



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Working towards healthy, self-sustaining populations of all Atlantic coast fish species, or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015

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PRESS CONTACT: Tina Berger
(202) 289-6400

American Lobster Stock Assessment Yields Mixed Results

Stable Abundance for Georges Bank & Most of Gulf of Maine

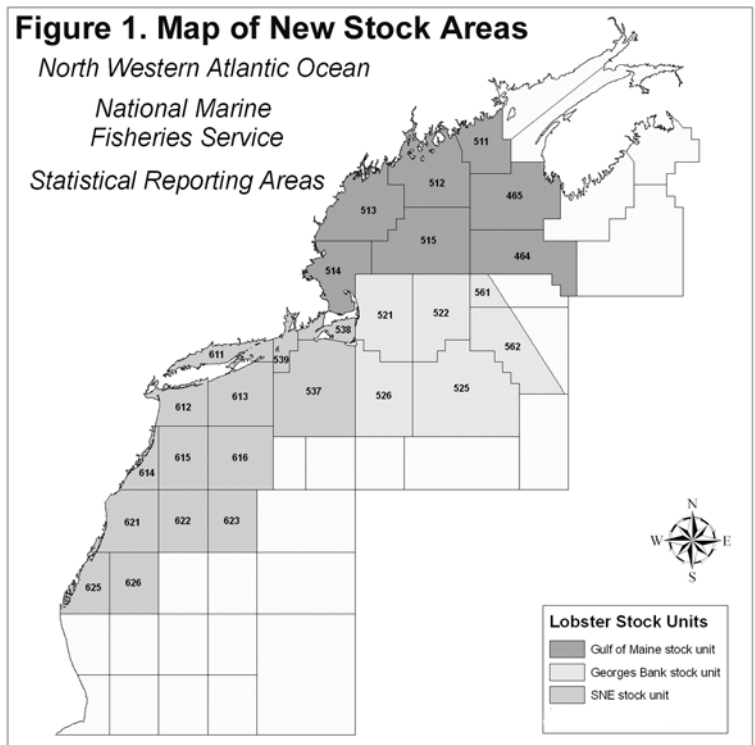
Low Stock Abundance & Recruitment for Southern New England

Decreased Abundance & Recruitment for Area 514 (MA Bay and Stellwagen Bank)

Washington, DC – The 2005 peer-reviewed stock assessment report indicates the American lobster resource presents a mixed picture, with stable stock abundance throughout most of the Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Georges Bank (GBK), low abundance and recruitment in Southern New England (SNE), and decreased recruitment and abundance in Area 514 (Massachusetts Bay and Stellwagen Bank). Of particular concern is SNE, where depleted stock abundance and recruitment coupled with high fishing mortality rates over the past few years have led the Peer Review Panel to call for additional harvest restrictions.

Summing up the Panel's concerns the report stated, "it is the future that leads to the greatest peril for the lobster resource...it would only take a sequence of two to three years of poor recruitment to collapse any component of the lobster resource, and the appearance of extremely low recruitments in recent times in some areas is a cause of concern if not alarm. Until the harvest strategy is revised to provide a buffer of mature adult spawners to cover the bad times, lobster fishery management is a time bomb waiting to explode, its fuse lit by recruitment failure."

Echoing the recommendations of the 2000 Peer Review Panel, the 2004 Model Peer Review Panel, and stock assessment scientists, the 2005 Panel report stated, "the data available are woefully inadequate for the management needs of this fishery and that the primary

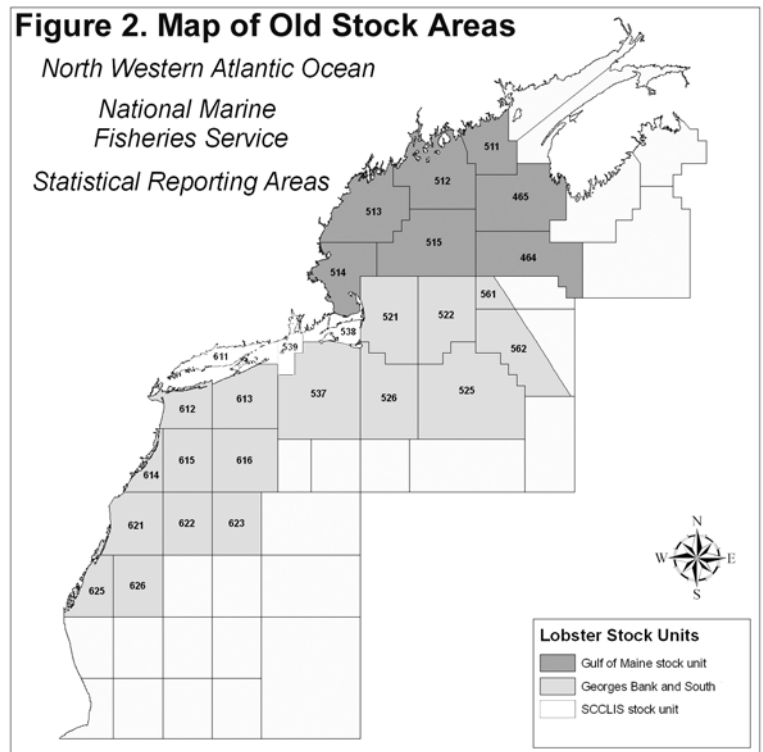


The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species.

limitation on the ability to manage is limited data.” Additionally, “the most significant improvement for future assessments would be procurement of complete and unbiased catch information.” The report calls for the implementation of a standardized mandatory reporting system for American lobster fishermen.

Overall stock abundance in the GOM is relatively high with recent fishing mortality comparable to the past. There has been a long-term trend of increasing recruitment and spawning stock through 2002. On average the fishable stock is about 60% new entrants (recruits) into the fishery. The one area of concern within the GOM is Area 514 (Massachusetts Bay and Stellwagen Bank), which has exhibited persistent low recruitment in recent years and high levels of fishing mortality since 1999. The majority of the fishable lobsters in this area are new entrants into the fishery.

The GBK stock appears stable, with current abundance and fishing mortality similar to the 20-year average. Forty percent of the fishable stock is new entrants into the fishery and the female proportion of the stock is increasing slightly.



Stock abundance for the SNE stock is low and fishing mortality is relatively high. New entrants into the fishery comprised 61-72% of the fishable stock. Overall, the Peer Review Panel expressed concern regarding each stock area’s dependence on new recruits in their current fisheries.

Based on information on lobster maturity, abundance trends, size composition and anecdotal information from fishermen, the report recommends the adoption of the new stock assessment areas (GOM, GBK and SNE) and a refinement of management boundaries to coincide with the new assessment areas (see Figures 1 & 2). It also recommends new biological reference points, including abundance and fishing mortality targets and thresholds.

The American Lobster Plan Development Team will be drafting a public information document (PID) to include recommendations of the stock assessment and peer review, and their possible application to future lobster management activities. The Board will review and consider sending forward for public comment the Draft PID in February. Copies of the stock assessment and peer review reports will be available in December and can be accessed via the Commission’s website at www.asmfc.org under Breaking News or by contacting the Commission at (202) 289-6400. For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at <tkerns@asmfc.org>.

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