



LANDINGS

News & Views from Maine's Lobstering Community

February 2025 | Vol. 33, No.2

MAINE HALTS ASMFC GAUGE INCREASE

By Melissa Waterman

At a January 9 public hearing on implementing the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) rule to increase the minimum size for lobsters caught in LMA1, Department of Marine Resources (DMR) Commissioner Patrick Keliher announced that he would withdraw the state's regulation altogether based on lobstermen's comments.

The ASMFC rule, which was due to go into effect on July 1, had twice been delayed by the ASFMC at Maine's urging. The Commission adopted the management plan that includes the gauge change in May 2023 in response to survey data showing a sharp decline in sub-legal lobsters.

According to Keliher, by withdrawing the state regulation, Maine runs the risk of being out of compliance with ASFMC's American lobster fishery management plan (FMP) when the new rule goes into force in July.

On January 10 in a message to lobstermen Keliher explained his decision. "... [A]fter hearing loud and clear from Maine lobster industry members that they are unified in their opposi-

tion to a proposed rule change that would increase the minimum gauge size starting in July of this year, with approval from Governor Mills I decided to pull the regulation. ... this decision to pull the regulation, driven by the Maine lobster industry's strong and compelling opposition, now requires that I go back to ASMFC and work with the Policy Board on a plan to ensure compliance with the FMP."



Lobstermen made it abundantly clear: no increase in the minimum gauge size. MLMC photo.

Numerous fishing organizations, including the Maine Lobstermen's Association, New England Fishermen's Stewardship Alliance, and the Maine Lobstering Union, advocated against the proposed change.

The Maine Lobstermen's Association had opposed the gauge change since it was first proposed. "In April 2023, MLA attended public meetings and submitted comments to ASMFC opposing the gauge increase. Among the concerns we raised were that lobstermen do not believe an increase is needed because they are seeing lots of small lobsters, questions regarding data and reference period, and the economic impacts of trade with Canada." The association continued to argue against the increase.

Continued on page 5

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TRUMP PAUSES OFFSHORE WIND LEASING

By Melissa Waterman

On his first day in office, President Donald Trump signed an executive order that temporarily halts offshore wind energy lease sales in federal waters and pauses approvals, permits and loans for both offshore and onshore wind.

During the pause, Department of Interior officials will review the environmental impact of both onshore and offshore wind projects on wildlife and consider the "economic costs associated with intermittent generation," according to the executive order. In addition, Trump's order instructs federal officials to review the



Photo courtesy of Business Wire.

"ecological, economic, and environmental necessity of terminating or amending any existing wind energy leases," which could allow officials to reassess or revoke leases that have already been granted.

The U.S. has around 2.4 gigawatts (GW) of advanced-stage offshore wind developments which are unlikely to be impacted by the order, according to Rystad Energy. More than 20 projects are in various stages of permitting.

In New England, two offshore wind projects are either oper-

Continued on page 4

Inside

Page 2
COASTAL OUTLOOK
Thoughts from the MLCA president

Page 3
MUCH IS CHANGING IN
LOBSTER FISHERY

Page 6
NEW STUDY ON N.E.
LOBSTER FISHERY

Pages 7-11
MLA UPDATE

Page 12-13
SAVE MAINE
LOBSTERMEN DONORS

Page 24
MAINE FISHERMEN'S
FORUM PREVIEW

Page 26
IN THE NEWS

Page 28
PHOTOS OF A LOST PAST



COASTAL OUTLOOK *Thoughts from MLCA President Patrice McCarron*

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Landings is published monthly. It is provided for *free* to all Maine lobstermen thanks to the support of **Mack Boring.**

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MLCAlliance is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, established in 2010, which achieves its charitable mission through programs in education, research and charity.

On January 18, two Downeast scallopers, Chester Barrett and his son Aaron, were lost at sea as they were bringing their boat *Sudden Impact* from Edmunds to South Addison. After a multi-day search, Maine's underwater recovery team located the 34-foot vessel in approximately 160 feet of water near Moose Cove between Cutler and Lubec. The loss of the two men is tragic and has been felt throughout the coast. It underscores what every fisherman knows: every day you set out to sea you may not come back.

In January lobstermen were surprised when Department of Marine Resources Commission Patrick Keliher abruptly withdrew Maine's acceptance of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) planned increase to the minimum legal size for lobsters caught in LMA1. During an angry public hearing with lobstermen in Augusta, Keliher announced that Maine would withdraw its rule to implement the gauge increase. In a written statement, Keliher said "...with approval from Governor Mills I decided to pull the regulation. ... this decision to pull the regulation, driven by the Maine lobster industry's strong and compelling opposition, now requires that I go back to ASMFC and work with the Policy Board on a plan to ensure compliance with the FMP [lobster fishery management plan]." New Hampshire soon followed Maine's action. The ASMFC gauge change is scheduled to go into effect on July 1.

On the day he took office, President Trump signed an executive order halting offshore wind energy leases and pausing approvals and permits for both offshore and onshore wind projects. Among the reasons cited for this action, was "to ensure that the United States is able to maintain a robust fishing industry for future generations." Trump's order instructs federal officials to review the "ecological, economic, and environmental necessity of terminating or amending any existing wind energy leases," which could allow officials to reassess or revoke leases that have already been granted. The executive order will likely stall the Gulf of Maine leases recently awarded to two international companies in October 2024 but it is too early to understand how it will affect Maine's planned offshore wind energy research array, which received approval in August 2024.

Next month the 50th Maine Fishermen's Forum takes place at the Samoset Resort in Rockport. The Forum was started by University of Maine resource economist Jim Wilson and his research assistant Robin Alden in 1974, just as the

Magnuson-Stevens Conservation and Fishery Management Act was coming into effect. The Forum was envisioned as a gathering organized by fishermen for fishermen to discuss what was most important at the time. Since then it has become a highly anticipated annual event at which fishermen, scientists, environmental organizations, and regulators can meet with each other, argue, learn, and also spend time informally with family and friends. *Landings* provides an overview of this year's seminars. The Maine Lobstermen's Association's 71st annual meeting will take place at the Forum at 9 a.m. on Friday, February 28 and it will host a social at the Samoset Golf Club at 4:30 that afternoon.

During the past few decades, Maine's lobster fishery has undergone many changes. While the techniques of lobstering remain largely the same, the ecological and economic environments in which lobstermen fish have shifted greatly. Researchers at the University of Maine are studying social indicators related to the lobster industry to better understand how the fishery

is changing and what those changes might mean for the broader economy. The lobster fishery is not likely to disappear from the state yet it is unclear the form it may take in future decades.

Part of the evolution in the lobster fishery has come in the equipment lobstermen use. Where once a lobster boat carried a compass and VHF radio, now a range of high-tech gear helps lobstermen find the lobsters. Jason Philbrook, a former lobsterman and marine electronics professional, reflects on the shift he has seen in the last thirty years and considers what may come next.

Women make up a growing percentage of lobstermen in Maine, yet they have also been fully involved in New England fisheries for many years. They may work as scientists, business owners, heads of fisheries organizations, or in many other occupations related to commercial fishing. Ann Backus, director of outreach at the T.H. Chan School of Public Health at Harvard University and a columnist for *Landings*, has worked to improve fishermen's safety at sea for many years and in many forms, as highlighted in this month's issue. And she shows no signs of stopping this important work.

We hope you enjoy *Landings* and look forward to your comments.

Patrice

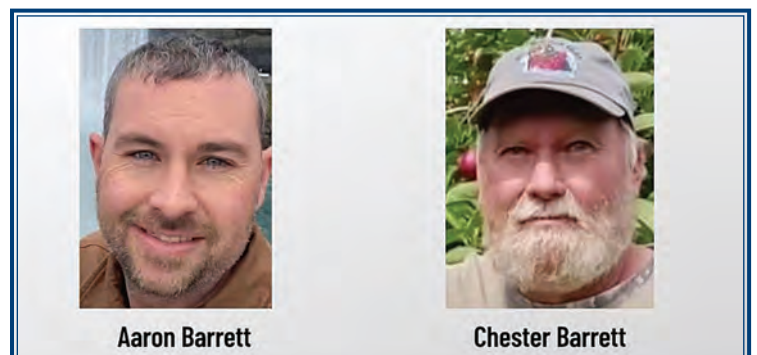


The new year is starting with a mix of tragedy and regulatory surprises. MLMC photo.

Support for family of lost fishermen

A GoFundMe campaign is underway online for Melanie Barrett, who lost Chet Barrett, her husband of 36 years, and Aaron Barrett, her only child, on January 11. The two men were lost at sea as they were bringing their scallop boat *Sudden Impact* from Edmunds to the South Addison harbor. "They simply loved the water; bass fishing, boating, and the infamous rope swing at their lifetime camp at Schoodic Lake, lobster fishing out of South Addison and scallop dragging out of Cobscook Bay," a family member wrote.

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/fishing-vessel-sudden-impact-support-melanie-barrett>



Aaron Barrett

Chester Barrett

MUCH IS CHANGING IN MAINE'S LOBSTER FISHERY

By Brooks Hays, Maine Morning Star, reprinted with permission

Wait times for a lobster fishing license, especially for those not born into a family of fishermen, used to exceed a decade in some parts of Maine, but the queues are getting shorter as fewer young people enter the fishery. Lobster boat captains often struggle to find enough sternmen to help and used lobster boats are taking longer to sell than they used to.

The threat of climate change and more restrictive right whale protections — as well as several years of more modest landing totals — have some in the lobster industry second-guessing their future in the business, yielding subtle, but real, changes in the makeup of the fishery.

“There are fewer variable professional fishermen than there were 20 years ago, but there are more fishermen fishing full-time, offshore,” said Theresa Burnham, a postdoctoral research associate with the University of Maine. “Licenses overall are decreasing over time, as well. So the question is: Who is remaining?”

Burnham is one of a handful of researchers looking at social indicators related to the lobster fishing industry for clues as to how the fishery is changing and what those changes might mean for the broader economy.

Both those who study lobster fishing and those who do the fishing (and a few who do both) are quite certain the industry is evolving. Far fewer, however, are confident about what exactly it will look like in five or ten years.

In conversations with fishermen, a sense of uncertainty permeates. “It’s such an unstable way of life and it’s not getting any better,” said Nick Perreault, a fifth generation fisherman who captains a lobster boat out of Jonesport.

Given the choice, most people prefer stability, but for investors and business leaders, predictability is especially vital. The same goes for lobster fishermen, who are both the leaders of and investors in their own small businesses.

The ocean is full of surprises, but for nearly 50 years, lobstermen have mostly gotten their wish. Fishermen have faced periodic changes in regulations, modest price fluctuations, and of course, the threat of bad weather, but as far as making a living on the water goes, Maine’s lobster industry has been a rather reliable place to conduct business. Thanks to a combination of environmental factors, including the prevalence of deep, cold (but not too cold) water in the Gulf of Maine, as well as forward-thinking size limits and a tightly controlled supply of commercial fishing licenses, Maine’s lobster stock has remained bountiful.



What will be the future of Maine's lobster fishery is a question on many lobstermen's minds. MLMC photo.

The reliability and profitability of the industry has resulted in a workforce largely defined by generational continuity: fishermen begetting fishermen. For many in Maine’s lobster industry, life on the water, hauling traps and banding claws, was a given. They watched their grandfathers, fathers, mothers, uncles, sisters and brothers up before dawn, thermos in hand, headed to the docks in orange and yellow bibs.

“It used to be that pretty much everyone from here went fishing,” Perreault said. “Now you see a lot more people go to college.” He said that even those who want to stay put or get into the fishery are increasingly devising backup plans.

“You have people going to Maine Maritime Academy and getting an engineering degree,” he said. “I even know one fisherman who has a doctorate.”

Perreault himself, who also holds fishing licenses for scallops and elvers, is in the process of getting off the water and moving to the retail side of the industry. He expects that being the one buying lobsters off the docks — as opposed to

Continued on page 4

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Changing lobster fishery continued from page 3

selling lobster freshly pulled from traps — will offer a more stable and lucrative career, as well as the flexibility to base his operations somewhere with a few more people and amenities. As of the 2020 Census, Jonesport had a population of just 1,264.

Though Perreault never felt the pull to fish in deeper waters, he has witnessed its effect on his peers. “There was a period of time when everyone was rushing to get offshore,” he said. “That was to be the pinnacle of your career.”

That trend is reflected in the licensing data Burnham and her colleagues have been collecting and analyzing. Different license classes dictate what lobster fishermen can and can't do. Fishermen with an LC2, or Class II license, can carry one crew, while an LC3 holder can carry two sternmen.

“Over the last 20 years, we found the number of LC2 holders, which are kind of like mid-range efforts, professional fishermen with just one crew, is going down,” Burnham said. “On the other hand, the LC3s, or Class III, have gone up 50%.”

With more sternmen, or deckhands, to help, LC3 holders can venture farther from shore, where they can harvest lobsters found in deeper water. Many lobsters migrate out into the Gulf of Maine during the winter months, where the water is actually warmer, but scientists think some lobsters remain in deeper water year-round. Offshore lobster fishermen sometimes set traps in water as deep as 600 feet.

The length of the commute from dock to traps isn't the only thing that changes when fishermen graduate to offshore lobstering. The change typically necessitates the purchasing of a new, more expensive boat, as well as additional gear. “These are people that are relatively young and making a huge investment in the fishery,” Burnham said.

Twenty years ago, most lobster fishermen relied on modest boats, between 25 and 35 feet in length. “Today, the typical lobster boat is more like 46 feet,” said Peter Kass, owner of a boat building shop in South Bristol. “The boats also got four feet wider and two feet deeper, and they got much bigger engines. All in, you're pushing a million dollars.” Around 2000, a new seaworthy downeast boat might fetch \$25,000 to \$50,000.

“My boat is only 26 feet, I paid \$60,000,” Perreault said. At the time, Perreault said he had to pay more than the boat was appraised for because the market for boats was running hot. Even as fishermen rushed to get offshore, the ever-increasing landing totals that characterized the fishery in the early-to-mid aughts, as well as the generational nature of the labor force, ensured there were always new in-shore fishermen eager to take the place of those headed for deeper waters.

According to Perreault, finances rarely proved an impediment to fishermen looking to go offshore. “All you had to show really was that you work hard and are doing well,” he said. “It was super easy to take out huge bank loans.”

Perreault saw friends and peers regularly buy \$500,000 to \$700,000 boats. And though this may have been the norm several years ago, Perreault and others said that's no longer the case.

“The lobster boat market right now is quite dead, there's been the fear of regulations for quite a while and landings have been down,” said Kass. “I think there are very few lobster boats being built right now. Whereas five years ago, you couldn't buy one without waiting two or three years.” Kass said he and other lobster boat builders have been busy building tuna boats for recreational fishermen.

Whether fueled by fear of impending right whale protections or concerns over reports of dwindling numbers of young lobsters, the industry churn that once sent fishermen racing offshore replaced by eager sternmen, often the offspring of fishermen themselves, has begun to slow and even reverse.

“It's kind of coming back the other way now,” Perreault said. “I'm seeing some guys starting to leave offshore and coming back inshore. I'm seeing some guys in their 40s and 50s that don't want to do the offshore thing anymore. You see more fishermen now trying to be on the wholesale or retail side, like me, because it's a good hedge, you can get more money for your product.”

Others may have to supplement lobster fishing with kelp farming or other forms of aquaculture. Few in the industry think lobster fishing is on the way out, but the period of uncertainty, like a slack tide preparing to recede, may reveal new patterns within the industry.

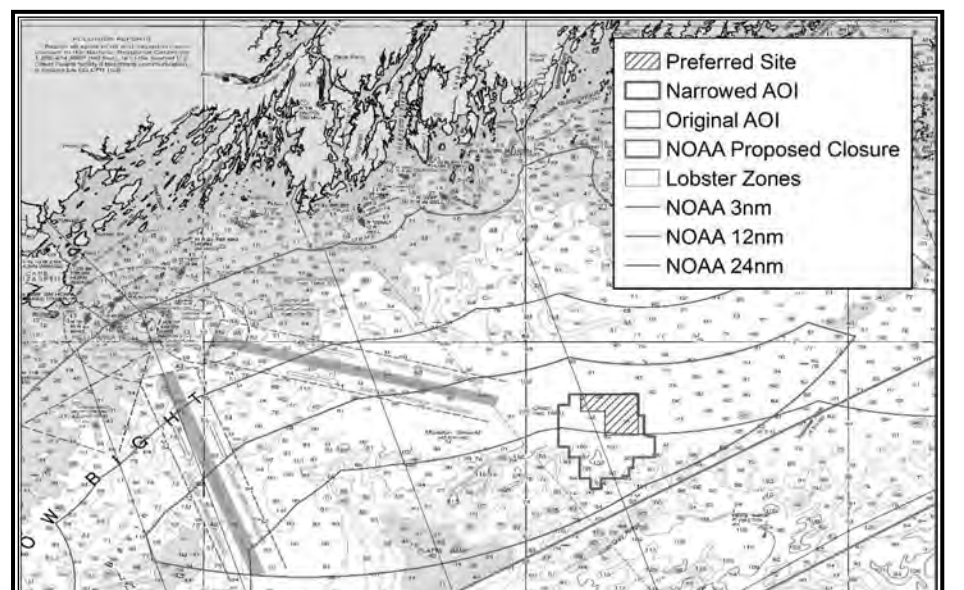
Wind energy continued from page 1

ating or under construction — Vineyard Wind and New England Wind — and would not be impacted by this order. These projects will produce 6.5 gigawatts when fully operational. Other planned developments, such as Beacon Wind and Vineyard Wind 2, will be on pause because they still require some federal approvals. The impact on other projects, such as SouthCoast Wind, is unclear.

The executive order also prevents those who have obtained leases in the Gulf of Maine from beginning the permitting process for floating wind turbine projects. Last summer the state of Maine received lease approval for a floating wind turbine research array in federal waters southeast of Portland. Chris Wissemann, CEO of Diamond Offshore Wind, the development partner with the University of Maine on the research array, said in a *Portland Press Herald* article that engineering, research and planning will extend beyond the end of Trump's second term in January 2029. No federal action, he said, “is necessary or expected for the research array for more than five years.”

At the first offshore lease auction last October two international companies, Avangrid Renewables and Invenergy NE Offshore Wind, successfully purchased several leases in the Gulf. In the *Portland Press Herald* article an Avangrid spokesman said the company would not comment on how Trump's executive order might affect the energy company's project. An Invenergy spokeswoman said the company, with industry partners, is evaluating the executive orders. Andrew Price, president and CEO of Competitive Energy Services, a consulting group in Portland, said lease negotiations between the federal government and Avangrid and Invenergy will likely stall as long as the president's executive order is in place.

Former President Joe Biden's administration encouraged offshore wind development as part of the administration's goal of creating 30 GW of offshore wind energy by 2030. During the past four years, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management in the Department of Interior permitted 11 commercial-scale offshore wind energy projects, totaling 19 gigawatts of renewable energy.



The future of Maine's proposed offshore wind energy research array is unclear in light of Trump's executive order.

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NAVIGATION GOING HIGH TECH

By Melissa Waterman

It wasn't that long ago when you could stand at a lobster boat helm and see only a compass and VHF radio. The amount and type of electronics carried on a lobster boat in earlier days was limited. "When I started out in the 60s, well, you didn't need much," said a retired Spruce Head lobsterman who wished to remain unnamed. "Inshore you didn't bother with radar, just another expense."

Jason Philbrook's family members have all been mid-coast Maine fishermen. Philbrook lobstered himself in Penobscot Bay during the 1980s and early 1990s before shifting into marine electronics at Rockbound Computers in Rockland. "In the 80s you had a compass, a radio and a depth finder, that was it," he recalled. He started out as sternman for his father at a time when the electronic gear lobster boats carried was just beginning to change. "I helped him with the electronics, he helped me learn to fish," Philbrook said.

When Philbrook started out, lobstermen didn't fish particularly large areas and very few fished offshore. You generally knew where you were, even in poor weather, and you knew how to get home. "We would line up the cement plant [in Thomaston] and a visible object like the Rockport Drive-in to lay a course. And then take note of the compass to do the same if we had bad weather," he said.

Slowly lobstermen began to set their traps offshore, some for part of the year, others year-round. "It wasn't wise to just go by the compass if you were going offshore," Philbrook said. "Loran was available but it didn't always work." Loran (Long Range Navigation) was developed during World War II using radio signals to determine location. The system began to be phased out in the U.S. during the 1970s.



In the early 2000s, Maine lobstermen were beginning to concentrate on offshore waters beyond the 12-mile line. To venture offshore meant a larger boat and, as marine technology changed, more electronic gear.

"You needed two radios, rather than just one. Maybe a satellite phone. Radar and autopilot. Computer and software. EPIRB. It's an above average amount of money for the equipment," Philbrook said drily.

Gauge change continued from page 1

Any state that is a member of the ASFMC can come up with actions that differ from ASFMC regulations, known as a conservation equivalency, so long as they "achieve the same quantified level of conservation." Maine can submit proposals for equivalent conservation measures but it must also prove that it can enforce those measures. According to Keliher, "[t]hat plan will require input from industry to ensure that we are proposing measures that achieve conservation benefits that are equivalent to those intended by this regulation".

The MLA said in a message to members, "Over the past few months, MLA has been advocating that DMR explore a conservation equivalency that could achieve the conservation goal without devastating our industry. These ideas came from you, our members, as stated in our comment at the public hearing. This appears to be the path that DMR will follow moving forward."

DMR plans to meet with the reconvened Lobster Conservation Management Teams, the Lobster Advisory Council, and the Lobster Zone Councils to discuss possible conservation measures. The ASFMC Lobster Management Board will discuss the issue at its winter meeting on February 4. That board, ultimately, would be the first to review Maine's proposed alternative conservation measures if they are developed.



Philbrook thinks the electronic devices have helped lobstermen fish more effectively and safely. But he takes exception to the notion that such devices have erased the need to actually know how to fish. "Fishermen learn about where the lobsters are every time they go out. They learn the migration patterns. If you don't really know how to fish it doesn't matter what tools are available," he said.

NOAA charts for offshore waters provide the general bathymetry of areas but many lobstermen want more specific information about depths and bottom features. As a result, TimeZero, Olex, Hondex systems came into use. Computers now can create detailed and specific maps for each lobsterman, giving them a more precise understanding of the bottom and lobster behavior. "The computer can mark every time they set. They can track what the bottom is, mud or hard. They can understand the habitat," Philbrook said.

He believes that the next step in the world of marine electronics will be expansion of Internet access on fishing vessels. "To go fishing used to be unplugged. You go out and do one thing very well," he said. That has changed. Elon Musk's Starlink satellite internet system provides high-speed broadband internet to remote areas around the world. Starlink provides a more affordable option for lobstermen to have high quality Internet on board. You buy an antenna, pay \$200 a month and you're no longer disconnected from the rest of the world," he said.

If you have a minor medical issue or something needs to be repaired at sea, a fisherman can find YouTube videos on what to do. "If you're twenty miles offshore and something goes wrong, I can give you tech support," Philbrook said. It's just one more new element of fishing in a rapidly changing world.

For more information about ASFMC: www.asmfmc.org

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NEW STUDY BEGINNING ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF NEW ENGLAND LOBSTER FISHERY

By Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries staff

FACT: American lobster is the most valuable commercial fishery in the north-eastern U.S.

How many thousands of people depend on this fishery for their livelihood?

GOOD QUESTION! (But no one knows for sure.)

How many depend solely on the lobster fishery? How many are involved in other fisheries or have other jobs or businesses? How many family members do they support? Are they able to save for the future? What are the true costs of running a lobster business today?

MORE GOOD QUESTIONS! (But still no answers...)

Despite its economic importance, we currently have very little socioeconomic data available on the lobster industry. A dramatic increase in landings in the 1990's allowed the fishery to absorb an influx of new entrants. As the number of people employed by the lobster industry increased, so did the dependence of many coastal communities upon this single marine resource.

This creates a dangerous situation for coastal communities: current lobster landings support nearly 10,000 fishing jobs throughout New England, yet we have little information to quantify communities' dependence on the resource.

The lack of socioeconomic data for the Gulf of Maine lobster industry makes it very difficult to prepare effectively for inevitable changes within the fishery. As lobster landings and regulations change, the industry is unprepared to clearly show the magnitude lobster fishing has on the economic status of coastal communities.

A large-scale effort is currently underway to begin this important task.

Guided by an industry and management steering committee, the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries in partnership with the Maine Lobstermen's Association, the Department of Marine Resources, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, and UMaine has created a survey designed to elicit the socioeconomic data we currently lack. This survey will be administered by Market Decisions, an independent research firm, to a random sample of lobstermen throughout Maine.



More information is needed on the broad socio-economic importance of New England's lobster fishery. A survey of lobstermen conducted by Market Decisions will help gather that information. MLMC photo.

Answers will be reported only in aggregate to ensure the confidentiality of all responses.

It is important that we understand and assert the true importance of the lobster industry. By doing this survey now, when the resource is healthy, we will be able to properly quantify and qualify its importance to so many communities

If you receive a call from Market Decisions, please do your part to help show the importance of lobster fishing to you and your community. If you have any questions about this survey, contact Alexa Dayton at MCCF (207) 367-2708.


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MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

Maine Lobstermen's Association

...

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

President: Kristan Porter
Cutler, 460-0560
Vice-President: Craig Stewart
Long Island, 653-6914
Treasurer: Jarod Bray
Matinicus, 542-8961
Secretary: Chris Welch
Kennebunk, 205-2093

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Joshua Beal, Milbridge, 479-9624
Sonny Beal, Beals Island, 356-1684
Brian Billings, Deer Isle, 812-0287
Laurin Brooks, Kennebunk, 468-2165
Herman Coombs, Orr's Island, 807-8596
Gerry Cushman, Port Clyde, 372-6429
Jim Dow, Bass Harbor, 460-2565
Adam Gamage, Walpole, 557-2694
Andy Havener, Friendship, 542-1466
Richard Howland, Islesford, 460-3016
Robert Ingalls, Bucks Harbor, 271-7199
Jason Joyce, Swan's Island, 526-4109
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STEAMING AHEAD

BY PATRICE MCCARRON, MLA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A new year usually brings feelings of anticipation and a promise of good things coming in the year ahead. This year has been different.

We start the year with heavy hearts as we mourn the deaths of two fishermen who were lost at sea after their boat went down. It is impossible to make sense of the loss of Chester and Aaron Barrett. Downeast fishermen have lost two of their own, a father and son, deeply affecting their small fishing communities. Some fishermen aided in the search, other community members rallied to support the missing men's family and set up a GoFundMe site which, to date, has raised more than \$62,000. Donations in support of the family can be made to www.gofundme.com/ff/fishing-vessel-sudden-impact-support-melanie-barrett. Their deaths serve as a stark reminder of the risks quietly faced by those who choose to make their livings from the sea.

Beyond the immediate heartbreak of the accident, this tragedy reminds us of the incredible courage it takes to step onto a boat, face the unknown, and do the work that sustains so many of us. It also underscores what is becoming a new normal for fishing communities — a growing tension rooted in anxiety over proposed regulations and the changing reality of our livelihoods.

Fishermen are caught between the need to protect their future, keep their fishing business profitable, and sustain the ocean and its resources. The challenges are high stakes, tensions are rising, and there are no simple answers. Each issue on its own could have devastating effects on the lobster industry.

Take the whale rules. In 2024 the Maine lobster fishery was on track for a near shut down to protect right whales, but thanks to MLA's historic court win and a six year pause from Congress, we have a reprieve until 2029.

We know we're facing further regulation when it comes to whales and the situation is evolving. For years, right whales were extremely rare in areas where Maine lobstermen fish. In January, however, there was an unprecedented gathering of as many as 90 right whales near Jeffreys Basin, prime fishing grounds for lobstermen from Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Lobstermen are worried about what will happen to the fishery in 2029.

And offshore wind. Maine's fishing industry has not budged in its opposition to offshore wind. The "establishment" told us time and again that offshore wind was coming and if we knew what was good for us, we would "get on board." Maine's fishing industry sounded an unequivocal "No."

It is clear that President Trump heard our concerns. His executive order putting new offshore wind developments on hold was welcome news. Ensuring "that the United States is able to maintain a robust fishing industry for future generations" was one of the reasons cited for the action. We hope that this means there will be no progress on industrializing the Gulf of Maine with offshore wind projects during the next four years. After that, we will have to

wait and see.

Then there's the gauge increase. Ironically, lobster resource managers had set out to protect lobstermen. They saw the southern New England lobster fishery crash about 10 years ago, leaving those lobstermen without a fishery. In their zeal to save LMA 1 lobstermen from a similar fate, they failed to comprehend the industry's skepticism and concern over their proposed solution — an increase in the gauge.

The MLA was among the first to oppose the gauge because it would disrupt lobster trade with Canada, was blatantly unfair to Maine's Gray Zone lobstermen, relied on a complicated trigger that the MLA didn't agree with, and would result in significant reductions in catch. As more industry groups and lobstermen joined the opposition, there was a growing belief that they weren't being heard and that the gauge change wasn't needed.

When what lobstermen are seeing with their own eyes doesn't match what they're being told, they push back hard. Ultimately, this push-back led the Commissioner to pull the rule. He will work with lobstermen to develop alternative measures that achieve conservation equivalent to that intended by the gauge increase. It is certainly a relief that this gauge increase will not happen in July, but this issue is not over, and the path forward is uncertain.

The lobster industry is now living in limbo. We've had a series of tremendous regulatory victories, which is rare in commercial fisheries. But there is no end to these processes. On the other side of each victory lies the unknown of what will come next. We must try to prepare for an uncertain future and cope with the stress and anxiety that comes with not having answers.

Anxiety runs deep as each of lobsterman fears for the fate of his lobstering business, the future of his community and the future of our way of life.

The MLA has fought countless battles over the last 71 years to build a thriving lobster industry in Maine and we are not going to back down now. The world has changed tremendously since the MLA was established in 1954, and the MLA is changing with it.

The issues are complicated yet the MLA is well prepared to take them on, in part because the organization is led by a board of 21 deeply committed lobstermen from throughout the coast. Each person understands that it is his duty to sustain the lobster fishery for today's MLA members and for those who will continue our proud heritage in the future.

As always, stay safe on the water.



It's the uncertainty about what the future holds for Maine's lobster fishery that is building this winter. C. Clegg photo.

Patrice



MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

MLA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

On January 24, the MLA board of directors held a productive day-long retreat to review the association's work in 2024 and to refine its plan for 2025. The MLA will hold its Annual Meeting at 9 a.m. on Friday, February 28 at the Samoset Resort in Rockport. The MLA will also hold a social gathering in the Golf Club that afternoon at 4:30 p.m. with a free drink ticket for all who attend. The MLA invites members, their families and the public to join us at the Forum for these events.

MLA BOARD EXAMINES GEAR REMOVED FROM RW 5120

Members of the MLA Board and staff traveled to Gloucester on January 15 to examine the gear removed from Right Whale 5120. NMFS gave a presentation detailing the timeline of the entanglement and an explanation of the process to remove the gear from the whale, including a video of the initial gear retrieval by the Massachusetts Environmental Police.



MLA photo.

Based on MLA's evaluation of the gear, the association acknowledged there is evidence to support an assessment that the entanglement involved a buoy line that can be used with "Maine trap gear" based on its markings. However, the MLA finds that not enough gear was retrieved to conclusively identify if it originated from state or federal waters, rendering the available evidence of origin inconclusive.

The MLA's finding is based on three key factors:

- NOAA Fisheries (NMFS) assumption that all Maine trap gear was compliant with the new whale rule implemented in May 2022 is inaccurate.
- Given the absence of a 3-foot mark and 1,700-pound weak insert, the recovered gear does not provide sufficient information to determine whether it was fished in state or federal waters.
- The recovered gear exhibits inconsistencies with the requirements of both the 2020 and 2022 whale regulations.

The MLA has requested that NMFS reconsider its "Maine state waters trap gear" classification, due to insufficient evidence to support such a specific conclusion and revise the finding to "Maine trap gear."

MAINE HALTS MINIMUM GAUGE INCREASE, NEW HAMPSHIRE FOLLOWS

On January 9, Commissioner Keliher announced to a room of angry lobstermen that he would not move forward with the gauge increase in Maine. He explained his position in a message to Maine lobstermen the next day. "Last night, after hearing loud and clear from Maine lobster industry members that they are unified in their opposition to a proposed rule change that would increase the minimum gauge size starting in July of this year, with approval from Governor Mills I decided to pull the regulation," he wrote in a message to lobstermen.

He continued, "It's also important to note that this regulation was required to ensure that Maine remains compliant with ASMFC's Interstate Fisheries Management Plan for Lobster (FMP). So this decision to pull the regulation, driven by the Maine lobster industry's strong and compelling opposition, now requires that I go back to ASMFC and work with the Policy Board on a plan to ensure compliance with the FMP. That plan will require input from industry to ensure that we are proposing measures that achieve conservation benefits that are equivalent to those intended by this regulation."

In response to the Commissioner's announcement, the MLA stated, "MLA appreciates DMR's willingness to listen to the industry's concerns and to work with us and other industry advocates on a reasonable path forward that will not only protect the resource but also safeguard lobstermen against the financial harm that would have been caused".

The MLA has long been opposed to a gauge increase due to concern over the economic impacts on the industry. MLA has called on regulators to resolve the economic and trade issues caused by having a different size lobster landed in the U.S. and Canada, collect more accurate data on lobster populations, and redefine the time periods that are analyzed by ASMFC. On January 21, New Hampshire Governor Ayotte sent a letter to ASMFC that New Hampshire would join Maine and would also not adopt these new guidelines.

In his message Keliher told lobstermen that he will "go back to ASMFC and work with the Policy Board on a plan to ensure compliance with the FMP. That plan will require input from industry to ensure that we are proposing measures that achieve conservation benefits that are equivalent to those intended by this regulation. In the coming months, I will be working with the newly reconvened Lobster Conservation Management Teams as well as the Zone Councils to develop a path forward. I can't promise what the outcome of that process will be, but I can promise that I will work diligently to give industry an opportunity to provide input into this process."

The ASMFC meeting will take place on February 4 in Arlington, Virginia; it can be attended online via webinar. The MLA will attend the meeting to ensure the concerns of Maine lobstermen are heard. MLA will continue to work with DMR to provide input on alternative measures to reduce the likelihood of economic harm to lobstermen if landings continue to decline.

A New Face in the MLA Office

Shannon Butler, 33, joined the Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA) as office manager at the beginning of January. Butler, a Caribou native, had worked for eleven years at book publishing company Islandport Press in Yarmouth, starting right after graduating from the University of Maine at Farmington. At Islandport she progressed over the years into steadily more challenging positions, from assistant office manager to office manager, operations manager and finally vice-president.

Butler laughed when she recalled moving from the top of the state to the Portland area. "It was a little bit of a culture shock, coming from Caribou and Farmington. The pace of life was a little different," she admitted.

Islandport Press was founded in 1999 by Dean Lunt to publish New England books in a variety of genres. Its first publication, *Hauling by Hand: The Life and Times of a Maine Island*, featured a photo of Lunt's grandfather, Sanford "Dick" Lunt, on the cover.

During her years at Islandport Press, Butler met individuals from throughout the state. "I had in-depth exposure to all sorts of people," Butler said. "I learned to work with people of all ages and abilities. Many had never written a book before. They all had great stories to tell." Islandport Press was a small company so Butler was involved in all aspects of publishing, from reading manuscripts as they came in to copyediting and proofreading. "I think I had a hand in more than 200 books during my time there," she said.

Among those titles was her very own book, *All Is Calm: A Maine Christmas Reader*. "It's an anthology of nonfiction Christmas stories from Maine spanning from pre-statehood years up to present day, little snapshots of what Mainers have been doing in December for the last 200 years or so," Butler explained. *All Is Calm* was a finalist for a Maine Literary Award in 2020 and has recently been

published in an expanded second edition.

The company was recently purchased by Islandport Media, which owns a number of small Maine newspapers and other businesses. After eleven years, Butler felt it was time for a change. "I see many similarities with the MLA," she said. "It's a small organization and scrappy. I'm certainly familiar with 'all hands on deck' situations. I'm willing to pitch in anywhere, it's what I enjoy. Every day is a little different!"

While Butler acknowledges she doesn't have broad knowledge of the Maine lobster fishery, she has learned a few important things since starting in January. "It is such a complicated, nuanced industry! It's much more complicated than most people know. It's an exciting time to be stepping in and I know I will be learning for a long time," she said.

When she's not learning all about lobstering, Butler and her partner spend time fixing up their 1935 house in Kennebunk. "We're learning how to repair just about everything," she said. "We joke that it's clear no one wealthy has ever lived in this house!"



Shannon Butler.



MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

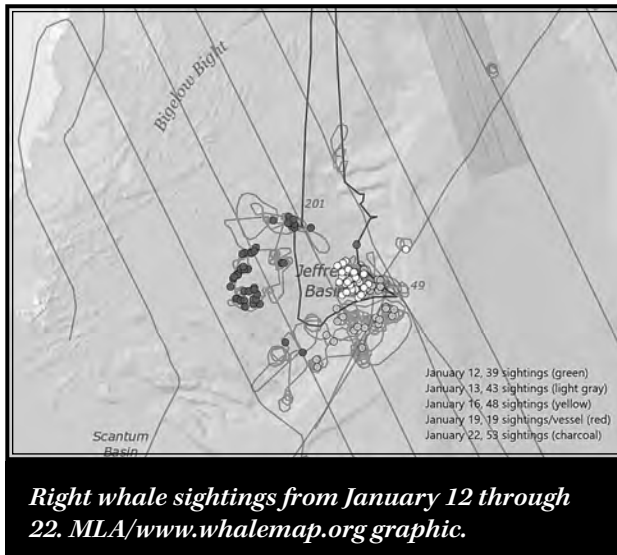
THE MLA VISITS WASHINGTON DC

MLA's executive director, Patrice McCarron traveled to Washington, DC in early January to advocate the association's priorities on right whales and other pressing issues. The MLA and Maine DMR staff met with Senator Collins to discuss several important issues before her long-time fisheries staffer, Molly Ross, transitioned to a new job. The MLA also shared the association's priorities with President-elect Trump's transition team.

RIGHT WHALES ON JEFFREYS LEDGE

An unprecedented number of right whales were sighted in areas off the western edge of Jeffreys Ledge in January. The first sightings were reported on January 12. On January 17, DMR Commissioner Keliher sent a message to the lobster industry that 75 right whales were sighted that week.

On January 24, he updated lobstermen that "as many as 90 individual right whales have been identified in this area over the past couple of weeks" and remain off the western edge of Jeffreys Ledge. "The most recent information suggests the whales may be feeding within Jeffreys Basin and the largest overlap of gear and whales appears to be in depths greater than 300 feet. I am strongly urging any lobster fisherman with trap gear set in greater than 300 feet of water inside the following area of Zone G to remove gear completely or drop one endline in order to reduce the number of vertical lines being fished. The identified area, as shown in the attached graphic, includes bottom in 300+ feet of water east of Boon Island Light and west of Jeffreys Ledge," he wrote. DMR Marine Patrol held an emergency meeting with lobstermen who fish that area on January 28.



MLA CORRECTS NMFS RIGHT WHALE POPULATION ESTIMATE

The MLA was successful in holding NMFS accountable to use the best available right whale science, resulting in 24 right whales being added to the official right whale population estimate. The estimate is now 364 whales, up from 340. Each year MLA comments on NMFS's draft right whale stock assessment. In the latest round, MLA noted that NMFS incorrectly used its original population estimate of 340 right whales for 2023 rather than its revised estimate of 364 whales for that year. The right whale stock assessment is the key reference document on the status of the right whale and has major consequences for management. "NMFS agrees with MLA that the NARW abundance estimates produced each October should generally be considered the best available scientific information on the population size of NARWs for that year," the agency wrote in its response.

NMFS WITHDRAWS VESSEL STRIKE RULE

On January 15, NMFS withdrew the proposed Vessel Strike Rule, which was proposed on August 1, 2022. According to NMFS, the agency had insufficient time to finalize this regulation under the Biden Administration due to the scope and volume of public comments. The proposed rule would have expanded the size of vessels subject to speed restrictions, enlarged the boundaries and extended the timing of seasonal speed zones, and introduced mandatory dynamic speed zones when endangered right whales were known to be present outside



L.A. Times photo.

of active seasonal zones. NMFS may issue a new rulemaking in the future, if it decides it is appropriate.

"NMFS's decision means the lobster industry will continue to be held to a higher standard while giving others a free pass," wrote the MLA in comments to

NMFS. "It is imperative that the issue of U.S. vessel strikes be addressed, however, NMFS must partner with the boating community to find a solution that will work for them. If boaters do not comply with new rules, then whales won't be protected. For more than two decades, the lobster industry has changed its fishing practices to comply with rules that protect these whales. Yet, regulators have failed to account for and acknowledge the lobster fishery's demonstrated success in reducing its impact."

MMPA SEAFOOD IMPORT BAN LAWSUIT IS SETTLED

NMFS reached a settlement with four environmental groups agreeing to ban seafood imports by next year from countries that do not meet the U.S. standards for protecting marine mammals. Conservation groups had sued to enforce the Marine Mammal Protection Act's seafood import ban provision. The seafood ban will be fully implemented by January 1, 2026. NMFS agreed to pay the environmental groups \$75,000 to cover legal fees.

TRUMP TARIFFS THREATEN U.S. AND CANADA LOBSTER INDUSTRY

President Trump has repeatedly threatened to expand tariffs on other countries' goods. Possible actions include a 25% tariff on all Canadian products, including lobster, as early as February. According to Seafood Source, that would affect \$5.6 billion worth of seafood products, and the lobster industry would be hit in both the U.S. and Canada. Congressman Jared Golden is proposing a 10% tariff on goods imported to the U.S.

Many believe the cost of the tariffs will ultimately be passed onto the consumer. According to Garrett Martin, president and CEO of the Maine Center for Economic Policy, the tariffs China placed on Maine lobster and blueberries during Trump's last administration hurt those industries. "China actually raised tariffs by 25% on Maine lobsters, and it led to a reduction in exports of lobsters to China by about 40%," he said. "Similarly, they raised tariffs on blueberries and actually the Maine blueberry market to China collapsed."

TRUMP EXECUTIVE ORDER HALTS OFFSHORE WIND

On President Trump's first day in office, he signed an Executive Order temporarily preventing offshore wind lease sales in federal waters and pausing the issuance of approvals, permits and loans for both onshore and offshore wind projects. All wind leasing and permitting practices for federal lands and waters will be reviewed and consider the environmental impact of wind projects on wildlife, the economic costs associated with the intermittent generation of electricity and the effect of subsidies on the viability of the wind industry. One of the reasons for this action, was "to ensure that the United States is able to maintain a robust fishing industry for future generations." It likely that the large commercial leases near the Maine lobster fishery will be stalled, but survey work could continue in Maine's research array.

CONGRESSMAN GOLDEN WORKS TO BAN OFFSHORE WIND IN LMA 1

Congressmen Jared Golden of Maine and Jeff Van Drew of New Jersey introduced the bipartisan Northern Fisheries Heritage Protection Act of 2025. The bill would prohibit commercial offshore wind energy development in Lobster Management

Continued on page 10

THE MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION 71st Annual Meeting

Friday, February 28 at 9 a.m.
at the Samoset Resort in Rockport.

Guest speaker Ryan Steen, MLA Legal Team

The meeting will address issues important to the lobster industry such as lobster management, future right whale protection measures, and offshore wind development.

MLA Social, 4:30 to 6 p.m., Golf Club at the Samoset. Please join us! Free drink ticket for all who attend.

We want to hear from you!



MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

MLA Update continued from page 9

Area 1 (LMA1), which includes nearly 14,000 square miles of fishing waters. "The Maine Lobstermen's Association applauds Congressman Golden for his leadership in reintroducing legislation aimed at protecting Maine's lobster fishery from the threat of large-scale offshore wind farms," said Patrice McCarron, MLA executive director. "For more than a century, these waters have supported thousands of Maine families, and the industrialization would disrupt vital fishing grounds and harm the generations-old tradition of lobstering. Congressional action is crucial to ensure that the fragile Gulf of Maine ecosystem and its wildlife, habitat and commercial fisheries are protected."

HERRING

Area 3 herring fishery landed its full 2025 quota. The fishery closed on January 19, effective through December 31, 2025.

SEVEN BOATS SELECTED FOR SHRIMP SURVEY

The *Portland Press Herald* reports that seven fishermen in South Bristol, Portland, Port Clyde and Pemaquid were selected to participate in the 2025 Northern Shrimp Winter Sampling Research Pilot Program. Three will fish with traps, and the other four will use trawls. According to DMR, 40 people submitted applications. Participating vessels will be assigned to one of three regions in Maine: Western Maine (Kittery to Phippsburg), Midcoast Maine (Phippsburg to Owls Head), or Eastern Maine (east of Owls Head). Shrimp trappers may only be set in Maine state waters and must comply with applicable Chapter 75 Protect Resource regulations, including an approved 1,700-pound weak link 50% down the vertical line. The program will not receive government funds. Instead, the program is entirely self-funded by industry participants who will be allowed to land and sell Northern shrimp, subject to limitations specified.

MAINE LEGISLATURE – LIST OF WORKING BILL TITLES

On January 24, the Legislature published the list of working bill titles for the first session of the 132nd Legislature. These titles are legislative requests (LR), which are assigned a number for tracking until the text of the bill is developed and it is printed as a Legislative Document (LD). The LD is assigned to a committee and can be tracked through the Legislature's Bill Search tool. The list of bill titles below (as of January 24) are LR's and have not yet been printed and assigned an LD number for tracking.

LOBSTERS

LR 605 *An Act Regarding Senior License Holders* (Rep. Faulkingham Billy Bob of Winter Harbor)

LR 689 *An Act to Change the Waiting List System for Commercial Lobster and Crab Fishing Licenses* (Rep. Foley Robert of Wells)

LR 861 *An Act Regarding Lobster Management* (Rep. Faulkingham Billy Bob of Winter Harbor)

LR 1858 *An Act to Improve Safety, Sustainability and Operational Efficiency in the Lobster and Scallop Fisheries* (Sen. Grohoski Nicole of Hancock)

LR 2093 *Resolve, to Require Input from Zone Councils on the Number of Lobster Traps That May Be Fished in a Secondary Zone* (Rep. Hepler Allison of Woolwich)

LR 1091 *An Act to Create a Green Crab Only Wholesale License* (Rep. Golek Cheryl of Harpswell)

MENHADEN

LR 728 *An Act Regarding the Menhaden Fishery* (Rep. Faulkingham Billy Bob of Winter Harbor)

LR 2010 *An Act to Establish Menhaden Licenses for Outer Island Communities* (Rep. Eaton Holly of Deer Isle)

COASTAL WATERS

LR 609 *An Act to Assert State Sovereignty over Ocean Waters and Marine Resources up to 12 Nautical Miles off the State's Coast* (Sen. Martin Joseph of Oxford)

LR 1261 *An Act to Assert State Sovereignty over Ocean Waters up to 12 Miles and State Ownership over Submerged Lands and Marine Resources up to 24 Miles off the State's Coast and to Direct the Attorney General to Study and Develop Opinions Concerning That Sovereignty and Ownership* (Sen. Martin Joseph of Oxford)

LR 1461 *An Act to Protect Maine's Marine Resources* (Sen. Tepler Denise of Sagadahoc)

WORKING WATERFRONT

LR 25 *An Act to Establish a Permanent Commission on Maine's Working Waterfronts and Develop a Statewide Plan* (Rep. Rielly Morgan of Westbrook)

LR 72 *An Act to Provide an Income Tax Credit for Certain Hazard Mitigation Projects for Working Waterfront Property* (Rep. Rielly Morgan of Westbrook)

LR 99 *An Act to Remove Certain Wharves and Piers from the Laws Governing the Current Use Valuation of Working Waterfront Land* (Rep. Ankeles Dan of Brunswick)

Attention Maine lobstermen!

Maine's Paid Family Medical Leave Act Affects You!

If you are a lobsterman, then you run a business. If you run a business, the new Paid Medical Leave Act (PRML) applies to you.

Maine's PFML law will provide up to 12 weeks of paid family or medical leave, or to deal with the transition of a family member's pending military deployment or stay safe after abuse or violence. The Maine Department of Labor is responsible for the implementation of this new program.

For Businesses (employer)

- The law pertains to all Maine employees but NOT independent contractors.
- If you have just one employee, even if it's just you, you are required to pay into the program. This includes any employees who were on payroll for a calendar work week — including full time, part time, seasonal, or per-diem.
- An employee is someone who is paid wages and works in Maine or performs some work in Maine.
- If you have less than 15 employees, your contribution premium will be 0.5% of wages and you may withhold all or a portion of the contribution from your employees' wages. Wages mean all compensation, including tips, gratuities, severance, terminal pay, commissions, and bonuses.

- Self-employed individuals are eligible to participate but must choose to opt in for coverage. For calendar years 2025-2027, the premium rate has been set at 0.5 percent of the individual's income from self-employment.
- Businesses must register in the Department of Labor's Paid Leave portal in January. Your payroll provider can do this for you.

For Employees

- Payroll withholdings from employee's pay begin on January 1, 2025. Both the employer and the employee contribute to the PFML Fund. Or, the employer may cover the full contribution.
- All funds are pooled to pay for future claims and other administrative costs.
- The maximum benefit is established based on average weekly wage, based on the previous year's annual earnings. Benefits will begin May 1, 2026.

For more information, visit: <https://www.maine.gov/paidleave>.

The Employer question support line number is 621-5024.



MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

LR 759 *An Act to Amend the Definition of "Working Waterfront"* (Rep. Faulkingham Billy Bob of Winter Harbor)

LR 869 *An Act to Spread Awareness of Maine's Working Waterfronts* (Rep. Rielly Morgan of Westbrook)

LR 1645 *An Act Related to Maine's Working Waterfront* (Rep. Hepler Allison of Woolwich)

LR 2049 *An Act Regarding the Maine Working Waterfront Preservation Rapid Response* (Rep. Mathieson Kristi of Kittery)

LR 2121 *An Act to Strengthen Working Waterfronts Against Nuisance Complaints Regarding Aquaculture* (Rep. Rielly Morgan of Westbrook)

LR 2323 *An Act to Facilitate the Reconstruction of Storm-damaged Commercial Fisheries Facilities and Infrastructure* (Pres. Daughtry Matthea of Cumberland)

AQUACULTURE

LR 1674 *An Act to Improve Community Communication in Aquaculture Siting* (Sen. Reny Cameron of Lincoln)

LR 2087 *An Act to Support Maine's Sea Farmers* (Rep. Rielly Morgan of Westbrook)

LR 2164 *An Act to Ease Regulatory Burdens on Maine's Sea Farmers* (Rep. Rielly Morgan of Westbrook)

SCALLOPS AND OTHER FISHERIES

LR 325 *An Act to Improve Scallop Management in Coastal Waters* (Rep. Faulkingham Billy Bob of Winter Harbor)

LR 995 *An Act to Authorize the Commissioner of Marine Resources to Add Limited-access Area Days During the Scallop Season* (Rep. Faulkingham Billy Bob of Winter Harbor)

LR 1683 *An Act to Support the Growth of Maine's Farmed Atlantic Sea Scallop Industry Through Funding Biotoxin Testing and Other Services* (Rep. Eaton Holly of Deer Isle)

LR 1964 *An Act to Retain Scallop Licenses for Outer Island Communities* (Rep. Eaton Holly of Deer Isle)

LR 1062 *An Act to Allow a Breakdown Waiver for Halibut Fishing* (Rep. Strout Tiffany of Harrington)

LR 667 *An Act Related to the Disbursement of Revenue Generated from the Harvesting of River Herring* (Rep. Bridgeo William of Augusta)

OTHER

LR 122 *An Act to Exempt from State Sales Tax Utility Vehicles Purchased for Use in Commercial Fishing, Agricultural Production, Aquacultural Production and Wood Harvesting* (Rep. Faulkingham Billy Bob of Winter Harbor)

LR 618 *An Act to Provide Reduced Interest Rates for Logging and Fishing Operations* (Sen. Bennet Richard of Oxford)

LR 1249 *Resolve, to Establish a Study to Determine How Much Input the Commercial Fisheries Have on the Determination of the Commissioner of Marine Resources* (Rep. Golek Cheryl of Harpswell)

MLA JUNIOR HARVESTER

Brenna Alley, 17, has a lot on her plate. A formidable basketball player, a senior at Jonesport-Beals High School, the 2024 Miss Maine High School America winner, and a lobsterman, Alley knows what it's like to be busy. Since the time she was a toddler she has been on a boat. Today she fishes with her father Anson and younger brother in the waters off Jonesport.

"Being on the water was a magical experience to me from the start. I love it so much that I've never been able to complain about early mornings, foul weather, or pitiful catches. The older I've gotten, the more I've appreciated the 'don't-quit-until-it's-done' ethic," she said.

Alley fishes inshore with her father and brother on *Underdog*, the first 29-foot Libby. It was her grandfather Ellery "Punk" Alley's boat, then her father's. "I imagine a lot of folks will remember the boat from my grandfather's and dad's racing days," she said. Her first boat was a 25-foot inboard named *Riff Raff* by her father. "He joked that the name suited my brother and me just about right," she laughed.

Fishing is something woven deeply into the Alley family, as it is within many families in the area. "My buoy colors are the same ones my great-grandfather Arnold fished — black and orange, like a Moxie bottle. I would say that I love the tradition. I love being part of something so much greater than myself," she said. "It's tradition and pride and a connection to the past."

Alley first considered a career as a teacher after graduating from high school but a recent surgery caused her to reconsider. "I was really impressed by my nurses," she said. "It's a different way of helping people. I will be attending University of Maine at Machias for nursing this fall."

But in the summer months, or whenever she can, Alley plans to be on the water. "I will keep going with my dad and my brother. Whatever I become from here, I always will be a lobsterman."



Brenna Alley.
Photos by L. Alley



Brenna on the boat, age 8.

MLA BUSINESS MEMBER OF THE MONTH: PEPPERELL COVE MARINE SERVICES

Pepperell Cove Marine Services is well-known in New England for its commercial diving, marine construction, mooring, dock and port services. The company was founded by Barry and Flora Bush in the 1980s. Barry, a dive instructor, began running a deep-sea fishing, scuba diving, and whale watching business in southern Maine and in 1987 the couple bought waterfront property in Kittery as the base for their company, eventually moving into commercial dive services.

In 1992, they expanded the business by purchasing Pepperell Cove Mooring Services. The company served more than 400 docks and moorings in the Little Bay, Great Bay, Sagamore, and Piscataqua Rivers. In 2000, they bought the dock service portion of Pickering Marine Construction Company and changed the company's name to Pepperell Cove Marine Services, venturing into increasingly complex projects, from constructing piers to building seawalls.

Pepperell Cove Marine Services, now located in Newington, New Hampshire, now is run by Barry and Flora's eldest son Bryan, with longtime em-



ployees Jeff Campbell, Geoff Tortoriello, Craig Overlock, and Fred Hart.

"As a marine service provider, we recognize the importance of collaborating with organizations like the MLA to preserve Maine's marine heritage and foster economic growth," Bryan said. "Our membership reflects our dedication to maintaining the health and sustainability of Maine's marine ecosystem, which is essential to the success of both the lobstering industry and our business."

"We value our membership in the MLA because it aligns with our commitment to supporting Maine's lobstering industry. The MLA advocates for sustainable fishing practices, protects the livelihoods of lobstermen, and ensures the future of our coastal communities."

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Your generosity has been a crucial part of our efforts to navigate the many challenges and seize the opportunities that arose throughout the past year.

The Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA) faced a series of hurdles including unprecedented storms and controversial federal regulations. Yet, despite all the challenges, we persevere.

We are celebrating the continued health of the lobster fishery which, despite fluctuations in landings, remains a sustainable and profitable industry. Our advocacy against unwarranted regulations, including a controversial gauge change, continues to protect the livelihood of Maine's lobstermen, while our fight against offshore wind development in the Gulf of Maine and overly burdensome restrictions to protect whales remains a top priority.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without your unwavering support. Your contributions have empowered us to advocate effectively, to ensure that Maine lobstermen are heard at all levels of government, and to invest in the long-term sustainability of the industry.

We are deeply grateful for your continued commitment to preserving Maine's lobster industry and heritage. Together, we will continue to make a lasting impact.

Thank you!

Patrice McCarron
Executive Director

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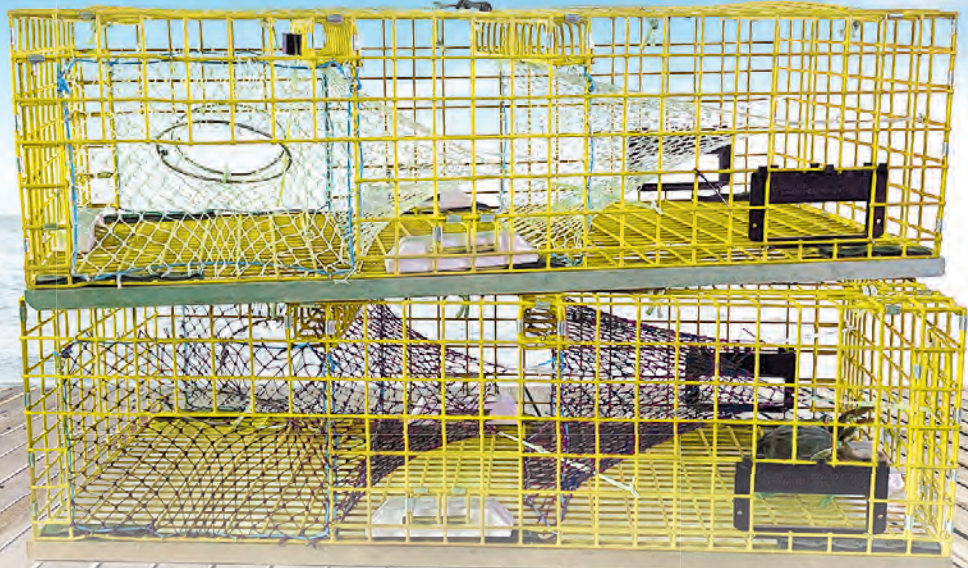
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TO YOUR HEALTH: *Stay hydrated during the winter*

By Melissa Waterman

It's cold out. Really cold — sea smoke rising in the morning, ice on the deck, hands numb as a post. Not the sort of weather that makes you think “Wow! I'm thirsty. I need a nice cool drink.”

But, in fact, you probably do. It's not uncommon to feel less thirsty in cold weather. Yet you can get seriously dehydrated in the winter simply because you don't recognize how much liquid your body actually needs. Dehydration occurs when the body doesn't have enough fluid to function properly and it can occur regardless of the air temperature.

We've all heard it before — human beings are basically big bags of water. Water makes up approximately 60 to 70% of our bodies. You have to keep replenishing the water you lose from sweat, urinating or bowel movements. The water is necessary for transporting nutrients, removing waste, supporting the immune system, hydrating tissues and organs, and maintaining blood pressure and body temperature. A lack of water not only results in dehydration but can increase the risk of kidney stones, urinary tract infections, and constipation.

When you are outside in cold weather hauling traps or shoveling snow, you might not notice that you are sweating. Even just lounging about in a dry, overheated house can increase the amount of water you lose through your skin, according to an article published by Massachusetts General Hospital last year.

Not everyone feels thirsty when they become dehydrated. But it's fairly easy to tell — take a look at your urine. If you are hydrated, your urine will be pale yellow or even clear. If it's dark yellow, you need some water, now. Other signs of dehydration include constipation, dry mouth or chapped lips and skin, headaches, difficulty concentrating, irritability, feeling faint or dizzy and a rapid heart rate.

According to Massachusetts General Hospital, there's a simple method to determine the minimum amount of fluid you need each day: take your weight in pounds and divide it in half. For example, if you weigh 160 pounds, you need at least 80 fluid ounces per day. If you're sweating heavily, exercising for more than 60 minutes, or have a fever or diarrhea, a drink with electrolytes may be needed.

No matter what month it is, you need to drink fluids. Keeping that big bag of water full of liquid should be a high priority!

Staying Hydrated in the Winter:

- Drink warm fluids if you find it difficult to drink cold water in the winter.
- Carry a water bottle with you everywhere you go to encourage hydration throughout the day. If you're working from home, have a designated water bottle or glass at your desk and refill it often.
- Drink your food. Homemade soups in winter can increase fluid intake to help you meet your fluid needs. You can also eat water-rich fruits and vegetables such as green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits, melon, tomatoes and cucumbers.
- Avoid too much caffeine, which can contribute to dehydration. Caffeine is a natural diuretic, which means it can flush water and electrolytes from your body. For every caffeinated beverage you consume, such as your mug of coffee, have an additional glass of water of equal volume.
- Alcohol should not be counted towards fluid intake. It dehydrates the body by increasing urination and causing the body to lose more fluids than it takes in. It can also interfere with a person's perception of cold, increasing the risk for hypothermia.



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NEW ENGLAND WOMEN IN FISHERIES: ANN BACKUS

By Melissa Waterman

It's no secret that women work in all parts of New England's fisheries. Whether as captains of their own vessels, business owners, directors of fisheries research and advocacy organizations, or in resource management, women make up a sizeable segment of the sector.

Ann Backus is one of those women. For more than thirty years she has worked to ensure that fishermen remain safe while fishing and healthy while at home. Currently, she is director of outreach at the T.H. Chan School of Public Health at Harvard University where she focuses on occupational safety and environmental health. She is also one of the founding members of Maine's Commercial Fishing Safety Council.

Backus, who learned to sail as a child and taught sailing during the summer in Massachusetts, was drawn into the fishing world when she led a School of Public Health Visiting Scholars' retreat in Camden in the 1990s. Participants came to Camden to meet Jeff Ciampa, a civilian employee of the Coast Guard in Maine.

"He came up and gave a talk on injuries that fishermen suffer and safety issues. I told him he should be a visiting scholar too, which he subsequently became," Backus recalled. With funding from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Ciampas, Backus and a third researcher conducted a project on how lobstermen get entangled in trap rope while at sea.

"We did a survey of lobstermen. We went up and down the coast [of Maine], stopping in coffee shops or going out on boats to talk to lobstermen," Backus said. "I went to *Commercial Fisheries News* and said that we'd like to publicize the survey in the paper, which they did. The editor then asked me to write a column on safety for each issue, so in February 2004 I started writing 'Fish Safe.'" Backus marks the 20th anniversary of her health and safety column this month.

The rope entanglement survey findings were later published by NIOSH. Backus took those findings and translated them into a series of large safety posters illustrating different methods of preventing rope entanglements while lobstering. She also connected with Plant Buoy Sticks, a company that makes fishing equipment and accessories, to make knife sheaths that fishermen could attach to oilskins. "Having a knife easily accessible is critical. We also encouraged fishermen to have a knife taped somewhere at the stern and on the hauling side," she said.

Lobstermen face safety issues not only while fishing but also while on shore. Some years after her survey project, Backus began an environmental health study on Vinalhaven. "I had talked with the doctor out there earlier, asking what medical issues he was seeing frequently among fishermen. He said they had respiratory issues during the winter months but it wasn't a cold or flu."

Backus and a group of environmental exposure assessment researchers went to Vinalhaven to discover what mystery illness was afflicting only fishermen. They spent time with lobstermen in their boat shops while they worked on their Styrofoam buoys in preparation for the lobster season. The researchers measured the air where the men worked and found that sanding and heat branding threw a huge amount of particulates into the air. The paint used on buoys emitted high levels of volatile organic compounds (VOC), which caused respiratory problems as well.

"Plastic buoys came in soon after," Backus said. "And we pushed for use of latex paint rather than high VOC paint." Sherwin Williams offers a low VOC paint that is resistant to UV rays and salt. According to Backus, Hamilton Marine is now producing its own line of low VOC paint for use on buoys.

"Our most important recent work is encouraging the use of damage control kits on boats," Backus said. Damage control kits contain the tools and materials needed to make important repairs to the boat while at sea, items like clamps, plugs, wrenches, fiberglass wrap, even a pump. "It all comes in a bucket with instructions on how to fix things, like a fuel or water leak." Such a kit is not required by the Coast Guard. Redde Marine Safety Systems in Stonington carries pre-packaged kits; Backus says one can be put together for less than \$300.

"For young people, the lobster apprenticeship program is supposed to help with learning how to deal with emergencies but that teaching is dependent on who the person's mentor is," Backus said. "This is just another way to be safe while fishing."

That is what Ann Backus has been doing nearly every day – discovering another way to keep lobstermen safe and healthy on the water and at home.



Ann Backus with Maine Seacost Mission Captain Mike Johnson at the Fishermen's Forum. MSM photo.

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE FINALLY RECEIVED

By Evan Lubofsky, Oceanus, reprinted with permission

It was Thanksgiving Day, 1968. Richard Nixon had just been elected President of the United States. "Hey Jude" began spinning on record players in living rooms across America. And it had been the deadliest year of the Vietnam war for the U.S. since the conflict began 13 years earlier. As families and friends gathered for their holiday feasts and took a break from the "year that shattered America," a U.S. Coast Guard airplane flying due east of Daytona Beach, Florida dropped five glass bottles into the open ocean.

What must have looked like a heinous act of littering from the sky was actually part of a study led by Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHOI) physical oceanographer Dean "Bump" Bumpus to measure ocean currents in the North Atlantic. Between 1956 and 1972, some 300,000 bottles were released into the ocean by ships and planes, along with more than 75,000 seabed drifters.

"It was an amazing project in terms of how many bottles and drifters were put in the ocean," says WHOI physical oceanographer Pelle Robbins. "Bump really marshaled the forces from both planes and ships to make it happen. It was very inspirational and got a lot of people back then thinking about ocean circulation."

This past April, one of the bottles dropped offshore of Daytona, No. #71645, was found washed up on Hendrick's Head Beach in Southport Island, Maine. Charlie Britton, a retired educator and Southport native, had been picking up trash from the beach after a bad winter storm had barreled through. "I looked down and saw this bottle staring at me," says Britton. A note inside had a bold inscription at the top: BREAK THIS BOTTLE.

Bottle No. 71645 began its journey offshore of Daytona Beach, Florida, and ended up on Southport Island, Maine. A real message in a bottle, Britton thought. He first tried removing the bottle's rubber stopper, but it wouldn't budge. So, he tapped the bottle onto a nearby rock to break the glass, pulled the letter out, and started reading.



The letter was from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and provided a brief explanation of the ocean current/drift study. And, it promised a 50-cent bounty — enough to buy two cheeseburgers and a Coke at McDonalds in 1968 — to whoever sent back the return card with details about when and where the bottle had been found. "Your giving accurate information will be of great aid," the note read.

Bump's idea of setting glass bottles adrift to track ocean currents may have been resourceful, but it wasn't new. Ancient Greek scientists are said to have used drift bottles to measure currents in the Mediterranean Sea, possibly as early as 310 B.C. Albert I, Prince of Monaco, used them in the late 1800s and early 1900s to investigate the dynamics of the Gulf Stream as it approached Europe.

The method wasn't nearly as accurate or efficient as today's GPS-enabled surface drifters and fixed current sensors, but the WHOI drift bottle program yielded about a 10% return rate, producing roughly 30,000 "Point A to Point B" drift paths. Robbins acknowledges that it was a decent-sized data set for the time.

The fact that a drift bottle couldn't report anything about how, and when, it got to its destination made it difficult to interpret the data. But according to the U.S. Navy, the combination of drift bottles and seabed drifters ultimately "provided invaluable information of surface and bottom circulation along the continental shelf of eastern North America."

How long did it take for Bottle No. #71645 to make the 1500-mile journey from Daytona Beach to Southport, Maine? It's anyone's guess. When Britton found it, the bottle was in pristine condition with no biofouling or debris caked on it, which suggests it had been beached there for a while. But whether it got there within days of Thanksgiving, 1968, or much more recently, we'll never know.

To Britton, it makes no difference. He was just happy to have stumbled upon a piece of oceanographic history (and WHOI did send him fifty cents). "For the bottle to have lasted all this time is really interesting," he says. "It gave this 61-year-old retired guy a thrill."

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50TH ANNUAL MAINE FISHERMEN'S FORUM NEXT MONTH

By MLCA staff

The 50th Maine Fishermen's Forum kicks off on Thursday, February 27, with a focus on shellfishing. The day begins with a session on sea level rise and its effect on intertidal mudflats. Sea level rise poses a direct threat to Maine's coastal ecosystems with predicted increases in flooding, saltwater inundation, erosion, and loss of habitat. Efforts to better understand how sea level rise will impact shellfishing can foster adaptive management of the fishery.

Another Thursday morning seminar looks at green crabs as a developing commercial fishery. Green crabs are major predators of young softshell clams throughout the Gulf of Maine. In 2019, a seminar at the Forum looked at developing markets for the invasive species. Since then there has been a surge in interest in a commercial fishery and culinary market development.

Brian Beal, director of the Downeast Institute on Beals Island, will speak about soft-shell clam reproduction in Maine. The Institute has been researching the relationship between the size of female clams and the number of eggs produced when they spawn. The results of the research could offer a way to outpace green crab predation by leaving more breeders in the ecosystem.

The New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) will hold a 'visioning' session on its scallop management plan in the afternoon. The Council is in the process of developing a long-term (3-5 year) strategic plan for managing the scallop fishery in federal waters. The visioning session will gather community input on specific topics related to the scallop fishery as an initial phase of the strategic planning process.

On Friday at 9 a.m. the Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA) will hold its 71st annual meeting. The meeting will feature updates on current policy issues such as lobster management, right whales and offshore wind development. All MLA members and their families are encouraged to attend. The MLA is also hosting a "Get to



The Forum has always been for fishermen and their families.

Know the MLA Social Hour" at the Golf Club from 4:30 to 6:00 with a free drink ticket for all who attend.

In addition on Friday morning a panel will discuss the next phase of work on a regional offshore wind fisheries compensation fund. For the past three years, eleven East Coast states have been working collectively to organize this fund. Key to the fund's development is ensuring that the unique cultures, experiences and needs of fishermen are reflected in the process.

NOAA staff will be holding a seminar on how to properly submit electronic vessel trip (eVTR) reports. As of April 1, 2024, all federal lobster permit holders have had to submit electronic trip reports. The seminar will review when an eVTR is required, how to submit an eVTR, the importance and benefits of electronic vessel trip reporting, and the various platforms available to complete an eVTR.

Department of Marine Resources (DMR) staff will provide an update on right whale monitoring efforts and the timeline for new protection measures. DMR's Division of Marine Mammal Research will talk about the department's research programs which are aimed at increasing understanding of right whales in the Gulf of Maine and exploring alternative lobster fishing gear types. DMR policy staff will then provide information about anticipated rulemaking to occur under the Atlantic Large Take Reduction Plan.

Ten years ago, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) began working with fishermen to develop the Gulf of Maine Bottom Longline Survey (BLLS). Survey samples are taken at 45 stations between 15 and 160 fathoms each spring and fall. The morning seminar will share the results of the BLLS and discuss how to expand industry engagement and data use.

Friday afternoon will include the annual question and answer session with NOAA and NEFMC staff. Those invited to participate include Janet Coit, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries; Michael Pentony, Regional Administrator, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office; Jon Hare, Research and Science Director, Northeast Fisheries Science Center; Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council; and Rick Bellavance, Chair, New England Fishery Management Council.

That afternoon there will also be a session hosted by the Lobster Institute on four ongoing collaborative projects. These projects include Environmental Monitors on Lobster Traps (eMOLT) which gather data on temperature, salinity, and oxygen on the ocean floor; the American Lobster Settlement Index, which helps identify young-of-the-year settlement patterns; the Lobstermen's Knowledge Trust, a project through which lobstermen manage and control use of their chart plotter data; and Navigating the New Arctic, a project which links changes in the Arctic to the biological, economic, and social dynamics of the lobster industry.

On Saturday morning the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative will give an update on its 2024 activities and plans for 2025. The Maine Elver Fishermen's Association will hold its annual meeting with presentations on the elver population, dam removal efforts, management and market forecasts. The Downeast Lobstermen's Association also will meet Saturday morning.

DMR staff will give the annual summary of the Lobster Monitoring and Research Program 2024 surveys, which collect demographic data on the Gulf of Maine lobster population at different life stages. The data is used by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in its lobster stock assessment, underway now.

Saturday afternoon will feature a seminar on aquaculture techniques from around the world. Maine has used aquaculture technology transfers with great success to introduce new species, technologies, equipment, and culinary uses for shellfish and kelp. Presenters involved in Maine's aquaculture sector will speak about kelp farming in South Korea, Japan and Alaska, scallop farming in Japan and Atlantic Canada, wild scallop harvesting in France, Australian oyster farming, West Coast shellfish aquaculture, and New Zealand mussel farming.

Later that afternoon there will be a Health and Safety Preparedness session. Fishermen who have experienced safety challenges at sea and others who have completed safety training will discuss their experiences. Attendees can then visit interactive stations to further discuss topics such as: vessel stability, first aid, health and strength training, lifejackets, and responding to an opioid emergency.

The Maine Lobster Boat Racing Association and the Alewife Harvesters of Maine will meet that afternoon as well.

The three days also will feature a Trade Show, health screenings, safety training in the Samoset pool, and evening events.



Everyone enjoys the Friday night dinner and auction. MFF photos.



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The Maine Lobster Community Alliance (MLCA) serves as an educational and charitable organization serving both fishermen and the general public who feel a strong affinity for this historic fishery and its people.

For information on our programs or how you can contribute, please visit us at www.mlcalliance.org or call 207-967-6221

In the NEWS

NEW HAMPSHIRE WILL NOT MAKE GAUGE CHANGE

On January 21 New Hampshire Governor Kelly Ayotte informed the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission that the state would not comply with new guidelines increasing the minimum size for lobsters caught in the Gulf of Maine. "I have heard loud and clear from our lobstermen, commercial fishermen, and concerned legislators and citizens from our Seacoast that this minimum size increase will have a negative impact on an industry already strained by existing regulations," said Governor Ayotte in her letter. "...New Hampshire will comply with the previous minimum size for lobster in an effort to preserve this proud industry."

RIGHT WHALE PROTECTION RULE FAILS

The Biden administration dropped a proposed rule that would have required vessels less than 65 feet to slow down in areas where endangered right whales are found. The rule, introduced more than two years ago by the National Marine Fisheries Service, would have required more ships to slow down in East Coast waters to help prevent collisions with the whales. Since introduced, the proposal has been the topic of much debate among shippers, charter boat companies and others. The National Marine Fisheries Service received about 90,000 public comments on the proposed rule. Officials said the volume of feedback and the complexity of the issue made it impossible to finalize the rule before the Biden administration left office.

VINEYARD WIND INSTALLATION RESUMES

Vineyard Wind has been given the green light to resume installation and power production after a blade from one of its turbines snapped and fell into waters near Nantucket last summer. However, the company must remove all blades made at GE Vernova's Quebec factory. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) announced on January 17 that it had completed its review of the project, which was begun after a 107-meter blade broke off in July 2024. The review found there was insufficient bonding at certain locations within the blade,

which should have been detected at the manufacturing plant through inspection and quality control procedures. The blades must be removed from 22 locations where they were installed.

CANADIAN LOBSTER FISHERY CONSIDERS A TRUMP FUTURE

The effects of tariffs from the United States on Canada's lobster industry could depend on timing, but officials say just the threat is further proof of the need to keep diversifying markets. Geoff Irvine, executive director of the Lobster Council of Canada, said he and others aren't waiting around to see what happens. Although shippers of live product have diversified markets through the years to the point that China — not the U.S. — is the largest market for live lobster, the frozen market still depends largely on American buyers. About 55% of Canada's export value in lobster is frozen or processed, and three-quarters of that goes to the U.S., said Irvine. A strong American economy has translated into lots of appetite in the retail and food service sectors for frozen lobster tails and meat.

NO LAND-BASED SALMON FARM IN BELFAST

Nordic Aquafarms announced in mid-January that it would no longer pursue its land-based salmon farm in Belfast, after years of legal challenges from opponents. The company said it has spent tens of millions of dollars on the project, and secured local, state and federal permits; calling the decision a sad day for the Maine economy and aquaculture industry. The company faced legal setbacks when trying to secure access to Penobscot Bay to draw water and discharge wastewater.

TOUGH MONTHS FOR NOVA SCOTIA LOBSTER SEASON

In Nova Scotia, the winter lobster season is off to a rough start. Lobster harvesters in the province's largest fisheries, Lobster Fishing Areas (LFAs) 33 and 34, are grappling with a combination of weather disruptions, weak landings, and lower-quality catches, and high Jonah crab bycatch which have significantly impacted both prices and operations. The weather has severely impacted the lobster fleet, and reports indicate that catches are down by as much as 20 percent in LFA 34 compared to last year. The situation is especially dire in St. Mary's Bay.

2025 MAINE TRAP TAGS

The Department of Marine Resources announced in January that UPS will no longer deliver trap tags to PO boxes. Due to this change by UPS, DMR amended the delivery information to the physical address provided by license holders for orders of 2025 tags that have already been submitted. If you have previously received tags at your PO Box, you will receive them at your physical address going forward.

If the license does not list a physical address, or lists a PO box as a physical address, the tags will be delivered to DMR's Augusta office. When DMR receives them, staff will contact you to make arrangements to receive your tags. In general, lobstermen should expect to receive tags no later than five weeks after the order is placed. If more than 5 weeks go by without receiving the tags, DMR asks lobstermen to contact the department so staff can track the status of the order and reorder if necessary to ensure that lobstermen can get the tags on traps prior to June 1.



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Events Calendar

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

January 31-February 3

Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association Annual Weekend and Trade Show, Margaritaville Resort Cape Cod, Hyannis, MA

February 4-6

ASMFC winter meeting, Arlington, VA. FMI: www.asmfc.org/home/2025-winter-meeting

February 4

ASMFC American Lobster Board, 9-10:30 a.m.

February 4

Aquaculture Public Scoping Session - Mere Point Oyster Co., & Dana Smith, 5:30 p.m., Curtis Memorial Library, Brunswick.

February 5

Aquaculture Public Scoping Session - Shearwater Ventures, 4 p.m., Long Island Town Hall.

February 10

Lobster Advisory Council Meeting, 4-6 p.m., DMR office building, room 118, Augusta.

February 11-13

American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment Workshop #2, Greenland, NH

February 11

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

February 12

Lobster Zone A Council Meeting, 4 p.m., Washington Academy, East Machias

February 19

Lobster Zone B Council Meeting, 5 p.m., Mount Desert Island High School Library, Bar Harbor.

February 23

Third annual Chowder's On!, 12 - 3 p.m., Kittery Community Center. Tickets on sale at <https://www.mlcalliance.org/3rd-chowders-on>.

February 25

Lobster Zone C Council Meeting, 5 p.m., Stonington Town Hall

February 27-March 1

50th Annual Maine Fishermen's Forum, Samoset Resort, Rockport.

February 28

MLA 71st Annual Meeting, 9 a.m., Samoset Resort, Rockport.

March 10

Lobster Zone G Council Meeting, 5 p.m., TBD.

March 12

Shellfish Advisory Council, 9:30-12:20 p.m., DMR office, room 118, Augusta.

March 16-18

Seafood Expo North America, Boston Convention and Exhibition Center.

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YOUR QUESTIONS, ANSWERED: *Why are we seeing so many sea squirts?*

By MLCA staff

It can be like a bad science-fiction movie. Thick mats of blob-like creatures enveloping lobster traps, swallowing aquaculture nets, engulfing even buoy ropes. Tunicates, also known as sea squirts, have proliferated in the Gulf of Maine in the past two decades as the Gulf waters have warmed.

The marine invertebrates are filter feeders, drawing in and expelling water through siphons. Tunicates occur either as single individuals or as colonies. After a brief period floating freely, a tunicate will attach itself to a solid surface — any solid surface. A lobster trap, dock piling, a rock, you name it, a tunicate will attach to it.

There are roughly a dozen different species of tunicates in the Gulf of Maine. More than half are believed to be invasive species brought to the Gulf from other regions.

Solitary tunicates, like the European sea squirt, are distinct individuals and can grow together in large groups. They reproduce quickly and can easily spread into new areas by attaching themselves to boats or gear.

Colonial tunicates, such as the pancake batter or sea vomit tunicate, form incredibly dense colonies. "Pancake batter" got its name because the colony forms a mat with dripping tendrils. These tunicates are individual organisms that live in colonies within a shared protective tunic. Warming Gulf of Maine waters have allowed tunicates to grow quickly in many parts of the Maine coast.

They also are less susceptible than many invertebrates to the impacts of ocean acidification and

low oxygen conditions created by algal blooms. Tunicate populations vary with the seasons, peaking at the beginning of fall. They are more likely found in shallow water.



This tunicate-covered trap reportedly weighed more than 200 pounds. D. Closson photo.

As Brian Beal, a University of Maine at Machias marine scientist and director of the Downeast Institute, commented in a recent Bangor Daily News article, "Sea squirts have exploded in the Gulf of Maine over the past decade or so. They're just a huge nuisance."

A colony of tunicates can easily double the weight of a lobster trap, making it difficult and dangerous to haul.

They can cover the trap escape vent and the wire mesh itself, limiting the amount of water that can pass through the trap. Typically, however, tunicates won't thrive in deeper water, where sunlight is limited.

Like the bad guys in a science fiction movie, tunicates are hard to kill. If scraped off a trap or hull at sea, the little bits hosed into the water will grow into new tunicates. Getting them off gear is best done on land, after they have dried out and died.

Researchers have found that during a severe winter when the Gulf temperatures drop and stay cold, tunicate populations will be reduced. Rain and a heavy influx of freshwater into coastal areas will also knock the populations back.

For now, however, with the Gulf of Maine continuing to warm, the invasive tunicates will remain irritating pests.

SEALSKIN, A FISHERMAN'S LOOK AT A LOST PAST

Stonington fisherman Jeff Dworsky, 69, had his first book of photographs published late last year, called *Sealskin*. The book marries Dworsky's photos of the Maine coast in the 1970s and 1980s with an old Celtic folktale of a seal who changes into a woman, marries and has a family.

After moving to Maine as a young man, settling off the grid on a small island off Stonington and beginning his fishing career, Dworsky felt called to document the world around him, which he knew was rapidly changing.

"I really wanted to record what was left of the Stonington that I had moved here on purpose to be a part of," Dworsky said. "Through that period, my photography developed and was borne out of a sense of loss and nostalgia." In addition to the book, published by Charcoal Press, 1,500 of Dworsky's photographs are now online at the Penobscot Marine Museum's photo archive.

Sealskin is available at <https://charcoalpress.com/shop/sealskin>.



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