



Lobster Whale Work Group



American Lobster Management Board
February 5, 2019

Introduction



- In October 2018, Board reviewed on-going discussions related to right whale conservation and fisheries management
 - Technical Memo by NEFSC on factors contributing to right whale population declines
 - Recent discussions of ALWTRT
- Given potential for impacts to the lobster fishery, Board created a Work Group to discuss the measures being considered and provide recommendations to Board
- Work Group participants included state agency staff, federal partners, ASMFC staff



On-Going Processes



Atlantic right whale populations have been in decline since 2010

MMMPA

- The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team is charged with reducing serious injury and mortality
- At spring meeting, expected to finalize recommendations to NMFS

ESA

- NMFS preparing a Biological Opinion
- Jeopardy= when an action is reasonably expected to, directly or indirectly, diminish a species numbers, reproduction, or distribution so that the likelihood of survival and recovery is appreciably reduced



Biological Opinion



- Provides a conclusion on whether an action is likely to jeopardize continued existence of an ESA species
 - Jeopardy= when an action is reasonably expected to, directly or indirectly, diminish a species numbers, reproduction, or distribution so that the likelihood of survival and recovery is appreciably reduced
- Consults on fisheries as they are currently operating or as modified by rule-making
 - i.e. TRT recommendations, Commission action
- A jeopardy finding results in Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives that must relieve jeopardy



Work Group Discussion



- Several on-going processes associated with right whale conservation which could substantially impact the economic and cultural future of the lobster fishery
- Given the high economic value of the lobster fishery and its social significance, the Work Group agreed it is important to ensure that the implementation of right whale conservation measures takes place, to the extent possible, in a way that maintains the viability of the lobster fishery



Commission Involvement



- Commission is managing authority for the Lobster FMP
- Goals of the FMP include:
 - Promoting economic efficiency
 - Maintaining opportunities for participation
 - Preserving cultural features of the industry
- Work Group concluded action by the Board to consider modifications to measures in the Lobster FMP is warranted at this time
 - States can continue to cooperatively participate in mgmt. of species
 - Those most familiar with lobster management can provide input on future regulations
- Work Group recognizes that other regulatory changes may occur in the fishery but notes the need to proactively respond to the growing challenges facing the fishery



Recommendation



The Work Group is recommending the Board initiate an Addendum to consider reducing the amount of traps and/or vertical lines in the water and require vessel tracking systems for federal permit holders.

- 1) Vertical line and/or trap reductions
- 2) Vessel Tracking
- 3) Reporting
- 4) Other Measures



Recommendation



- 1) Management tools the Plan Development Team (PDT) should evaluate are:
 - Reductions of vertical lines using trap limits, gear configurations, seasonal closures, and/or other measures to achieve a rate of 20% and 40% by LCMA (exclusive of LCMA 6).
 - Trap reductions should consider on-going state and federal management actions by LCMA and future trap reduction plans already set in rule (e.g., Area 3 Trap Cap phased reductions).
 - Elimination of the 10% replacement trap tag provision.
 - Acceleration of planned trap reductions



Recommendation



2) Lobster Vessel Tracking:

- Vessel tracking system - Require 100% of federal lobster permit holders to have advanced vessel monitoring/tracking systems
 - Not only track movement but also identify where gear is hauled or how many traps are fished

3) Reporting:

- The PDT should develop a method for reporting vertical line and trap use by individual in each jurisdiction until 100% harvester reporting is implemented in state and federal waters



Recommendation



4) In addition, the PDT may want to consider the list of management tools below if they are not included in the final ALWTRT recommendation to NMFS.

- Weak link placement on rope
- Other innovations to breaking rope during entanglements (e.g., sleeves)
- Reduced rope strength on one or both end lines



Questions?

