales was front and center at the Fishermen's Forum session with federal officials. On the panel were Dan Solerno, NEFMC chairman; Jon Hare, NEFSC; Michael Petony, GARFO; Eugenio P. Soler, NMFS head; and Kate O'Keefe, NEFMC executive director.

Jason Joyce, representing NEFSA, spoke first. "Ropeless is not safe. If you go over because of a groundline the only thing that's going to help you is the endline," he said. He said that NEFSA had a petition with 120 signatures opposing ropeless gear.

Joyce asked why NMFS wasn't looking at the use of pingers, like those used on gill nets to scare off harbor porpoises, to reduce risk to right whales from lobster gear.

"What we are doing is working. That's it. The mortalities are down and births are up. Weak links, breakaway lines, it's working,"

Fisherman Steve Woodrow told of a recent incident when he was on an off-shore crabbing boat. He was caught in a groundline and went over. "It was the endline in the hauler that got me back on the boat. If that endline was in a cage [before released by an acoustic signal] how are you going to save me?" he asked.

Another audience member asked about tagging right whales in order to know their location. Jon Hare acknowledged that new tagging techniques being used with South Atlantic right whales appear successful. The Center plans to test the technology on humpbacks and finbacks in New England this summer.

Phinneas Sprague, Portland Shipyard owner, spoke of a new AIS-based system called Watchman that will show the location of whales on a vessel's navigation station. It connects to 51 AIS stations, from Jacksonville up to Maine. "If NOAA can tell me where the whale is, I will avoid it. No fisherman wants to run them over," Sprague said.



Lobstermen's safety concerns about the use of ropeless lobster gear and worries about future right whale protection measures dominated the Forum session with federal fisheries leaders. NEFSC photo.

Ginny Olsen asked about the Biological Opinion due from NMFS by the end of 2028. "Congress said that the lobster and Jonah crab fisheries are consistent with the MMPA and ESA until the end of 2028," Michael Petony answered. "NMFS must have new right whale regulations in place by then. The process goes through the TRT. This fall the TRT will discuss what measures to reduce risk will be, then there will be a proposed rule. The Bio Op would follow that process. It will comply with the ESA. If the MMPA or ESA changes or the end date changes, then the process will change."

Mike Goodwin, from Gloucester, Mass., spoke vehemently against the use of ropeless gear. "We are getting sold out to ropeless gear. It's not the way to go," he said. He pointed out that Maine lobstermen voluntarily took action at Jeffrey's Basin last year to reduce risk to the right whales that turned up in January. A second Gloucester fisherman felt that NMFS was not acknowledging the efforts made by lobstermen to protect right whales. "What we are doing is working. That's it. The mortalities are down and births are up. Weak links, breakaway lines, it's working," he said.

"It's right to be cautiously optimistic," Hare replied. "But there are regulations that say the biological removal limit is less than one whale [under the Marine Mammal Protection Act]."

He added, "Ropeless is an option. There is no intention for it to be required."

"For the next Biological Opinion we will have more data. Births are up, deaths are down," Pentony said. "We can quantify what Canada has done, which we couldn't before. There are positive impacts from the 2021 rule, yes. That will change the calculations regarding risk from the lobster fishery."

With regard to the New England Fishery Management Council's alternative gear marking framework, which has alarmed Maine lobstermen, Pentony said, "I can't stress it enough. Development of ropeless gear was to provide options to lobstermen. The closed areas are closed to endlines so you can use ropeless there because there are no endlines. However, groundfish regulations do not allow that. You have to have two endlines with a buoy. So they have to modify those regulations to allow groundfishing in the closed areas. The NEFMC is trying to reconcile the regulations."



Audience members asked questions about NMFS's plan for the next Biological Opinion on the lobster fishery, due in 2028. Maine Fishermen's Forum photo.

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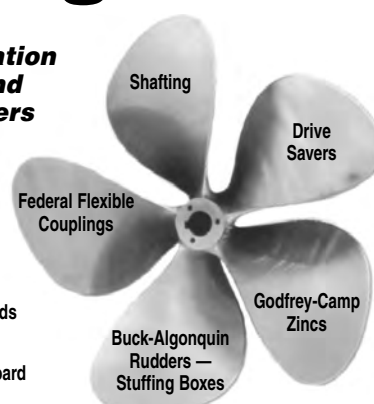
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MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

Maine Lobstermen's Association

...

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 Christian LaMontagne, Long Island, 400-7310
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STEAMING AHEAD BY SONNY BEAL, MLA BOARD CHAIR

What a great Fisherman's Forum! It is certainly one of my favorite times of year. It was so great to see all the friends I've made there over time, the people you only see at the Forum. My wife Abbi and I have been going for at least 17 years and my two sons, Damon and Kaden, for the last 12 years or so.

This year's Forum, however, was a little more special in several ways. We had Eugenio Piñero Soler, the head of NOAA Fisheries, as a guest speaker at the MLA annual meeting. It was a great opportunity for fishermen to hear directly from him and to ask him questions. I had several opportunities to talk with Eugenio. He's a fisherman just like us. In Puerto Rico he fished for yellow fin, grouper, red snapper and spiny lobster.

He's a normal guy who's easy to talk to, especially about fishing, and just like the rest of us, wants what's best for the fishing industry.

On Friday afternoon the MLA had its second annual MLA social, which is proving to be a very fun event. It's a chance for people to hang out, enjoy a cocktail and talk business or policy or whatever with a person you don't normally have a chance to talk to. Senators Susan Collins and Angus King made an appearance and got to talk to lobstermen and their families as well.

Last but not least, I took the helm at the MLA annual meeting and became chairman of the board of directors.

This step has been a long time coming. For as long as I've been on the board of the MLA guys have been asking me when I was going to take the helm. You see, my father, Ossie Beal, was president of the MLA from 1967-1974 so people just assumed that eventually I would do it as well. Call it destiny, call it legacy, call it whatever you want, here I am. He said one time that his goal was to make the Maine fishery "the best thing there is on the coast."

All I can hope for is that I do as good a job as the past leaders of this organization have done and be a leader who my father would be proud of.

That being said, I have full confidence that I can do it for three reasons. The first is because of the board of directors. The MLA board is very diverse, with lobstermen of all ages from all parts of the coast. They are fully involved in their communities and conscientious about paying attention to what's going on. And these guys show up. Our monthly meetings in Belfast are always well attended. We talk a lot and argue more and then make decisions that are best for the fishery as a whole, not any specific harbor or person.

Second is the support of two past presidents, Dave Cousens and Kristan Porter, and MLA executive director Patrice McCarron. They have been giving me advice for the past few years and are always willing to bend an ear whenever I need it. Their years of experience have given them a ton of knowledge and having them willing to pass that along is something I'm grateful for.

And the third is, I'm a lot like my father. Whatever comes into my mind usually comes out of my mouth. Good, bad or indifferent, no one will ever have to wonder what I'm thinking.

For those of you who don't know me, and I'm sure most of you reading this probably don't, I live on beautiful Beals Island. No, I don't own the island — I get that question a lot. I was on the board of directors for the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative and am currently the Beals-Jonesport Co-op board president.

I fish from a 40-foot Young Brothers that my father built in the spring of 1980 outside in his dooryard. This is the boat I grew up on. I learned how to fish with him teaching me everything he knew. After he passed, I bought the boat and still can't picture myself owning anything else. It's a piece of family heritage where I taught my boys to fish. I've since rebuilt everything except for the hull and fish mostly trawls in federal waters and some pairs and triples up inside.

Becoming the chair of the MLA is something I've been hesitant about since I got on the board. Not because of confidence, but because of the time and energy it takes to do the job. I'm a family man. Both boys were very heavily involved in sports in their younger years, especially basketball. Yes, believe it or not, we love basketball here on Beals Island. I figured I wouldn't be able to give the job my full attention because I'm not one to miss any games.

Now the boys are 18 and 20 with their basketball careers behind them, so that gives me the ability to attend meetings instead of games. And that's something this job is going to be full of — meetings, interviews and standing on a dock somewhere talking to lobstermen, one on one. I'm not going to have all the answers for sure, but I will have a board of directors and a small but mighty MLA staff who will be there to help me find them.

I would like to thank everyone who congratulated me on becoming MLA board chair. There were people stopping me in the hallways at the Forum shaking my hand and giving me a pat on the back. Some I knew and others, I had no clue who they were. I feel like not knowing people is going to be a common occurrence for a while until I get settled into this new role.

So if you see me at a meeting or somewhere say 'Hi' and if you don't want to, that's alright too. Just remember that the MLA will always be there fighting for you and now I'll be there too.



Sonny Beal, MLA board chair. Photo by G. Rybus.

Sonny Beal



MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

MLA ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARY

The Maine Lobstermen's Association held its 72nd Annual Meeting at the Samoset Resort in Rockport on March 6. The meeting kicked off with MLA board vice-president Sonny Beal thanking the MLA board members and staff for all their hard work over the past year. He also recognized retired board member Jason Joyce of Swans Island, who stepped down last fall.

MLA members then approved a slate of nominees electing six board members for a three-year term. The MLA announced that the board had selected Sonny Beal to replace Jarod Bray as MLA's Board Chairman to lead the organization, and Richard Howland as Vice-Chair.



It was a full room for the 72nd MLA annual meeting in March. MLA photos.

MLA executive director Patrice McCarron presented an overview of the MLA's 2025 achievements. The MLA conducted an educational campaign focused on lobstermen's longstanding practice of V-notching egged lobsters, in partnership with the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Alliance (NEFSA). In addition to promoting V-notching on social media channels, in editorials, posters, and in Landings, the MLA sent free V-notch tools to more than 130 new lobstermen.

Additional collaborations included safety training with Massachusetts-based Fishing Partnership Support Services (FPSS); working waterfront protection with Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI); and the socio-economic study with the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries.

The primary issue facing Maine lobstermen in 2025 was profitability. Colder water impacted the fishery through a delayed lobster molt leading to fewer hauling days. Landings came in later and were lower than in 2024. Tariff uncertainties impacted markets; high inflation, increased operating costs, and ultimately, a lower boat price meant catch did not keep up with lobstermen's expenses.

In the policy arena, 2025 began with deep concerns about the ASMFC Amendment 27, which would have raised the minimum gauge size for legal lobsters. The MLA had long opposed such a change. In response to vigorous protests from Maine lobstermen, the ASMFC ultimately repealed that provision of Amendment 27 in May.

Lobstermen then brought ideas to MLA about common sense ways to make the industry stronger and the resource more resilient. The MLA surveyed members on these ideas with responses showing support for enhancing V-notching, improving use of vents and bio-panels, incorporating claw-save bottoms, and stricter enforcement penalties for egregious violations.

Securing a strong bait supply remained a priority and the MLA advocated at the state and regional levels to oppose a large reduction to the ASMFC menhaden quota.

The MLA closely monitored the development of the ASFMC lobster stock assessment, which found that stock abundance had declined from its historic peak, yet the resource remains healthy. Exploitation rates remained high, meaning lobstermen catch most of the legal lobsters available to them, as they always have. ASFMC determined that overfishing was occurring -- but by less

than 1%. The MLA countered a barrage of misleading press coverage when the assessment was released in October.

The MLA continued its work on right whales and is prepared to address upcoming right whale protection rules that are due from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) by the end of 2028. MLA organized other lobstering organizations in support of proposed reforms of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA), the federal laws that protect right whales. The MLA was successful in urging NMFS to delay the planning process for the new whale rules until 2027 in order to fully incorporate Maine's extensive fishing effort and right whale monitoring data in its deliberations.

In 2026, the MLA will continue its V-notching campaign to raise awareness of its importance to the conservation of the lobster resource. Nearly 90% of MLA members surveyed in 2025 responded that they V-notch consistently, an encouraging sign as the lobster population changes. The MLA plans to continue distributing quality stainless steel V-notch tools to new lobstermen again this year.

McCarron then introduced Eugenio Piñeiro Soler, the Assistant Administrator of NOAA Fisheries. Mr. Soler talked about his family's commercial fishing heritage, his time as a commercial fisherman and fisheries advocate in Puerto Rico before becoming head of NMFS.



NMFS head Eugenio Piñeiro Soler.

"You have to protect your culture and way of life," Soler said at the beginning of his talk. "Once you lose it, it is not coming back." For NMFS to effectively manage the lobster fishery it must act in partnership with stakeholders, he continued. "Governments come and go. Step up. Be ready for a fight always."

NMFS, said Soler, is ready to assist lobstermen in every way it can. Among his priorities is generating better science. "We don't need slow science. We need timely science, not five or six years old. That is not productive," he said. "We all need to be scientists and managers and take part in the system."

After Soler finished speaking, the meeting opened for questions. Brian Billings, MLA board member, questioned Soler about the cost of using and maintaining ropeless fishing gear. "One size doesn't fit all," Soler replied. "It's up to you if you want to use it. You have to decide what you want to do because there are going to be changes. What will work to conserve the fishery? No one knows more than the guys fishing. If it works for you, you should use it. If something better shows up later on, it's up to you."

Craig Stewart of Long Island wondered if NMFS had studied the impact of offshore wind farms on right whales. Sam Rauch, NMFS Deputy Assistant Administrator for regulatory programs, who accompanied Soler, responded. "We've done modeling work with the Department of Interior. We are actively engaged on it."

David Cousens of South Thomaston asked about NMFS's plans for the alternative gear marking framework, which was developed without adequate input from the lobster industry. It proposed to change rules to allow ropeless fishing but fortunately was voted down by the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC). "It's confusing. We need to be involved in it," he said. Rauch replied, "NMFS is under a pause until December 2028. Then the TRT will act on whether any additional regulations are needed and what those will look like. They will be seeking input [from lobstermen]."

In responding to another question about the Biological Opinion NMFS must produce by 2028, Rauch said that the process right now is for the TRT to meet

Continued on page 10

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MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

MLA update continued from page 9

later this year and in 2027. It will decide if further protections are needed and come up with recommendations on additional regulations. Then NMFS will create a proposed rule. There will be consultations and a final rule will be promulgated before the Congressional pause expires.

MLA Board member Chris Welch of Kennebunk explained that in January 2025 lobstermen from zones F and G voluntarily changed their gear when large numbers of right whales turned up in Jeffreys Basin in order to reduce the risk on entanglement. "That showed we are willing to take action. Can NMFS give us more flexibility?" he asked.

Rauch said, "We were very encouraged by that. This is the number one fishery in the country. We want the fishery to succeed. Being proactive is great. Those things make a difference. It may have a mitigating effect on measures in 2028."

Curt Brown of Bold Coast Seafood asked if NMFS is considering ropeless gear for use only in closed areas or for adoption throughout the fishery. "Right now there's a limited set of tools to deal with right whales. Our goal is not to prevent fishing. So closed areas with ropeless gear works," Rauch replied. "We don't believe ropeless is a suitable tool to use coastwide. But it is a tool that would prevent us from using other tools like closures. Ropeless is likely to be a voluntary measure always, a way to get into closed areas."

Another member of the audience questioned the safety of ropeless gear. "It takes just a second to go over and with no endline, it's dangerous," he said. "We have a statutory requirement to consider life at sea," Rauch responded. "This is part of what we are looking at. Even as a voluntary option it might not work because of safety issues. There's a difference between large and small boats when it comes to safety. One size does not fit all"

For those who were not able to attend the annual meeting in person, never fear! We recorded it. You can view the slides and watch the video recording posted on the MLA website at <https://www.maine lobstermen.org/annual-meeting>.

MLA BOARD ELECTS NEW CHAIRMAN – SONNY BEAL

The MLA announced at its annual meeting the new Board Chairman, Sonny Beal of Beals Island, to lead the organization.

Sonny is a long-time member of the MLA and board member since 2017. His father, Ossie Beal, was MLA's second president, serving from 1967 to 1974. Sonny's two sons Damon and Kaden also fish for lobsters. Sonny and his family embody the heritage that MLA fights to protect. We are proud to have him leading the MLA. Special thanks to outgoing chair, Jarod Bray, for his outstanding leadership!



MLA FORUM SOCIAL HOUR

MLA's second Annual Social was lots of fun! We don't often make time to chill out and catch up with the MLA community. This year drew big crowd, including Senators Collins and Senator King. Thank you to our generous sponsors for making it possible.

MLA AT THE FORUM

MLA staff had a great time meeting our members and other friends from the fishing industry at our booth during the Forum. We were excited to welcome many new members who joined during the Forum.

A big thanks to everyone who supports us!



FORUM SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

This year the Maine Fishermen's Forum raised \$68,000 from its auctions and the many individual cash contributions received from attendees and organizations. 2026 scholarship awards included two \$8,000 scholarships awarded to Leah Beal and Brevin Kenney, thanks to an anonymous fisherman's donation.

Additional scholarship recipients include Oceania Black, Celia Brinkler, Maya Brown, Jenna Colby, Ella Cushman, Aidan Dow, Maddy Eaton, Hannah Erickson, Jackson James, Olivia Larrabee, Grace Lemoine, Mary McDonald, Alexander Pinkham, Mariah Watkinson, and Anna Zlotkowski.

MLA JR HARVESTERS LEAH AND LUKE AMES

Leah Ames, 10, and Luke Ames, 8, know how to get about on the water. Or at least on the waters around their home island, Matinicus. The two siblings each run ten traps which they fish under the watchful eye of their father, lobsterman David Ames Jr.

It's part of the family tradition, according to Leah.

"My dad has been a fisherman since he was a kid and his dad and grandfather too," she said. She started going lobstering with her father some years ago, as did her brother. The two like being part of the family's fishing lineage.

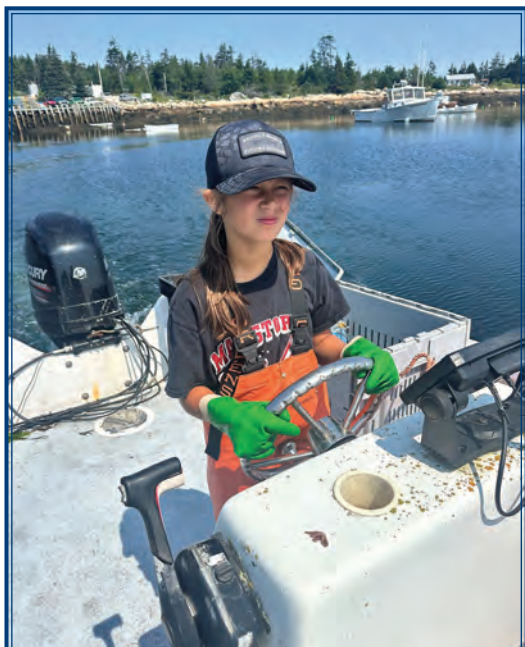
"It's pretty cool on the water to haul up traps. Not many people can do it," she said.

Leah and Luke generally head out to haul around 9 o'clock during the summer months

when the whole family lives out on the island. "We do everything. I've been pinched a couple of time banding lobsters." "I let the lobster grab a glove," Luke chimed in, "but I've gotten pinched too." During the school year the two live in Spruce Head and attend school in St. George.

They haul from the *Jaybird*, a 16-foot Calvin Beal, keeping close to the Matinicus shore. Leah is looking forward to increasing her traps from 10 to fifty in the next year. She thinks she'll keep lobstering as she grows older but also might get another job for the winter months.

During the summer she also goes fishing for menhaden with her father when the season starts. "I do the hydraulics sometimes," Leah said. "But I like lobstering better. Pogy fishing you go all day!"



Photos courtesy of S. Ames.



MLA GOLDEN V-NOTCH AWARD PRESENTED TO MAINE BANKS

The MLA Golden V-notch Award is given annually to someone who goes above and beyond to support Maine’s lobster fishery. At this year’s Annual Meeting, the MLA was proud to present our 2026 Golden V-notch Award to honor three banks that were pivotal to the success of MLA’s Save Maine Lobstermen campaign.

In 2021, Maine’s lobster industry has stunned when the National Marine Fisheries Service released a Biological Opinion that mandated a 98% risk reduction by the Maine lobster fishery. The MLA Board agreed to sue NMFS without having the funds in hand to do so.

Fortunately for the lobster industry, Machias Savings Bank, Bar Harbor Bank & Trust, and First National Bank each stepped up big time with generous donations that made it possible for MLA to move its lawsuit forward.

The MLA is incredibly grateful, honored, and humbled that these banks placed their trust in us to preserve Maine’s fishing heritage. The lawsuit would not have been possible without their support — and we won!



Machias Savings Bank: from left, Sonny Beal, Melissa Denbow, Patrice McCarron.



Bar Harbor Bank and Trust: from left, Chelsea Sawyer, Will Hatt, Sam McGee, Rebecca Emerson, Patrice McCarron, Lisa Veazie, Marion Colombo.



First National Bank, from left: Kristen McAlpine, Tony McKim, President & CEO, Sonny Beal, Jake Miller, Michelle Curtis, Patrice McCarron.

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MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

CHRIS WELCH RECEIVES 2026 DMR ANDY MAYS AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Department of Marine Resources (DMR) Commissioner Carl Wilson presented Chris Welch of Kennebunk the annual "DMR Andy Mays Award of Excellence" at the recent Fishermen's Forum in Rockport.

Commissioner Wilson praised Welch, chairman of Maine's lobster management Zone G Council, for his work with lobstermen in southern Maine to implement a rapid and coordinated response during last winter's unprecedented aggregation of North Atlantic right whales near Jeffreys Ledge. "Chris was instrumental in bringing lobstermen to the table to craft a solution to avoid entangling the nearly 100 whales, while allowing fishermen to keep gear in the water," said Wilson.



DMR commissioner Carl Wilson, left, presents Kennebunk lobstermen Chris Welch the 2026 Andy Mays award.

"This was a unique challenge that had no playbook," said Wilson. "Chris brought lobstermen together to work with DMR on a plan that relied on a combination of whale sightings data from survey teams across the region, including DMR's whale monitoring program, and data from vessel trackers on federally permitted lobster vessels to identify areas that had the highest risk of entanglement in lobster gear.

"Chris helped coordinate a meeting with fishermen and DMR staff within days of the first sighting in January to develop a novel solution involving fishermen dropping one of two vertical lines on their string of traps. Lobstermen proactively developed a plan to reduce entanglement risk." To date, scientists have observed no entanglements of any whales from the aggregation.

"Chris is a natural born leader. He's been on the MLA board since 2016 and currently serves on the MLA executive board, providing strategic guidance for MLA. His ability to think critically and work collaboratively to solve complex problems has benefited this industry for years," said Wilson.

The award is named for Southwest Harbor fisherman Andy Mays, who passed away in 2017, but who left an important legacy of participation in the management and regulatory process.

EVAN WHIDDEN RECEIVES 2026 MLA MARINE PATROL AWARD

Marine Patrol Specialist Evan Whidden was again honored with the Maine Lobstermen's Association Officer of the Year Award during the Maine Fishermen's Forum. Specialist Whidden, who joined the Marine Patrol in 2020 and serves from Harpswell to Bremen, also received the honor in 2023.

In nominating Specialist Whidden, Sergeant Wesley Dean recognized both his work ethic and professionalism. "In 2025, Evan logged 683 hours underway and hauled 9,421 lobster traps, making him the most productive Marine Patrol Specialist in the state and helping ensure the lobster fishery remained well monitored and effectively enforced."

"As captain, Evan's steady leadership and sound judgment are valued by officers within his section and division," said Sergeant Dean. "Officers trust his decision-making, appreciate his experience, and seek opportunities to work with him. He is self-motivated, knowledgeable about the fisheries, and leads by example during day-to-day operations."

His work to successfully investigate two complex trap molesting cases was an example of the high professional standard he demonstrated in 2025. "Evan's knowledge of the fishery was clearly demonstrated in these investigations," said Sergeant Dean. "Trap-molesting cases are among the most difficult cases to successfully investigate and prosecute, requiring detailed knowledge of fishing practices, gear identification, and careful follow-through. In 2025, Evan successfully investigated and prosecuted two complex trap molesting cases, an outcome that is rarely seen in a single year."

As a former lobsterman, Specialist Whidden brings a unique understanding of the fishery to his job. "Evan's background as a lobster fisherman gives him practical knowledge and perspective that are well respected within the fishing community," said Sergeant Dean. Each year the Maine Lobstermen's Association presents its award in recognition of Marine Patrol Officers who provide outstanding service in support of the Maine lobster industry.



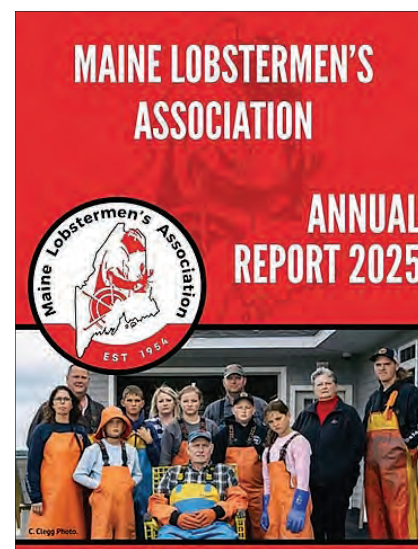
From left: DMR Commissioner Carl Wilson, MLA Chair Sonny Beal, Marine Patrol Specialist Evan Whidden, Marine Patrol Colonel Matt Talbot, MLA President and Executive Director Patrice McCarron, and Marine Patrol Sergeant Wesley Dean. DMR photo.



This is why the MLA exists. J. Beal photo.

The Maine Lobstermen's Association 2025 Annual Report is available online at

<https://mainelobstermen.org/about-us#annualreport>



THE MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION GETS SOCIAL

It was a great turnout for the second Maine Lobstermen's Association social hour during the Maine Fishermen's Forum in March. The casual gathering was an opportunity for MLA members and people involved in Maine's fisheries to meet, talk, and just hang out together during the busy Forum. Many thanks to our supporters, Atwood Lobster, Brooks Trap Co., Friendship Trap Co., Georges River Bait, Luke's Lobster, Lund's Fisheries, New England Bait, Nor'East Bait, and the Port Clyde Co-op.



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FORUM SPEAKERS FOCUS ON FISHERMEN'S SAFETY

By Melissa Waterman

Improving the health and safety of fishermen was a theme that ran throughout the three-day Maine Fishermen's Forum in early March. Whether physical health or safety at sea, keeping Maine's fishermen well is a concern of many organizations and individuals.

Mark Murry, Department of Marine Resources Marine Patrol officer, kicked off the Thursday session on Single-handed Fishermen Safety. He introduced Liz Michaud, founder and director of Green and White Hope, a new nonprofit organization based in Machias. Michaud founded Green and White Hope shortly after the death of her nephew, lobsterman Tylar Michaud, who went overboard while fishing alone in 2023.

She offered the audience a scenario: what would you want to have on your boat if your line got caught in the prop while setting a trap? How do you plan to get back in the boat? What would you want to have if you cut yourself with a knife while untangling the line? Audience members called out items such as a medical kit, a cell phone, a telescoping ladder.

"Fishing is complex. Smaller boats are not subject to the same regulations as documented boats fishing offshore. You should take a safety class and you should have the right equipment on board," Michaud said.

Ann Backus, former instructor in occupational health at the T.H. Chan School of Public Health, emphasized that fishermen need to evaluate their safety at sea via the four-legged stool model. The legs of the stool are personal health and self-knowledge, training, equipment, and vessel integrity. Single-handed fishermen need to assess themselves and their boat based on these four categories and address any gaps before heading out.

Having a personal locator beacon attached to your PFD makes all the difference in the world, said Chris Harrison, safety specialist at Chase, Leavitt and Co.

"Some beacons have AIS so you show up to local vessels. In some the signal can pass through the water, go to a satellite and hail the Coast Guard. The smaller ones are good for local response, the larger are good for calling the Coast Guard," he said. The beacon goes on when the PFD inflates and has a battery that lasts seven years. The key thing is to wear the PFD. "Wear it. Twelve pounds extra buoyancy makes a huge difference in staying afloat," Harrison said.

Michaud then asked the audience what they would need if their boat got a hole in the hull along the waterline. Various members called out items: a damage control kit, a PFD, a pump, a radio.

Josh Duym, co-owner of REDDE Marine Safety Systems in Deer Isle, spoke about the need for an engine kill switch, particularly for those fishing alone. He also emphasized the need to wear a PFD at all times. "Everyone has had an 'Oh boy, that was close!' moment," he said. "Single handed fishing is just not safe. It will never be as safe as fishing with a crew."

REDDE Marine sells a wireless Man Overboard Emergency Alarm that kills the boat engine when triggered. The equipment consists of a fob that attaches to a PFD. When the fob is a certain number of feet away from the vessel, it signals the engine to stop.

Another seminar at the Forum continued the focus on fishermen's safety but from a community perspective. Green and White Hope

recently published a Community Orchestration Guide which gives fishing communities a template for how to organize when tragedy strikes.

"I learned lessons when Tylar was lost that could be used in other cases," Liz Michaud said. "When something happens, the community comes out in droves but no one is in charge. You must have someone immediately in charge at the community level to act in harmony with the Coast Guard and other authorities."

Having a community emergency plan will increase the speed and effectiveness of a town's response, she continued. She noted that for a fisherman lost overboard in the Gulf of Maine, hypothermia will set in within an hour. It will take 45 minutes to two hours for the Coast Guard to reach the scene, less for the area's Marine Patrol officers. But time is definitely against anyone in the water.

John Roberts, a safety trainer with Fishing Partnership Support Services in Massachusetts, stressed the need to have proper equipment onboard. "I say, meet the requirements for your vessel and then pick three more things," he said. Fishermen should have additional safety equipment with them, such as a personal location beacon. "It lets everyone know where you are in the water," he said. "You should practice with all this stuff to become comfortable using it, not only on your boat but another's. Fishermen are first responders at sea."

Annie Sokolowski, founder of Voices of the Fleet, spoke of the need to identify beforehand who does what when catastrophe strikes.

"Planning ensures that early response is immediate and coordinated so the first hour feels less chaotic," she said. "Keep your search and rescue lists up to date. Know who has expertise. Who will be your lead communicator?"

Monique Coombs, Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, also noted the importance of careful communication. "Phase one is when communication can help or cause confusion. Identify a communication information person. Plan and practice communications so it becomes automatic," she said. "It's important to identify roles clearly."



Michaud closed the session by noting that Maine Sea Grant has provided funding for creation of community plans in two harbors this year, which her organization will be involved in. Why? "Every fisherman deserves to come home," she said.

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Presenters emphasized the importance of wearing a PFD at all times. Photo courtesy of Atlantic Fisherman.

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By Melissa Waterman

How do we know what is happening in the depths of the Gulf of Maine?

One way is through a sophisticated network of deep-water buoys managed by the Northeastern Regional Association of Coastal Ocean Observing Systems (NERACOOS). Seven deep water oceanographic buoys in the Gulf that provide near real-time data on ocean conditions.

Established in 2009, NERACOOS is a non-profit organization that serves as part of the U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). Its primary mission is to provide high-quality, real-time data on ocean waters from Long Island Sound to the Canadian Maritimes.

Rather than just a collection of buoys, NERACOOS acts as a bridge between the scientific community and the public. By partnering with universities such as the University of Maine, NERACOOS transforms raw oceanic data into usable information for fishermen, search-and-rescue teams, weather forecasters, and climate researchers.

The stars of NERACOOS are the deep-water oceanographic buoys. These are massive research platforms weighing more than a ton and rising up to eight feet above the waterline. Sensors along their anchor chains, which can extend over 250 meters deep, provide additional readings on salinity, pH, and more.

Each buoy is equipped with a suite of sensors. These sensors measure:

Atmospheric Conditions: Wind speed, direction, gust strength, air temperature, and barometric pressure.

Surface Conditions: Wave height, period (the time between waves), and direction.

Subsurface Oceanography: Water temperature, salinity (saltiness), and current velocity.

Biological and Chemical elements: Chlorophyll-A levels (indicating plank-

ton growth), dissolved oxygen, pH (to track ocean acidification), and nutrient concentrations like nitrate and silicate.

Data is recorded every six minutes to an hour and stored on an internal computer before being beamed via satellite or cellular technology to land-based receivers, such as the University of Maine. The university sends the raw data to the Gulf of Maine Research Institute's Ocean Data Product team, who transform it into usable information.

The buoys are placed to monitor specific "chokepoints" and biological hotspots within the Gulf. Buoy M sits in the Jordan Basin. This deep basin acts as a reservoir for the Gulf's interior waters, and monitoring it allows scientists to track how the North Atlantic Oscillation—a major weather pattern—influences regional water properties. Other buoys, like Buoy E and Buoy I, monitor the Eastern and Western Maine Coastal Currents.

The buoys' data serves two primary purposes. First, it provides real-time information on ocean conditions, which is crucial for people making decisions about whether or not it's safe to go to sea, such as fishermen or ferry captains. Second, the long-term collection of the data helps researchers understand trends and patterns in the Gulf of Maine, offering insights into environmental changes over time

and how those changes might be affecting marine ecosystems.

These buoys provide the crucial information that feeds practical applications such as meteorological forecasts, ocean simulation models, and near real-time products like the Mariner's Dashboard — a NERACOOS tool designed to help anyone who goes out on the ocean understand current ocean conditions.

To learn more and to view NERACOOS data, visit <https://mariners.neracoos.org/platform> or <https://gmri.org/projects/northeastern-regional-association-coastal-and-ocean-observing-systems-neracoos>.



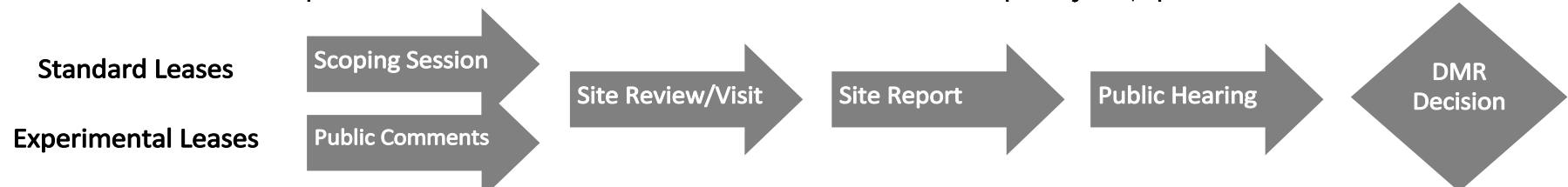
DMR Aquaculture Lease Applications: New Activity (12/25-3/23/26)

Deer Isle	Brewer, M. & Brewer, R.	East Penobscot Bay	4 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	App rec'd 12/17/24; site review published 1/29/26
Beals	Downeast Institute	Near Mud Hole Pt/Eastern Bay, Mud Hold Cove	3.95 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	Public Hearing 5/12/26 1pm Peabody Library Jonesport
Chebeague	Jordan, John Jr.	W of Great Chebeague Isl, SW of Seal Ledge	3.98 acres	Marine Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	App rec'd 9/21/23; site report published 3/4/26
Cumberland	Summit Point LLC	NE of Sturdivant Isl Ledge, Casco Bay	4 acres	Shellfish/Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	App I rec'd 7/16/24; site report published 3/2/26
	Summit Point LLC	N of Sturdivant Isl, Casco Bay	4 acres	Shellfish/Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	App II rec'd 7/16/24; site report published 3/2/26
Deer Isle	Melvin, Allison & Klein, Jesse	Between Oak Pt & Campbell Isl, Fish Creek	4.74 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	Public Hearing 4/30/26, 1pm, Moore Ctr. Ellsworth
Edgecomb	McPherson, Ryan	S of Perkins Cv, Damariscotta Rvr	.45 acres	Shellfish	Experimental	3 yrs	App rec'd 2/11/25; site report published 3/11/26
Friendship	Ehle, Timothy & Lash, Isaac	NE of Cranberry Island, Muscongus Bay	4.05 acres	Marine Algae	Standard	20 yrs	App rec'd 2/4/25; site review published 2/24/26
Harpwell	Quahog Bay Conservancy	E of Snow Island, Quahog Bay	1.36 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	Lease Granted 2/11/26
Jonesport	Nautical Farms LLC	N of Roque Island, Shorey Cove	12.24 acres	Marine Algae	Standard	20 yrs	App rec'd 7/30/24; site report published 12/19/25
Newcastle	FareWell LLC	Upper Dodge Cove, Damariscotta River	3.6 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	App rec'd 3/7/24; site report published 12/4/25
	Spinney, Joel	E of Little Point, Damariscotta River	9.38 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	App received 10/17/24; site report published 2/18/26
S. Freeport	Dirigo Marine Resources, LLC	Casco Bay	6 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	App rec'd 2/27/2026; site review TBD
Saco	University of New England	Saco River	3.91 acres	Marine Algae	Standard	20 yrs	App rec'd 3/10/26; site review TBD
South Bristol	Blackstone Point Oyster Co	Hodgsons&Farmers Isl's, Damariscotta Rvr	2.19 acres	Shellfish	Experimental	3 yrs	App rec'd 2/28/22; site report published 12/4/25
S. Thomaston	Tripp, Krista	E-HaydenPt/NE BirchPt Weskeag Rvr	1.99 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	App rec'd 2/2/26; site review TBD
St. George	Devil's Apron Sea Farms	E of Little Caldwell Isl, St. George Rvr	3.91 acres	Marine Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	Lease Granted 3/23/26
	Devil's Apron Sea Farms	E of Caldwell Isl, St. George Rvr	3.90 acres	Marine Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	Lease Granted 3/23/26
Stonington	Greenhead Lobster LLC	Penobscot Bay	3.5 acres	Shellfish	Experimental	3 yrs	Lease Granted 1/26/26
	Greenhead Lobster LLC	Between East Penobscot Bay and Jericho Bay	4 acres	Marine Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	Lease Granted 1/26/26
Vinalhaven	Salt of the Earth Seafarm LLC	East Penobscot Bay	3.95 acres	Marine Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	App rec'd 10/22/24; site report published 2/5/26

For an interactive source of pending lease applications, please see DMR's table of Pending Aquaculture Lease Applications, where you can find maps and documentation.
Go to: www.maine.gov/dmr/aquaculture/maine-aquaculture-leases-and-lpas/pending-lease-applications

Understand the Process

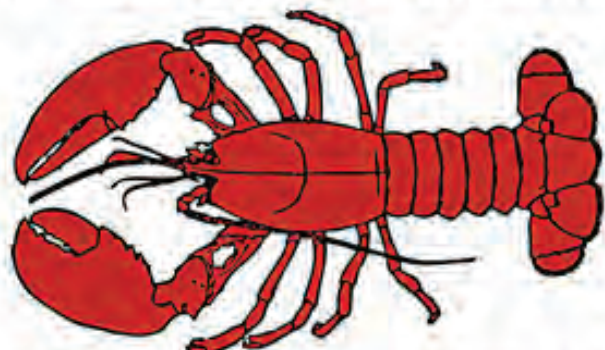
Standard Leases are renewable and available for terms up to 20 years, up to 100 acres;
Experimental Leases are non-renewable and available for terms up to 3 years, up to 4 acres.



All Scoping Sessions, Public Comments Deadlines, and Public Hearings dates and locations are listed on the calendar at www.maineobstermen.org/events and include links to corresponding DMR Notices.

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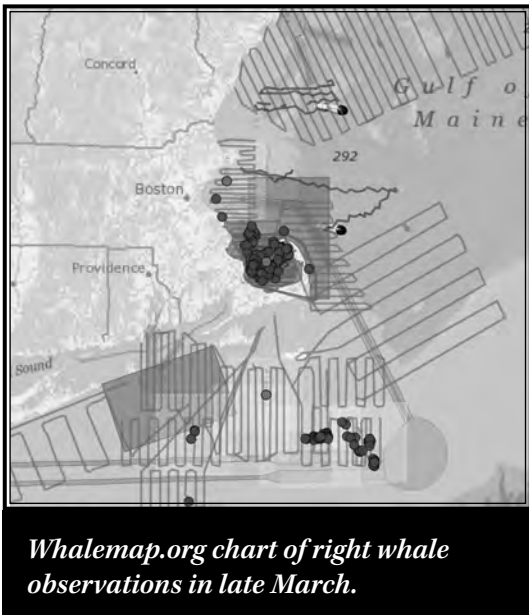
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A message from the Maine Office of Behavioral Health, made possible by Grant Number TI087826 from SAMHSA.

In the
NEWS

RIGHT WHALES CONGREGATE OFF MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts continues to see high North Atlantic right whale activity, with the New England Aquarium documenting over a quarter of the population offshore of Nantucket in late February and throughout March. The Center for Coastal Studies documented more than 100 whales in Cape Cod Bay this year, including a record 33 sightings in January. A notable whale seen is “the Irish whale,” who made headlines in 2025. This right whale, who hasn’t yet been entered into the North Atlantic Right Whale Catalog, was first sighted in Ireland in 2024 and then again in Cape Cod Bay last year. The most recent sighting marks just one of the few times researchers have ever documented it. The winter/spring season is the peak time of year for right whale sightings in southern New England waters. National Marine Fisheries Service reports 23 right whale calves born this year. The calving season ends in mid-April.



Whalemap.org chart of right whale observations in late March.

Sciences and Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station. In addition to shark and tuna tagging projects, the vessel will be used for marine mammal and seabird surveys, fisheries research and other offshore studies. With docking stations at both the Darling Marine Center and in Portland, the vessel will give students and faculty improved access to offshore waters throughout New England, from the Gulf of Maine to Rhode Island. The vessel can travel up to 100 miles offshore, cruise at 18 knots and carry 700 gallons of fuel.

SEAWEED TWINE SOON TO HIT SHELVES

Viable Gear, a Portland-based start-up launched in 2021, will soon bring its first product to market — a seaweed-based agricultural twine called SeaTwine. Designed as an eco-friendly alternative to petroleum-based plastic trellising and crop twine, SeaTwine is engineered to offer durability, water resistance and handling performance.



The new twine is hydrophobic, meaning it resists water absorption and degradation in wet conditions. Natural fibers like hemp, jute and sisal eventually will weaken or rot in the presence of water. Viable Gear is initially targeting vegetable and fruit farmers with direct-to-consumer sales via its online platform.

NEW VESSEL BEGINS SERVICE AT DARLING MARINE CENTER

A new teaching and research vessel at the University of Maine’s Darling Marine Center is expanding student access to the open ocean. Previously used as a commercial tuna fishing platform, the 45-foot boat will support student training, faculty research and workforce development within the School of Marine

NOVA SCOTIA LOBSTERMEN SHIFTING TO ELECTRONIC LOGBOOKS

The transition from paper logbooks to mandatory electronic logbooks (ELOG) is coming this fall for southwestern Nova Scotia lobstermen. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) began rolling out mandatory ELOGS for fisheries catch reporting in other Atlantic Canada fisheries last year.

In 2026, ELOGS will become mandatory in ten Lobster Fishing Areas (LFAs), including southwest Nova Scotia, this fall. For eastern Nova Scotia lobstermen, ELOGS will become mandatory when their seasons open this spring. “This change is to modernize reporting of catch information, improve the accuracy and timeliness of reporting, while supporting compliance with fisheries regulations,” says DFO.

VINALHAVEN LOBSTERMEN TAKES CASE TO SUPREME COURT

Frank Thompson of Vinalhaven is asking the U.S. Supreme Court to hear his appeal of a government requirement that all Northeast federal lobstermen continuously operate vessel trackers. He argues that tracking violates his constitutional rights, and “this warrantless surveillance violates his Fourth Amendment rights.” The Pacific Legal Foundation is bringing the appeal on his behalf.

Thompson originally sued the Department of Marine Resources over its enforcement of the regulation in 2023. But his case was dismissed by the federal First District Court of Appeals, which held the GPS tracking requirement is justified in a “closely regulated industry.”

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WE’RE HERE BECAUSE YOU FISH

MLA

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Events Calendar

More details on all of these events can be found online at www.maine lobstermen.org

April 1
MLA Directors Meeting, 5 p.m., Darby's, Belfast.

April 6
Zone E Council meeting, 5 p.m., Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission, Wiscasset.

April 8
Zone D Council meeting, 6 p.m., Rockland Ferry Terminal.

April 9
Zone A Council meeting, 4 p.m., Washington Academy Library, East Machias.

April 13
First Aid/CPR, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Fishing Partnership Support Services (FPSS), Eastport Port Authority. FMI: ngrosso@fishingpartnership.org or 978-282-4847.

April 14
Zone F Council meeting, 5 p.m., Yarmouth Town Hall, Yarmouth.

April 14-16
New England Fishery Management Council meeting, Holiday Inn by the Bay, Portland.

April 16
First Aid/CPR, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., FPSS, Southwest Harbor Coast Guard Station. FMI: ngrosso@fishingpartnership.org or 978-282-4847.

April 18
USCG Approved F/V Drill Conductor Training, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Friendship Town Office. FMI and to register, McMillan Offshore Survival, jmcmillan@mcmillanoffshore.com or 207-233-0787.

April 23
Zone B Council meeting, 5 p.m., Mount Desert Island High School Library, Bar Harbor.

April 29
Zone G Council meeting, 5 p.m., Kennebunkport Fire Department.

DMR Aquaculture Advisory Council meeting, 9 a.m.-12 noon, DMR office building, Augusta.

May 4
Zone C Council meeting, 5 p.m., Stonington Town Hall, Stonington.

Safety & Survival Training, 7:30 a.m.-4 p.m. FPSS, US Coast Guard Station, Portsmouth Harbor, NH. FMI and registration: email ngrosso@fishingpartnership.org or 978-282-4847.

May 4-5
Drill Conductor Certification, 8 a.m.-3 p.m., FPSS, US Coast Guard Station, Portsmouth Harbor, NH. *You must take Safety and Survival Training on May 4 to complete Drill Conductor certification.* FMI and registration: email ngrosso@fishingpartnership.org or 978-282-4847.

May 4-7
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission meeting, Arlington, VA. FMI: <https://asmfc.org/events/2026-spring-meeting>.

May 18
Safety & Survival Training, FPSS, 7:30 a.m.- 4 p.m., Eastport Port Authority. FMI and to register: jverde@fishingpartnership.org or 774-770-5666.

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May 19
Drill Conductor Certification, FPSS, 8 a.m.- 3 p.m., Eastport Port Authority. *You must take Safety and Survival Training on May 18 to complete Drill Conductor certification.* FMI and to register: jverde@fishingpartnership.org or 774-770-5666.

May 21
Safety & Survival Training, FPSS, 7:30 a.m.- 4 p.m., Southwest Harbor Coast Guard Station. FMI and to register: jverde@fishingpartnership.org or 774-770-5666.

May 22
Drill Conductor Certification, FPSS, 8 a.m.- 3 p.m., Southwest Harbor Coast Guard Station. *You must take Safety and Survival Training on May 21 to complete Drill Conductor certification.* FMI and to register: jverde@fishingpartnership.org or 774-770-5666.

NEW EU CATCH CERTIFICATE REQUIREMENTS FOR LOBSTER EXPORTS

By MLCA staff

The European Union (EU) has strengthened its seafood import rules under the EU IUU Regulation, which is designed to prevent Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing from entering EU markets. As part of these updates, the EU has moved to a fully digital catch-certificate system known as EU CATCH System, which took effect for imports beginning in January 2026.

The EU is one of the largest seafood import markets in the world and requires documentation verifying that fishery products were harvested legally. Catch certificates are intended to prevent illegally harvested seafood from entering the EU market, improve traceability from the harvest vessel to the final product, detect seafood fraud and mislabeling, and ensure imported seafood meets the same oversight standards required of EU fisheries.

These requirements apply to all wild-caught seafood entering the EU, which means Maine's lobster industry must comply to export to this market.

While the new requirements primarily affect companies that export lobster to the EU, the lobster supply chain must ensure that the information needed to complete the certification is available. This creates an administrative burden for dealers and processors selling lobster products to Europe. Key compliance steps include:

- Digital catch certificates: EU importers must submit catch certificates electronically through the EU's CATCH system before the product enters the EU.
- Harvest traceability: Export documentation must identify the harvest vessel, gear type (lobster traps/pots), catch area, species, and weight.



Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative photo.

- Processing documentation: Processors must provide a processing statement linking the product back to the original catch certificate.
- U.S. validation: Catch certificates must be validated by the U.S. government through NOAA's seafood trade certification system.

Lobstermen should talk to their dealers to find out if they are subject to these requirements. This program will require lobstermen to sign off to verify the product that they sell each day. By signing, lobstermen's landings data will no longer be confidential because it will be used to certify the origin on of the catch.

FMI: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/seafood-commerce-trade/european-union-certification-requirements>.



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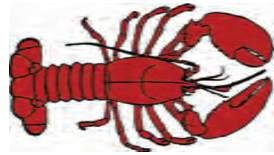
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