

2005



Canadian/U.S.



## LOBSTERMEN'S TOWN MEETING

April 22, 2005 – St. John, New Brunswick, Canada




Hosted by the Lobster Institute

# SUMMARY REPORT

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# **Acknowledgements**

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## **Primary Event Sponsor**

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## **Moderator**

Ted Hoskins, Minister to Coastal Communities & Fisheries - Maine Sea Coast Mission

**The Lobster Institute would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the Planning Committee, comprised of representatives from the Lobster Institute's Board of Advisors:**

## **Planning Committee**

Bonnie Spinazzola- Chair

Bill Adler – Massachusetts

Bill Anderson – Maine

Dr. Bob Bayer – Lobster Institute

John Boland -- Newfoundland

Dana Rice – Maine

Mike Sirois -- Massachusetts

Klaus & Melanie Sonnenberg – Grand Manan

## **Background and Goals**

At the suggestion of its Board of Advisors, the Lobster Institute planned and hosted its second Canadian/U.S. Lobstermen's Town Meeting. This year's industry-wide gathering of lobstermen and others connected with the lobster industry brought people together to discuss lobster management issues and related economic impacts – from the lobstermen's perspective. The meeting took place in St. John, New Brunswick on April 22, 2005. Over 85 people attended the meeting, coming from as far south as Florida and as far north as Nova Scotia.

Goals of the event:

- Provide fishermen with an opportunity to share with one another what they are observing, what their concerns might be, what positive things they are seeing, what has worked and what has not.
- Allow fishermen and fisheries management to get a more complete picture of the entire resource, including commonalities, differences and potential future impacts in order to build on the prior successes or failures and/or lessons learned by other management or geographical areas in both Canada and the U.S.
- Fostering collaboration and communication between all geographic areas of the fishery, reinforcing the fact that all share and rely on a common resource that must be protected.
- Promote dialogue between lobstermen and fisheries management personnel.

## **Format**

The daylong session took the form of a town meeting. Lobsterman and others in the industry were invited to draw from their experiences while fishing and share their thoughts, observations, concerns, theories and questions about lobster management. Principal participation in this component of the meeting was from industry people (fishermen, dealers, pound owners, processors). The town meeting was directed by an experienced moderator, Ted Hoskins, Minister to Coastal Communities & Fisheries - Maine Sea Coast Mission

The Town Meeting was audiotaped and an unabridged transcription of these tapes is available from the Lobster Institute at 210 Rogers Hall, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469 (207-581-1443)

Following the Town Meeting, attendees had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss issues with a panel of management, science and economic professionals connected with the lobster industry. This information is available on the audiotapes of the event.

## **Summary of Topics Discussed**

Major topic areas discussed are listed below in alphabetical order. Comments made and questions raised regarding that topic are summarized.

*Note: Comments noted in this report do not necessarily reflect a consensus opinion of those who attended the Town Meeting, nor do they necessarily reflect the views of the Lobster Institute.*

### **Bait**

- Seals are negatively affecting the bait fishing
- Hide bait is causing the problem of animal hair showing up in lobsters. This is a particularly sensitive issue in Canada because of the BSE and our beef. We must remember we are in the food business not just the fish business.
- We don't know if hide bait is a problem or not because no one has researched the issue.
- The marketing implications themselves are a problem even if the bait is not a health threat.

### **Ecosystem Management**

- Ecosystem management is new outlook from the government in both the U.S. and Canada that says lobster management will have to be integrated with management of all other fisheries. There must be a natural balance, which means you can't have all stocks at maximum levels at all times.
- You can't ignore the predators like seals and striped bass
- Can't protect one species to the detriment of the other, and that is what the government has been doing.
- There definitely seems to be a correlation between the number of larval lobsters and the prevalence of groundfish.

### **Effort control**

- In lieu of quotas, fishery attempts to control the effort. Challenge is this is not as easy to quantify and outputs/quotas.

- Fishing patterns have changed over the years...fishing more days and more intensively definitely produces effort issues.
- You may see a problem one year, such as the poor quality lobsters being caught in LFA33/34 last year – which you don't see the next year. The risk is that you might institute measures to correct a problem that would correct itself – and then you are left with a measure that may be pointlessly restrictive.
- Maine has already instituted one trap reduction and should not have another. We're all coming up to the same level playing field
- There has been a lot of talk about effort control in Maine this year...and a lot of finger pointing. The real challenge is to look at ourselves.
- One problem is we are always changing with giving things the time to work. For example, the average age of a lobsterman in 54 or 55, and with limited entry young people are coming into the fishery at a slower pace. Give it 10 years and limited entry will work.
- We didn't have very much to do with what's on the bottom today and we're not going to have much to do with what's on the bottom in 10 years – so let's just fish.
- Government instituting conservation measures without the science to back them up is a problem, but it is due to lack of funding more than anything. Fishermen have to help come up with the money.

### **Enforcement**

- It is important to enforce regulations as much as possible and punish those that break the rules.
- There is too much untagged gear and unrecorded catch.
- Enforcement budgets are insufficient
- Can't put too much blame on cheaters because there will always be cheaters. It is more important to look at ourselves and what we are personally doing to sustain the industry.

### **Gauge Size**

- Can't increase the gauge size without destroying the market – lobsters will be too big and expensive to sell.
- Use market price to dictate what size lobsters lobstermen target (pay less per pound for the larger lobsters)
- Maine feels it protects the brood stock by not taking lobsters with over a 5-inch carapace...male or female.
- The habitat is different in PEI than it is in Maine (mainly depth of the water). The catch is mainly bigger lobsters. PEI does protect females in a certain size range, but if they didn't allow larger lobsters to be taken there would be hardly any to catch.

### **Independent Science & Funding for Science**

- It is important for the industry to work together for reliable, objective science.... fishermen and buyers. Involve government scientists as well.
- Government funding is always scarce; therefore, industry must step up and find funding for science as well.
- A caution was raised: are we, as an industry, mature enough to accept the findings of our own independent science if it says things we don't want to hear?
- Changes in conditions and problems – even from year-to-year – point to the need for ongoing research that is independent.
- People will not care unless someone starts screaming. Maine has the biggest stake in the U.S. and needs to be the one to push for more funding...but we all need to work together and share resources for scientific research.
- We need to spend more on research proportionately to the value of the fishery.
- We should use the message that the lobster fishery is successful and sustainable, and a big part of the economy of the region, and it will stay that way if research is properly funded. If we put out a message of doom all we will get are more regulations and not more funding.
- Looking at a research surcharge on the licenses might be a good idea.
- Fishermen can't do it all – they need management to do science and to enforce.

### **Marketing/Pricing**

- It is important to remember we are talking about human food issues and not just fishery issues. And the media should be aware of that as well.
- Maine is the only area that has any marketing. All areas need to be involved in that. It would be a good educational tool about issues important to the fishery.
- Getting out the good word and defending against misinformation.
- Need to work as a whole – not sector by sector, but the industry as a whole.
- Fishermen don't have time to do marketing; they need the processors and buyers to do that.
- Money needs to be channeled into marketing and research more proportionately to the value of the industry.
- Should look at the industry for ways to raise money for marketing. Perhaps a fee per pound landed if we can institute a workable recording system. It's our future.
- Maine is marketing eco-friendly fishing practices. Still has little money compared to marketing budgets of other industries like salmon and beef.
- Fishermen should look at selling lobsters directly to consumers themselves, using small holding systems.
- With lack of supply, demand, and high prices – some restaurants and food companies will stop buying lobsters. Once they do that, it's not likely they will go back. There needs to be a lot of communication. People are working on short margins all they way through the system.
- Fishermen themselves should not have to absorb any more cuts in the price of lobsters.

### **Miscellaneous**

- Lobstermen should never have to report the price they receive for their lobsters to management.
- Certain LFAs in Canada are forming their own management boards and are willing to work with other LFAs to do the same. These boards have various committees i.e. science, transportation, etc.
- In Atlantic Canada DFO said you had to be certified through a professional certification board (at a \$50 fee) before you could buy a fishing license...and had to prove fishing provided at least 75% of your income. Wiped out 10,000 licensed fishermen.

## Quotas

- Opposition was voiced by a majority of lobstermen who spoke on this issue (primarily from Nova Scotia and Maine) Concerns included:
  - A “black market” developing in the lobster fishery
  - Buying and selling of licenses
  - Loss of individual fishermen to “corporate” fishing – ownership of licenses by just a few
  - Comparisons to the groundfishery crisis in Canada
  - No transferring of tags or licenses
  - Once they are introduced there is no going back
  - Limited entry should be enough
- Others, while not strongly in favor or strongly opposed, did expressed a desire to keep the discussion on the table for the future
- May work for offshore but not inshore fishery.
- Since it is already being talked about in the legislature – it is bound to happen in one form or another.
- Quotas are easy to enforce so that is why some managers want them. They don’t understand how it will affect the average fisherman.

## Seals

- Seals have no natural predators left – but they do prey on lobsters and are quite a nuisance.
- Gray seals (not inshore harbor seals) are voracious predators, and not just on lobsters. They are infiltrating the cod-spawning areas as well.
- Seal worms are infesting fish – even in protected areas. Some cod are so infested they must be thrown out.
- Seals are also impacting the bait fish i.e. herring and mackerel.
- The population has increased in the Sable Island area more than 10-fold, with more than a thousand breeders. This population is likely to spread into New England in the future... so Canadians need the support of the U.S. fishery now.
- The seal hunt issue has caused a boycott of Canadian seafood in the U.S. We need to work together in the fishing industries to get the word out that there is a rationale for the hunt...we are aiming for a balance to save our fishery – not to eliminate the seals.

- People are boycotting Canadian seafood without having all the facts about the seal issue. We must provide education on this issue. The media should tell both sides of this story.

### **Stock Assessment**

- It was voiced that some don't have confidence in the current stock assessment. It is difficult to make informed decisions about management strategies without an accurate stock assessment.
- It is difficult to get accurate stock assessment when you can fish an area one day and do very well – and then they will conduct a trawl survey the next and say the findings are the worst ever. It makes the data difficult to understand.
- Management decisions must be based on the “best data available” – and that is not really good data right now. We need to find the money to conduct better science, and that is very hard.

### **Sustainability**

- Maine has been protecting the brood stock for years. We throw more lobsters back in a day than we used to bring in and we're still bringing in good catches. Maine's been doing the right thing. There may be ups and downs, but they'll always be there.

### **Zones/Areas**

- It was stated that the industry was fortunate to have zones and areas that allowed for varying management initiatives – the opportunity for differences.
- Stock assessment areas don't mesh with management areas and that causes problems.
- It was expressed that so many different zones/areas, with different seasons and management strategies, makes it difficult to institute equitable effort control measures. There is a feeling that if we're doing our part by using a certain strategy – it is only fair that others do the same. Nobody wants to feel that they are making all the sacrifices.

## Volunteer Action Groups

As the town meeting concluded, several people volunteered to form action groups to address certain issues that arose from the day's discussions. The Lobster Institute will organize initial meetings of these action groups. These issues, in alphabetical order, included:

- **Bait:** the availability and the safety of certain baits being used in the lobster fishery.
- **Grassroots Organizational Structures:** the need to establish an organizational structure for self-management and for “fishermen owned science”... and sharing information about these efforts among areas and zones.
- **Marketing:** the need to have a coordinated, regional marketing effort for the lobster industry, with all sectors of the industry collaborating.
- **Seals:** the need to work with the proper parties to provide correct information on the impact of the seal population on the lobster resource, including a need to address misinformation circulating as a result of a proposed ban on Canadian fish by certain environmental groups.