

AMERICAN LOBSTER TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY
CONFERENCE CALL
November 28, 2000

Participants: Carl LoBue, Carl Wilson, Clare McBane, Heather Stirratt, Bob Glenn, Bruce Estrella, Kevin Kelly, Dave McCarron, Joe Idoine, Tom Angell, Bill Andrews

Agenda

1. Welcome/Introductions

Heather Stirratt introduced herself as the ASMFC representative on the American Lobster Technical Committee.

Clare McBane is the new Vic-Chair

2. Approval of August Minutes

Motion to approve the August Minutes-Carl LoBue

Seconded by Tom Angell

Comments:

Bruce Estrella reiterated the Technical Committee's (TC) protocol, established at the August, 2000 TC meeting, regarding its reports to the Lobster Management Board. The protocol called for an initial editing by all Technical Committee Members followed by a second mailing for final approval of any changes before the Chairman of the Technical Committee presents them to the Lobster Management Board members. This was agreed to by all.

3. Review/Approval of the Agenda

a. What can be accomplished during this conference call?

1. Update on Reference Point Discussions

Reference points (additional or alternate) are very important to address. There is concern whether the Lobster Management Board realizes that they will take a long time to address (years). It was confirmed that the Lobster Management Board does realize that it will be a long process (referral to Carl Wilson and Heather Stirratt's conference call with Gordon Colvin and George LaPointe). It was agreed that Larry Jacobson would be a good person to start the discussion on reference points with the TC. Larry was unavailable for a meeting in November due to previous commitments. It was decided that the discussion could wait until Larry could attend, hence the conference call, rather than a two-day meeting.

2. Socio-Economic Study

This study was detained. This detainment was due primarily to the ASMFC member transition and trying to schedule the discussion on reference points. Carl Wilson contacted a graduate student at the University of Maine to initiate a literature search, the member names of the subcommittee were not sent to the Lobster Management Board Chair for approval.

3. Effort and Fishing Mortality Reduction

This will be discussed under item #6 of the agenda (Efficacy of evaluating trap reduction plans)

4. Other Business

- a. Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement-Federal lobster management in the exclusive economic zone
- b. Summary of the 2000 commercial lobster fishing year for each state
- c. Communication between Technical Committee Members

4. Reference Points

A. The TC will meet with Larry Jacobson and others to begin the process of generating a table of potential reference points and with associated objectives, ways to achieve objectives and the if the TC can use these reference points. The Lobster Management Board realizes that there could be a major change is the way the Technical Committee addresses the assessment of the lobster population. For many years, the Technical Committee has asked that the Management Board set the objectives and options for the reference points, while the Management Board has asked that the Technical Committee do the same. Joe Idoine stated that a reference point could be in relation to anything. He feels that reference points need to be specific to a set goal. Bruce Estrella agreed indicating that egg production is used in the current overfishing definition because it is measurable. Other options previously suggested for management during the 1990's were not as measurable and had a higher degree of uncertainty. Heather Stirratt suggested that the Technical Committee should present objectives and options to the Management Board and then they can pick from this list. Heather stated that the members of the Management Board have a wide range of backgrounds and some are not as familiar with the lobster issues as others. It was decided that a list of possible objectives with reference points to address these objectives be listed. It is important to keep limitations in mind. Carl LoBue pointed out that a list to work from will cut down the time needed by the Management Board to address this issue.

B. Tentative meeting dates of January 4 and 5 (December 20&21 alternate dates) were selected to begin the discussion on reference points. Josef Idoine agreed to check on Larry Jacobson's availability as well as meeting space in Woods Hole.

C. Stock assessment workshops were discussed. The stock assessment workshop scheduled for early next spring will likely not be held until next summer. Heather

Stirratt indicated that these workshops will likely not be species specific and only the most involved assessment technical committee members will be invited. Clare McBane, Carl Lobue and Carl Wilson all expressed interest in attending these meetings.

5. Socio-Economic Study

A&B. Sub-Committee Update and Independent Work Task Assignment

The Socio Economic SC will be established to investigate the impacts of implementation of FMP objectives and potential management measures. Carl Wilson has not formalized the membership of this sub-committee. He will ask Gordon Colvin at the next Lobster Management Board meeting. It is hoped that the sub-committee will consist of: John Sutinen, Dick Allen, Jim Acheson, Jim Wilson and Eric Thunberg. Carl Wilson and Carl LoBue are interested in representing the TC and in sitting in on the discussion especially if there are conference calls. Tom Angell will contact John Sutinen. Joe will contact Dick Allen for sub-committee membership, plus ask him to make a 45-minute presentation at the next Technical Committee meeting on effort reduction. It was decided that graduate student, Jen Brewer (currently working with Jim Acheson and Jim Wilson), will undertake a literature review of socio-economic studies on lobster under the guidance of the Socio-Economic SC. The question was asked why this graduate student (cost \$400.) and not a member of the sub-committee. In August, the Technical Committee decided that the literature review was needed in such a short period of time that the graduate student would free up time for the sub-committee and allow them to focus on other items. Current socio-economic sub-committee members have indicated that they are too busy to conduct the work. There is concern that Jen Brewer will not receive all needed information. The literature review should include a thorough review of New England Fishery Management Council contracted studies: studies by Ed Richardson, Lou Botsford,, Priscilla Brooks, and all socio-economic studies carried out with every amendment, etc..

David McCarron brought up the fact that the literature study should be limited to the American lobster because the study could be massive. The Technical Committee will direct socio-economic studies to specific areas such as limited entry, trap issues, etc..

A. It will be unlikely that the SC can complete this task by the January Board meeting. Look for an early spring completion.

6. Effort Reductions

a. Review of previous work initiatives.

Bob Glenn presented the study, *Efficacy of evaluating trap reduction plans*, carried out by himself and Joe Idoine (See Attachment). This paper considered the history of effort reduction recommendations, examined studies in the literature

on this subject, and explored the development of an effective method for evaluating trap reduction plans. The relationship between trap hauls and soak time was found to be an important factor for controlling effort and eventually reducing mortality. It was mentioned that when the optimal soak time is interrupted a decrease in fishing mortality might begin. Previous studies have determined that it would be necessary to reduce the number of traps, and/or frequency of hauls, to the point that fishers can no longer scale back soak time without compromising the effectiveness of each trap for trap reductions to be effective at reducing fishing mortality. Trap reductions would have to be very significant to effectively reduce fishing effort.

The TC agrees that a significant decrease in effort would be needed to reduce fishing mortality, but we don't know what that number is. A lengthy discussion pursued concerning trap reductions and the effect they have on fishing mortality. The main message resulting from this discussion was that the current management measures are in jeopardy if fishing effort continues to increase. Industry should meet with the Technical Committee members and the Management Board and discuss this problem. All LCMT's should look at trap reduction schemes. Bob Glenn commented that any reductions in trap numbers make the fishery run more efficiently and will lead to a more manageable number of traps. Vic Crecco has previously mentioned that he feels that traps in close approximation are competing with each other and that small reductions in effort could result in increased fishing mortality. Bob Glenn agrees that an individual trap is more efficient in catching lobster than a trawl of traps for this very reason. Carl LoBue stated that it is very difficult to equate number of traps to fishing mortality. The relationship between traps and a unit of effort and effort to fishing mortality is unknown. Dave McCarron stated that it is important for the Technical Committee to make clear what trap reduction could achieve. There is a serious concern about latent effort where lobstermen can increase their number of traps to the greatest number allowed because trap limits were set too high.

Carl Wilson suggested that every state should make a list of the number of tags issued to license holders and the number of traps actually fished. Each state will compile numbers of tags, traps fished and existing regulations on entry. This will help to see where the extent of the fishing effort can go. It was also suggested that the Canadian Lobster Fishery be investigated as they have had limited entry and traps for nearly 30 years. Bob Glenn will investigate and collate this information.

b. Future LCMT proposals.

The need to consider "effective" effort reductions in any future LCMT proposal is essential. It is likely that the degree of effort reduction needed to achieve reductions in fishing mortality is very high, but there are other benefits for reducing effort. Current management measures are reduced when effort is still increasing in the fishery.

7. Addendum II Requirements

- a. Circular Escape Vent Size
The TC recommends a 2.5" circular vent be used as an equivalent to the 2.0" rectangular vent. Addendum II to Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan was discussed. A circular vent size of approximately 2 and 1/2 inches is equivalent to 64mm which is compatible with a 2 and 1/32 inch rectangular vent. If the Technical Committee goes along with the Management Board where the vent is oversized (i.e. some legal sized lobsters will escape), then a 2-inch rectangular vent is approximately equivalent to a 2 and 1/2 inch circular vent. Heather Stirratt stated that it is best to have scientific data concerning these trap equivalents, but there is a time limit and the Management Board has to act now. Carl Lobue recommended that the PRT recommend a 2 and 1/2 inch circular vent. Kevin Kelley stated that previous circular vent recommendations were based on extrapolations. Previous work by the Maine DMR on circular vents did not look at vents this large. NY may initiate future vent studies. This will apply to Areas 2,3,4,5,6 and the Outer Cape if they move to increase their gauge size.
- b. Compliance Reports.
Limited entry is not included in compliance reports. Heather Stirratt will send all the information on regulations to Bob Glenn.

8. Other Business

- a. The Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement-Federal lobster management in the exclusive economic zone is available on the web. Clarification was made by Clare McBane to the TC on the NMFS DEIS. It was noted that when a situation arises and there is a question about a state's regulations, that the state's Technical Committee member be contacted for clarification. This will eliminate the propagating of misinformation.
- b. An informal survey of the 2000 fishing year was conducted for each state. The findings follow:

NY- Generally a poor season. There are only 3 of 100 fishermen fishing in Western LIS in 2000. Moving eastward, catches are down 30-50% and further east, catches are down 30%. The southern fleet has been reduced by 25% due to other circumstances.
RI- There is no hard data. Catches are down 40-60% especially in the Narragansett region. Offshore catches were good in the beginning of the year. Shell disease is seen in 25-30% of the lobsters seen by Tom Angell. He has just started collection this information. There is still a problem with the oil spill from 1996 because it killed lots of juvenile lobsters. The v-notching program is going along well according to Tom Angell. Some lobstermen complain that they are only catching v-notched females. There is no hard evidence of its success as yet. A tagged v-notch lobster was reported caught in the canyons, not sure where it was released.

MA-Catches south of Cape Cod are poor. Catches are low in Buzzard's Bay. There is no evidence yet that the low catch is the result of shell disease. Shell disease has spread up to the Canal and Cape Cod Bay, but it is mostly in Buzzard's Bay. The catches have improved north of Cape Cod. Catches have not completely recovered from a previous downturn in the MA Bay area but have improved. All areas have not been analyzed for shell disease. The trawl surveys have not been analyzed yet.

CT-Catches in LIS during the spring of 2000 were down from the last 2 years but are the third highest of the time series. Last spring, the trawl survey had the third highest catches of lobsters in the time series, but the survey did not include areas in Western LIS, which really hit hard with lobster deaths. This fall survey had low catches.

NH-There is no hard data available. The lobstermen are doing well with their catches. There is no problem with shell disease.

ME-There was early shedding east of Casco Bay. Eastern ME had huge landings in the July and August after a low spring. They are in the process of conducting the inshore fall trawl survey, and so far there are lots of lobsters.