THE FUTURE WAS THE FOCUS AT MAINE FISHERMEN’S FORUM

By Melissa Waterman

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

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

Continued on page 21

2015 LANDED LOBSTER VALUE BREAKS RECORD

Maine's lobster fishery hit a new record for landed value in 2015, topping $500 million. Although the total number of pounds was down slightly, the average price per pound was up. The preliminary Maine Department of Marine

Continued on page 4

MAINE LOBSTER HAS A PLACE AMONG THE WORLD’S SEAFOOD

By Matt Jacobson

At the annual Maine Fisherman’s Forum held in March, Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) announced the preliminary 2015 landings results for the state’s lobster fishery. Last year Maine lobstermen made $37 million more in revenue than in 2014. A pretty good year, and the biggest single-year gain ever.

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

Like many others attending the Forum, we then departed and made our way to Boston for the start of the Seafood Expo North America (formerly known as the Boston Seafood Show) the following day. On

Seafood vendors from around the world gather at Seafood Expo North America. MLMC photo.
COASTAL OUTLOOK

Thoughts from MLCA President Patrice McCarron

Last year Maine lobstermen landed more than 121 million pounds of lobster in the state. It was the fourth year in a row when more than 120 million pounds came across Maine's many wharfs and docks on the way to consumers across the globe.

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

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

Landings also focuses on lobster quality this month. Dr. Jean Lavallée, a lobster veterinarian from Prince Edward Island, spoke at the annual Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA) meeting in early March on lobster biology and proper handling practices. Despite its armored exterior, lobsters have delicate inner structures suited to life on the cold sea floor. Changes in temperature, stress from lack of oxygen and other factors can turn a vigorous lobster into a limp, weak creature in a very short time.

Landings also looks at what lobster buyers along the coast also look at what lobster buyers along the coast are doing about the packaging that comes with frozen lobster. Lobsters have turned to frozen bait, much of it produced in foreign countries, to supplement the more traditional herring and pogies. This bait comes packaged in plastic and cardboard boxes. Getting rid of the stuff properly is something that most wharves take very seriously.

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

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

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

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

Patrice

MLA fosters thriving coastal communities and preserves Maine's lobstering heritage

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

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MLCA is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, established in 2010, which achieves its charitable mission through programs in education, research and charity.
Lobstering is a traditional fishery, one of the few remaining in the United States unencumbered by giant boats and high-tech equipment. Maine lobstermen continue setting and hauling their traps using much the same techniques and gear that their fathers and grandfathers did. Sure, the traps are now made of polyvinyl-coated wire and a hydraulic hauler certainly makes the work slightly less backbreaking. Yet lobster fishing largely remains wrapped in traditional practices honed over decades of use. Some innovators, however, are injecting something different into this traditional way of life. This month Landings looks at how lobster dealers are successfully sending their live product all across the globe.

By Melissa Waterman

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stonington has seen a dramatic rise in the number of pounds of lobsters landed in its harbor. In 2014 and 2015 it led the state in the value of seafood landings; according to DMR, nearly $64 million worth of seafood came across Stonington docks last year. Keeping the quality of those lobsters high, particularly the crated ones, is crucial. The conveyor belt helps move the load when the lobsters come in hard later in the season. MLA photo.

Continued on page 23
Resources (DMR) figures for the year show that Maine lobstermen harvested 121,083,418 pounds in 2015, surpassing 120 million pounds for the fourth year in a row. The total value of all Maine’s commercially harvested marine species reached $631,768,531 in 2015. The total represents an all-time high in value and an increase of more than $33 million over the previous record set in 2014.

The largest single increase in value was in Maine’s lobster fishery. The overall landed value jumped by more than $37 million; the average per pound value increased by more than 10%, exceeding $4 per pound. It is the sixth year in a row that the estimated dockside value of Maine’s annual lobster harvest has hit an all-time high.

“Maine’s lobster fishery continues to be a major engine for our coastal economy,” said DMR Commissioner Patrick Keliher. “This past year saw a continuation of steady and historic lobster landings throughout the season. The increase in value reflects growing demand for Maine lobster.”

The overall value of Maine’s lobster fishery was $495,433,635. When factoring in bonuses paid to lobstermen as reported by 11 of Maine’s 19 lobster co-ops, the overall landed value of Maine’s lobster fishery reached $510,680,048.

Lobster landings had remained around 20 million pounds annually until the 1990s when the catch began to rise steadily. But the more significant increase has occurred during the past five years, leaving many coastal towns solely dependent on lobster fishing for their economic livelihood.

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

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

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

“Similar to previous years, lobster landings in 2015 were generally strongest in downeast Maine and weakened as you move westward along the coast. Zone C led the state in both landings and value; Zone A posted the state’s second highest landings and the third highest value. Zone G had the lowest landings along the coast, but posted the strongest average boat price. In general the average boat price was highest in western Maine and weakened as you move east.”

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Port</th>
<th>Value 2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stonington</td>
<td>$63.8 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vinalhaven</td>
<td>$39.6 million</td>
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<td>Portland</td>
<td>$34 million</td>
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<td>Friendship</td>
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<td>Milbridge</td>
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$22,536,086, a record for the fishery. At $2.46/lb., 2015 landings were 23% greater in value compared to 2014, despite a drop of one million pounds in total landings. Maine’s elver fishery was by far the most lucrative of Maine’s commercial fisheries on a per pound basis. Last year the tiny glass eels fetched $2,171 per pound. Despite a cold spring, the fishery’s overall value increased by nearly $3 million. At $11,422,381, the elver fishery was Maine’s fourth most lucrative fishery in 2015, just behind herring.

"Maine’s lobster fishery continues to be a major engine for our coastal economy."
Everyone knows: lobstermen use a lot of bait. In recent years much of that bait has come from far off lands: alfonsino from New Zealand, tuna heads from Vietnam, rockfish from California. These different species of fish are shipped frozen to dealers, then sold to wharves and lobster cooperatives along the coast. The blocks of bait come wrapped in plastic, packaged in cardboard boxes of various weights which themselves are bound together with plastic ties. Taken all together, the increasing use of frozen bait has led to a lot of extra trash for lobstermen and wharf owners to dispose of.

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

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

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

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

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

The Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA) has taken steps to make it even easier for lobstermen to keep trash from entering the Gulf of Maine. The MLA distributed more than 100 nylon mesh bags to lobstermen during the Maine Fishermen’s Forum in early March. "We were delighted to receive a donation of these bags from the Ocean Conservancy," said Patrice McCarron, MLA executive director. "We know that Maine lobstermen are very aware of the impacts of marine debris and these bags make it even easier for them to haul that stuff ashore."

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Maine lobster continued from page 1

they tasted and how expensive they were. He told me everything except that they were “magically delicious!”

Among all the hundreds of booths were 18 companies selling Maine lobster, about 1.4% of the total exhibitors.

In my opinion, the Maine companies had the best stories. They talked about their ability to fill orders for recognizing how special Maine lobster is and told them how important it is to our state.

In my opinion, the Maine companies stood out from the crowd at the show. They all had a story—a way to differentiate themselves from everyone else in the room. And Maine companies had the best stories. They talked about their ability to fill orders and the quality of their products, just like everyone else. But, Maine vendors had so much more. I heard them talk about our sustainability measures which have rewarded us with abundance in the face of scarcity challenges in many fisheries.

Maine companies talked about boat-to-table stories highlighting the work ethic and history of the Maine lobsterman. And our vendors also talked about culinary versatility and the ability to adapt Maine lobster to lots of different dishes. Finally, there was buzz about new shell lobster — why it is different and worth considering.

On my way back home after the show, I had a chance to think more about our competition. It occurred to me that our competition was everyone in that room — we were all competing for the attention of the buyers who attend the show. With 1,300 other folks trying to get somebody to buy their products instead of others, our competition is tough. At the show there were more than 100 vendors selling shrimp. We hear from chefs that shrimp is the easiest (and lower priced) substitute on a menu for Maine lobster, so shrimp producers are a significant threat to us. But something else occurred to me on that ride home. The competition I was considering was only what I had seen. When I got home I did a little research, Americans eat about 15 pounds of fish per year. But they eat about 60 pounds of both beef and chicken and nearly 40 pounds of pork! Every one of those proteins has their own show just like the Boston show, and not just in the U.S.

The way we win and ensure we have a robust market for Maine lobster is to tell our story and differentiate Maine lobster from all the other choices. You can believe that MLMC is hard at work, doing just that.

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

Maine lobster must compete with many other seafood options, such as inexpensive shrimp, for space on the consumer’s plate. MLMC photo.
Maine Lobstermen’s Association

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

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

April 6, noon, at the Belfast Library.

Maine Lobstermen’s Association Update

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

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

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

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

The warm winter has generated a lot of speculation on how early the lobster season may be this year. The MLA took a proactive approach to this possibility by featuring a talk on lobster quality at our Annual Meeting in March. Dr. Jean Lavallée, the region’s premier lobster health expert, captivated everyone’s attention with his talk about the unique biology of lobsters and how easy it is to stress them out.

Lavallée, in his talk, reminded everyone that the health of a lobster affects its future, be it for his family or someone else. As always, stay safe on the water.

There’s a lot of complicated management issues right now at the state, regional and federal levels that affect what you do on the water and you can be darn sure there will be more in coming years. You can tear your hair, grumble over your coffee in the morning, and complain to your buddies as much as you want. But to make change, to alter the patterns that regulators may want to set for you and your children requires organization. For 62 years the MLA has been standing up for Maine lobstermen in ways large and small. Right now we need your support. We do a lot with the staff that we have and our dedicated board, but we are stretched mighty thin!

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

Happy spring — and good luck getting ready for the season! As always, stay safe on the water.
MAINE LOBSTERMEN’S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

LOBSTER QUALITY MEETINGS COMING TO MAINE!

Join lobster health expert Jean Lavallée at one of the upcoming workshops during the week of April 18. MLA received rave reviews on Lavallée’s presentation during the MLA Annual meeting, so we’re bringing him back!

If you are a lobsterman, sternman, dockworker or anyone who handles lobster for a living, this is a great opportunity for you! You will learn about the unique biology and physiology of the lobster, and how lobsters experience stress as they are hauled from the ocean floor and move through the supply chain.

Dead lobsters aren’t worth anything. Weak lobsters aren’t worth as much as they could be. So come learn some fascinating facts about the critter you rely on to pay your bills, and some easy, common sense practices to lower the stress on lobsters!

MLA will announce the final schedule in early April. Call the MLA office or visit the MLA website or Facebook page for more details.

Lobster Quality Workshops with Dr. Jean Lavallée

Are your lobsters stressed out?

Calling all captains, sternmen, dockworkers and other lobster workers

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

When? Zone F and G: Monday, April 18
Zone D and E: Tuesday, April 19
Zone B and C: Wednesday, April 20
Zone A: Thursday, April 21

Where? Central location in each zone; TBA

Cost? These workshops are FREE!

Register: Pre-register to get a free hat! Contact Andi 967-4555 or andi@mainelobstermen.org. Walk-ins are welcome!

Continued on page 9

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

LD 1503 An Act to Amend Lobster and Crab Fishing License Laws

The Marine Resources Committee approved the final language for LD 1503 in mid-March and unanimously reported out the amended bill on March 22. The bill was amended to include the following provisions:

Student Program

• Student lobster licenses may be issued to person who is between age 8 and under age 23 and is enrolled as a student at least half time. Breaks between school enrollment cannot exceed six months.

• Student license holders under age 18 who complete all requirements of the Apprentice Program may obtain a commercial license (status quo).

• Student license holders under age 20 who complete all requirements of the Apprentice Program and received a high school diploma or GED may obtain a commercial license.

• Student license holders under age 23 who begin logging time before age 18 and complete all requirements of the Apprentice Program, are enrolled in and meeting the requirements of a half-time course of study at an accredited postsecondary institution, and maintain status as a student since before age 18 and in each licensing year thereafter, may obtain a commercial license.

Waiting List

• The DMR shall maintain two separate waiting lists – one for new entrants to a zone who have completed the Apprentice Program and the other for those who seek to transfer to another zone. DMR shall adopt rules to manage the zone transfer waiting list.

• The DMR must verify at least once every three years that each person on the list wishes to remain on the list. DMR will attempt to contact those on the waiting list by mail, telephone or e-mail. If a person doesn’t respond within 60 days of the initial contact, DMR will send a notice via certified mail. Any person who doesn’t respond within 30 days of the date of the certified notice will be removed from the waiting list.

• Any person who did not respond to the notice in a timely manner because that person was on active duty with the Armed Forces of the U.S. or National Guard may be placed back on the list at the same position.

• DMR shall determine the number of new entrants for limited entry zones by April 1st of the licensing year.

Zone Councils and Exit Ratios

• Lobster zones may base exit ratios on licenses retired or the greatest number of trap tags purchased in any prior year, up to the zone maximum, associated with the license retired.

• Lobster zone councils may recommend that an exit ratio based on tags retired be applied retroactively.

• Lobster zones must post an agenda at least seven days in advance if they are to consider any action which would affect someone’s ability to get a license, such as exit ratios.

Island Limited Entry Program

• Persons wishing to fish on an island in the Island Limited-entry Zone Program may apprentice in any zone.

• An island may establish an Island Limited Entry Program if a referendum is supported by a majority of Class I, II and III license holders.

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LD 1653 An Act Implementing Pay Increases for Certain Law Enforcement Employees to Aid in Recruitment and Retention

In late March, the Governor put forward LD 1653 as a mechanism to bring pay standards for some members of Maine’s law enforcement agencies, including Maine’s Marine Patrol, up to standard to help agencies recruit and retain quality employees.

Maine’s DMR is one of the state’s smallest agencies and is charged with overseeing the entire coast. It operates on a very small budget, despite which it has been efficient and effective in its work. A long-standing struggle for the DMR has been recruiting and retaining marine patrol officers.

Continued on page 9
ing directors, Craig Stewart of Long Island, Jim Dow of Bass Harbor, Jack Young of Vinalhaven and David Cousins of South Thomaston were also nominated. The full slate was nominated and seconded from the floor; the vote was unanimous in favor. Cousins thanked the membership for nominating the candidates for the board and participating in the election.

Cousens warmly thanked retiring board members Elliott Thomas of Yarmouth and Jay Smith of Nobleboro and Criehaven for their many years of service to the MLA.

U.S. Coast Guard safety examiner Kevin Ploorman updated members about the 2015 Coast Guard Reauthorization Act, newly signed into law by President Obama. Contrary to information released by the Coast Guard last year, the new law requires no changes to existing life raft requirements. Mandatory safety exams are still required for those fishing outside 3 miles every five years. AIS law requires no changes to existing life raft requirements. Mandatory safety exams will be drafted by the Coast Guard, but the timeline is unknown.

Patrice McCarroll introduced Dr. Jean Lavallée, a Prince Edward Island lobster veterinarian, who addressed the members on the impact of handling on lobster quality. According to Lavallée, Canada and the U.S. lead the world in lobster landings. Since lobsters move through the supply chain alive, a percentage of the product is lost due to mortality. The shrink rate in the two countries is typically between 8% and 15%. In pounds, that shrink rate is equivalent to the entire annual landings of other countries such as Australia, Nicaragua, and Chile. The economic model for the fishery is based on landing a high volume so many people just take the shrink rate as a matter of course. But in Australia, where the fishery is based on quality not volume, profits are strong.

Lobsters live in the cold waters on the bottom of the ocean. So, it's not surprising that when you put it in a tank, that will help the clotting reaction, "Lavallée said. "When that happens the proteins in the blood go up closer to molt, "Lavallée explained. Just before the molt, a lobster is hurt, it will bleed easily. Happily, it also clots very quickly. "So when you V-notch a lobster, keep it in a tote for a while, at least 60 seconds, before you put it in a tank. That will help the clotting reaction," Lavallée said.

Lobsters live in the cold waters on the bottom of the ocean. So, it's not surprising that it is stressed when it is taken out of the water. To minimize stress, a veterinarian, who addressed the members on the impact of handling on lobster quality. According to Lavallée, Canada and the U.S. lead the world in lobster landings. Since lobsters move through the supply chain alive, a percentage of the product is lost due to mortality. The shrink rate in the two countries is typically between 8% and 15%. In pounds, that shrink rate is equivalent to the entire annual landings of other countries such as Australia, Nicaragua, and Chile. The economic model for the fishery is based on landing a high volume so many people just take the shrink rate as a matter of course. But in Australia, where the fishery is based on quality not volume, profits are strong.

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

Lavallée then turned to why lobsters are so susceptible to high shrink rates. The answer lies in its biology and physiology. Simply put, lobsters have weird systems. Its stomach is behind its head. Its heart is on its back. It has one nerve cord that travels along the bottom of the body. Its blood veins are not in a circuit like ours; the heart pumps the blood into ever smaller veins and capillaries which come to an end and then disperse blood through all the tissues. So when a lobster is hurt, it will bleed easily. Happily, it also clots very quickly. "So when you V-notch a lobster, keep it in a tote for a while, at least 60 seconds, before you put it in a tank. That will help the clotting reaction," Lavallée said.

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

Lobsters do not like to get warm. "They are cold blooded so if the environment gets warmer the lobster heart beats harder to move blood to the gills and dissipate heat," this effect causes stress to the lobster. Another key aspect of lobster biology is the molt. Lobsters will dehydrate themselves prior to molting to shrink their size and get free of the shell. "When that happens the proteins in the blood go up closer to molt," Lavallée explained. Just before the molt, a lobster ingests lots of water to expand and crack its shell. It will remove calcium from the old shell prior to the molt and then store that as a nodule in its stomach which it then reabsorbs after molting to build up its new shell.

A lobster's quality is like a one-way fuel tank, Lavallée said. Once its vitality is gone, it's impossible to replenish. Stressing the lobster diminishes its quality. Stress can come from hauling the trap from the bottom too fast or when the lobster is removed from the trap, transferred to a tank or later to a truck. Stress can come from low oxygen levels in the boat's storage tanks, warm air or water temperatures, too much ammonia in on-land tanks, lower salinity levels due to melting ice or rain, or stress from being in a box with other lobsters. "If you have 600 pounds of lobster in a 600 gallon tank, it will take just 15 minutes for all the oxygen to be gone from that tank," Lavallée said. "It must be aerated."

Lobsters don't recover quickly from stress, unlike most humans. "It's a death of a 1,000 cuts, a snowball effect," Lavallée said. It is important to be aware of the cumulative effects of stress on the lobster as it moves from the ocean through the supply chain.

To determine the quality of a lobster, Lavallée looks at the animal's blood protein levels, vigor, shell condition, wounds and lesions. In an ongoing study, he and his colleagues examined 2,191 lobsters caught on 47 Canadian boats both on the boat and at the dock. They uncovered a number of factors that affect lobster quality. Lobster bated with fresh mackerel bait fared worse than lobster trapped with other baits. Tossing a lobster rather than placing it in a tank or crate makes it three times more likely to have loss of vigor. Lobster landed on rainy days were six times more likely to be weak. Lobster kept in water warmer than 55°F had a significant loss of vigor and more injuries.

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A member of the audience asked what effect misting the crates on board the boat has on lobsters. Lavallée explained that lobsters store salt water in their gills chambers when they are taken out of the water. "If they are bumped or cut, they will reduce weight by 1% to 3% per 90 pound crate. That translates to about $10 per crate," he said. "Not much for one crate but think of all the years of crates you've hauled!"

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

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HYDROGRAPHIC SURVEY OF PENOBSOT BAY

NOAA plans to conduct a hydrographic survey of Penobscot Bay in the near future. This survey is part of NOAA’s ongoing mission to keep nautical charts up to date. MLA has communicated concerns from local lobstermen that the survey should be conducted during the winter months to minimize gear conflict. MLA will keep the industry updated as NOAA’s plans to survey Penobscot Bay evolve. Bottom surveys of the coast date back to 1807 when President Thomas Jefferson signed a mandate ordering a graphic survey of Penobscot Bay evolve.

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

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

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

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- South Bristol Fishermen's Cooperative
- Superior Bait and Salt
- Superior Marine Products Inc.
- Vinalhaven Fisherman's Coop
- Weathervane Seafoods Inc.
- Weirs Motor Sales Inc.
- William Coflin & Sons
- Williams CPA Group LLC
- Worcesters Lobster Bait
Because it matters

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

– Dustin Delano, Monhegan

www.mainelobstermen.org/membership
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scholarships.

Eligibility

• Students must have a permanent address within Farm Credit East’s territory.
• Students must be pursuing post high school education (full-time) in fall 2016 leading to a career in agriculture, commercial fishing or the forest products industry.
• Individuals demonstrating through their career plans, experience, program of study and extracurricular activities, significant progress toward and a clear intention for a career in agriculture, forestry or commercial fishing.

Disclosure of ethnic origin is purely voluntary and only required to be considered for a diversity scholarship.

Application

Visit FarmCreditEast.com/Scholarship for more details and an application. Individuals that have previously received a scholarship from Farm Credit East or predecessor organizations are ineligible to receive a scholarship under this program.

Only applications submitted online will be accepted.

Deadline

Submit your complete application electronically on FarmCreditEast.com by April 5, 2016.

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The Brand You Can Trust

Typographical errors are unintentional and subject to correction.
As a younger fisherman, I always want to experiment and try new ideas so I can catch more lobster. The folks at Friendship Trap are always there to help me develop these ideas and get the traps just the way I want them. AND, I get a top quality trap that’s built to last delivered when I need it. —Trevor Hooper
Corea, ME

WHEN THE LOBSTER MEETS THE TRAP, YOUR EFFORTS TURN TO CASH!
You know how to catch lobster; Friendship knows how to build traps – together we can put more money in your pocket. Can we help you earn more with your next set of traps?

I really enjoy providing helpful information to our customers. I see what’s working along the coast and can provide ideas that can help them design their traps. Effort spent getting their traps just the way they need them pays off!” —Jerry Wadsworth, Friendship Trap road sales

Present your MLA membership card at the following businesses and receive generous discounts!

New England Propeller Inc
Plymouth, MA -- Discounts on marine propeller, shafting, and related items, sales & repairs.

Nicholas H Walsh PA
Portland, ME -- 20% off legal services.

North Atlantic Power Products
Exeter, NH -- 10% discount on parts and service.

Penobscot Marine Museum
Searsport, ME -- Free admission for MLA members.

Richard Stanley Custom Boats
Bass Harbor, ME -- $1,000 off final price of hull with MLA membership

Sea Rose Trap Co.
Scarborough, ME -- 5% off trap list price when you show your MLA card.

Smithwick & Mariners Insurance
Falmouth, ME -- Discounted vessel insurance plus 5% discount with proof of CG approved Drill Conductor course within the last 5 years.

SW Boatworks
Lamonie, ME -- $1000 discount for hull or top

Weatherly Seafood Inc.
Kittery, ME -- 10% off mail order purchases. Just mention you are an MLA member. 1-800-914-1774.

Winter Harbor Fishermen’s Coop
Winter Harbor, ME -- 10% off picked lobster meat.
Congratulations! You now have health insurance! So what happens next?

First of all, you must pay your first premium before your coverage will be active. You must set up your payment process directly with the insurance company. Each insurance company has a variety of methods through which you can pay every month.

Harvard Pilgrim has an online billing and payment feature. This allows you to pay with a credit card (MasterCard, Visa, or Discover), electronic check, or regular check (print a coupon on the site and mail the payment to the address provided). Once you complete the initial payment, you may elect to use the feature for future payment. You can make a one-time payment each month using either a savings or a checking account or set up Auto Pay to have monthly premiums automatically withdrawn from your bank account.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YOU HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE. NOW WHAT?

By Alisha Keezer

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

Where’s your center of gravity?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Keep yourself afloat

One thing you must have and use while at sea is a personal flotation device (PFD). There are several categories of Coast Guard-approved PFDs. The Type I lifejacket is for extreme conditions. The Type II is a PFD which will position a person face-up in the water. Type III is for use in situations when you think rescue will be quick. The Type III PFD, however, will not keep a person face-up. So Type II is probably what you should have.

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

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

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

Other knowledge you should have: How to read the weather and weather changes, and information about tides and winds in your area. Finally, before you go out, let a responsible person know where you intend to go and when you expect to return. Adult fishermen should do the same thing.

Set an example for them. Have a safe summer. I would love to hear what you are doing; you can email me at abackus@hsph.harvard.edu.

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

By Ann Backus, MS

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

By Alisha Keezer

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

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

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

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Monthly safety drills can help keep everyone on board safe in the case of an emergency. J. McMillan photo.
KEEPING A LOBSTER HAPPY IS NOT COMPLICATED

By Sarah Paquette

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

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

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

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

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

"Cushioned, Cool, and Moist Banding Stations - Lobsters can be damaged when tossed onto a hard banding station. Line your station with seaweed, rope, or bait so the lobsters land on something soft and avoid damage. Seaweed, bait, and rope also keep the lobsters cool and moist while they are out of the water. This reduces the stress to the lobster, which keeps it healthy."

"Monitor Water Circulation to Increase Flow - Good water circulation at cold temperatures and with high levels of dissolved oxygen helps keep the lobsters healthy on the boat."

"Remove Lobsters by Hand - When off-loading, remove lobsters by hand to minimize the damage to their claws and shells."

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

"The results of the pilot study were clear, according to a 2013 press release from Penobscot East Resource Center: after sampling 1,008 lobsters over 28 days, researchers found that the lobsters landed onboard vessels following the best handling protocols had a higher price in the long run. Marceau explained that they manage to keep their mortality loss to 3% by working with lobstermen. "We're looking for lobsters that are not damaged, not stressed. They should have a strong life force," Marceau said. Stephanie Nadeau, co-owner and sales manager, also emphasizes the importance of good handling, particularly avoiding multiple temperature shifts which harm the lobsters. "They can only handle a massive temperature change once," she said. Last summer, with the intense heat we had, the death rate was higher than ever. We have to absorb that loss, which ultimately affects the boat price in the long run."

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

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Experience that counts

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

1980’s and 90’s
- Swayed managers to accept Maine’s core conservation practices of v-notching, maximum 5”, and minimum 3 1/4 gauges.
- Fought to prevent unlimited dragging of offshore lobster through 100/day, 500/trip limits.

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

Membership benefits that matter

Your voice matters
- MLA Members nominate and elect the MLA Board to lead the organization and connect with you. Monthly meetings are open to members.

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- Comprehensive vessel insurance at competitive rates through Smithwick & Mariners Insurance.
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Health Care Assistance
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For MLA members only
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Dustin Delano, age 25
Monhegan

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

John Tripp, age 27
Spruce Head

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

"Around Valentine's Day but now at 165 foot depth, the water is very warm," he explained. "The Gulf of Maine's temperature has great variability, normally, due to the mix of cold and warm water and air currents," Pershing said. "There's been a general upward trend in temperature in the world's oceans. But in the Gulf of Maine, that rate is 0.7°C per year, nearly four times the global average."

Within that context, this winter's El Nino-influenced warm weather is having a distinct effect. "We started 2016 at almost record temperatures. It cooled a bit around March 2015, but then began to increase again in May. 'Bottom foot depth, the water is very warm," he explained. "Those water temperatures aren't going to budge in the next four months."

The NERACOOS system of buoys throughout the Gulf records multiple environmental data, including water temperature at the surface and at depth on an hourly basis. The warm water suggests to Pershing and other scientists that this spring could be a repeat of the unusually warm spring of 2012. In that year, lobsters began to move in to shore and shed their shells much earlier than had ever been seen before, throwing Maine's lobster fishery into turmoil.

"Right now we are forecasting that there's a 50% chance it will be an extremely early season and that the shed will be about three weeks early [at press time, the chance had risen to 68%]. We will be updating this forecast regularly," Pershing said (to see those updates, go to http://www.gmr2.org/our-work/research/projects/gulf-maine-lobster-forecasting).

John Hare, an oceanographer at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, offered his view on the changes taking place in the Gulf of Maine. Those changes include not only water temperature but also salinity, precipitation patterns, currents, and the Gulf's pH levels.

Hare and his colleagues have looked at 82 marine species found along the Northeast Shelf and assessed those species' vulnerability to change. They found that 42 species important to Maine are vulnerable and that 56 species are likely to move from their traditional locations. "We've seen that many of those are going to the southwest Gulf of Maine where the water remains the coolest," he said. In addition, the altered Gulf may affect the health of those species that remain. "Winter flounder is an example," Hare said. "According to the literature, the productivity of winter flounder [the ability to produce young] goes down when water temperature goes up."

Fishermen from Australia, California, and Alaska spoke about what they have experienced in their areas of the world. John Mellor, a California Dungeness crab fisherman, told the audience about spending the winter months gearing up for the upcoming season, only to be told two weeks before the season's start in February that the level of domoic acid in crab tissue had skyrocketed. "The Dungeness crab season was closed due to increased domoic acid, which is showing up in Dungeness crabs after huge algae blooms triggered by unusually warm ocean water began occurring last April," they told us to wait until it gets better," he said. "That's hard to do unless you have other work."

As the waters around southwest Australia began to change, lobstermen there saw their livelihoods take a downturn. Australian fishermen harvest rock lobster; before 2010, it was an open fishery. During the mid-2000s, however, the water temperatures began to increase and the larvae of those species that remain, "above average," Linda Williams, a lobsterman and member of her local fishery council explained. "Settlement [of juvenile lobsters on the bottom] was down for several years. That's when we went to a quota."

The government instituted a quota on annual rock lobster landings in 2010. In the five years since then, the number of vessels in the area went from 600 to 250. Landings dropped from 11,000 tons annually to between 5,000 and 6,000 tons. "Settlement is so low now that you can't measure it. It could be that there's a mismatch going on between early spawns offshore [because of the warm water] and the larvae not being brought back in shore by the currents," Williams said. Still, for those lobstermen remaining in the fishery, life is pretty good. "We are making record profits and working less with the quota now," Williams said.

The final speaker of the session was Keith Colburn, a Dungeness crab fisherman in Alaska who is a star of the television program "Deadliest Catch." He noted that the past six years in Alaska included three of the warmest and three of the coldest years in recent memory. For him and other fishermen, figuring out where the crabs can be found is based less on traditional knowledge and more on scientific data, he said. "I have to use science to decide where to fish. If it's warm water and air temperatures, then you have to go to deep water to find them. Other years, it's the opposite. My problem is the huge swings from cold to hot years are happening too fast. Plus the storms are becoming much more severe and much more frequent," Colburn said.

The well-attended session showed that scientists and fishermen alike are worried about the future of the Gulf of Maine, a future that both groups acknowledge they know very little about.

### OCEAN ACIDIFICATION A REGIONAL ISSUE

**By Melissa Waterman**

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

Carbon dioxide, CO₂ in the atmosphere enters the ocean dissolved in rain or snow. The ocean is considered a carbon dioxide sink; it can absorb large amounts of dissolved CO₂ for periods of time. According to scientists, the world's oceans have been absorbing up to 25% of the CO₂ produced globally. But now that buffering capacity is gone.

Dissolved CO₂ mixes with water (H₂O) to form carbonic acid. Carbonic acid is just that, an acid. Large amounts of it alter the ocean's pH by eating up the carbonate ions in the water. Unfortunately, creatures such as crabs, shellfish and lobsters make their shells from the calcium carbonate in the water.

Global ocean pH has declined by 0.1 since the industrial revolution, which means an increase in acidity of about 30%. It is projected to decline by an additional 0.3 over the next century unless carbon emissions are cut back sharply.

Professor Joe Salisbury from the University of New Hampshire spoke about the implications of an acidifying ocean at the Maine Fisherman's Forum. "It doesn't matter if the CO₂ is coming from human activities or from phytoplankton blooms," he said. "It's CO₂, phytoplankton, when they die, emit CO₂ as they decay. He also noted that the freshwater entering the Gulf from its many rivers tends to be more acidic than freshwater rivers in the western United States.

Researchers point to two main factors that contribute to the Gulf's vulnerability: cold, fresher water from the Labrador Current, and the high volume of fresh water from rivers and streams flowing into the Gulf. These variables increase the Gulf of Maine's sensitivity to ocean acidification because cold, fresh water more readily absorbs carbon dioxide, leading to faster rates of acidification.

In addition, precipitation and freshwater discharge into the coastal ocean are predicted to increase in the future as temperatures warm. Port Clyde lobsterman Gerry Cusman ashed Salisbury when the Gulf will reach a critical level at which time lobsters will no longer be able to live here.

That point is not coming any time soon, Salisbury responded. Although the Gulf is warming rapidly, it is not acidifying as rapidly as other marine regions. "The Gulf of Maine is acidifying at half the rate of the world's oceans," Salisbury said. "We don't know why yet. It may be that we simply don't have enough data to do a rigorous statistical analysis." He speculated that the difference might be due to the fact that the Gulf's waters are still very cold, thus are less able to take in dissolved CO₂. If that is the case, he said, changes could lead Maine's lobster industry into turmoil.

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

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

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

"They are putting their energy into balancing the pH in their blood and tissues, not into growth. So the odds are you will see smaller lobsters with smaller gonads and decreased reproduction," Small said. But, he noted, not all areas of the Gulf of Maine are the same; in one area the water may be more sensitive to dissolved CO₂ than in another. The topic of ocean acidification is getting attention, not only in Maine, but throughout New England. The Maine Legislature set up a commission in 2014 to look at the impacts ocean acidification may have on the state's marine species. In 2015 the commission released its report which called for more research on ocean acidification and how it will affect the state's seafood industries. The report also recommended reducing carbon dioxide emissions, exploring ways to mitigate ocean acidification, and providing the state's fisheries with the capital required for limiting efforts to limit runoff from farms and other sources. In New England, the Northeastern Regional Association of Coastal and Ocean Observing Systems (NERACOOS) has organized a new association called the Northeast Coastal Ocean Acidification Network (NECAN) to synthesize regional ocean acidification science.
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND MARKETING BOARD TAKES SHAPE

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

MIXED NEWS FOR GROUNDFISHERMEN

NOAA and the New England Fishery Management Council proposed 2016 quotas for the northeast groundfish fishery which starts May 1. The proposal includes updated catch quotas and fishing limits for the fishery’s 20 groundfish stocks — including cod, flounder, haddock and more — for the next three years. Georges Bank cod will see a 62% reduction from last year in the allowable catch, reducing the total catch limit to 762 metric tons of Georges Bank cod in the 2016 fishing year. This translates into an approximate 95% cut in the Georges Bank cod quota since 2012. The total catch limit for Georges Bank haddock, by comparison, is 36,068 metric tons — an increase of 130% from a year ago. The update also includes a 30% increase from last year in catch for Gulf of Maine cod, and increases of 130% for Georges Bank haddock and 28% for pollock. Redfish will see a 14% decrease, but the total catch limit for 2016 is 10,338 metric tons — much greater than most other species.

SEN. COLLINS URGES FUNDING FOR SAFETY TRAINING

Senator Susan Collins spearheaded a letter from six U.S. senators to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Homeland Security, Senator Susan Collins spearheaded a letter from six U.S. senators to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Homeland Security, urging funding for the Fishing Safety Training Grant Program and Fishing Safety Research Grant Program in the Homeland Security Department’s 2017 appropriations bill.

“The safety and survival of our commercial fishermen are of the utmost importance, and we fully support the expansion of safety training requirements,” the senators wrote. “We are concerned, however, that the high costs of this required training will fall entirely on the fishing families in our states who continue to experience tremendous financial strain.” The signatories were Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), Sen. Angus King (I-ME), Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA), Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA).

MAINE DELEGATION TAKES ISSUE WITH SWEDEN

Senators Susan Collins and Angus King and Representatives Chellie Pingree and Bruce Poliquin wrote to three top Obama Administration officials to resist Swedish efforts to ban the import of live Maine lobsters into the European Union. In a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry, U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman and NOAA Administrator Dr. Kathryn Sullivan, the Maine Congressional Delegation said live Maine lobsters have been exported around the world for decades and the risk of those lobsters breeding with European species is low.

“We urge you to engage in immediate efforts to ensure the continuation of safe and responsible import of live Maine lobsters, consistent with the EU’s World Trade Organization (WTO) obligations,” the Delegation wrote.

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

EAVESDROPPING ON WHALES IN THE GULF OF MAINE

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

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

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

LOBSTER BUYERS REQUIRED TO TAKE HANDLING CLASS

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

The 50-member Nova Scotia Fish Packers Association objected to the new policy requiring lobster buyers to take a lobster handling course before their operating permits are renewed. The association claims that the rules are lopsided and believes that any mandated training should begin with the lobstermen, who are thus far immune from any requirement.
larly the soft-shell lobsters that dominate the fall season, means improving handling practices on the boat as well as on the wharf. The Stonington Lobstermen’s Cooperative has two buying stations on the harbor from which they move an astonishing volume of lobsters each year.

“It’s all manpower, to get the lobsters from the tanks to the crates and on the scale and into the water,” said Ronny Trundy, the co-op’s manager. But after that, Trundy continued, a conveyor belt takes over. A 40-foot conveyor belt attached to a hoist moves lobsters at the co-op’s main buying station; a shorter, fixed conveyor belt operates at the second site downtown. The co-op decided to buy conveyor belts about ten years ago. “It all works very well. There’s no way we could operate without it with the volume of lobsters we land here. We’d be hoisting lobsters all day,” Trundy said. “I timed it. We can load ten 90-pound crates to the pallet in just over a minute with the belt.”

“At the smaller but still busy Winter Harbor Cooperative, office manager Susan Soper spoke highly of the cooperative’s new $20,000 conveyor belt. “The belt runs into our cooler. So the lobsters go directly from the water to a cooler, then to a waiting truck each day.”

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“At the smaller but still busy Winter Harbor Cooperative, office manager Susan Soper spoke highly of the cooperative’s new $20,000 conveyor belt. “The belt runs into our cooler. So the lobsters come in there and then get stacked on the pallets and into the truck,” she said. The conveyor belt allows the crates to move directly from the water to a cooler, then to a waiting truck each day.

The Spruce Head Cooperative, on the other hand, moves a high volume of lobsters but without the benefit of a conveyor belt. “The crates come out of the water two at a time using a hydraulic lift, are loaded five high onto a pallet and then moved on a truck with the forklift,” explained general manager Tom Armbrrecht. The co-op has loaded more than two million pounds of lobster during the past four years. That figure translates into a lot of effort by the wharf workers and a lot of overtime pay to those workers as the season picks up in intensity during the fall. “The board talked about getting a conveyor this year, but it’s too early right now to say anything more about it,” Armbrrecht said.
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Numerous awards were presented at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum in early March. At top left, Marine Patrol Officer Jeff Turcotte receives the MLA Officer of the Year award. At bottom left, MLA Board member Bobby Ingalls receives the MLA Golden V-Notch Award. At bottom right, fisherman Andy Mays receives the first DMR Award of Excellence from DMR Commissioner Patrick Keliher. Photos courtesy of Mark Haskell Photography.