

Insights

Lobsters—the Bigger the Better

Lobsters are getting smaller. “Fifty years ago, people caught 25-pound lobsters,” says Massachusetts fisheries’ spokesperson Bruce Estrella. North, east, and south of Cape Cod, however, the lobsters caught have gotten much smaller—and that affects more than the daily specials.



Numerous environmental factors, but especially warmer waters, now cause female lobsters in this area to reach maturity and carry eggs before reaching the legal catch size. On the surface, this appears to be a good thing; however, a large lobster can carry two-thirds more eggs than these smaller lobsters. Fewer eggs now may mean an under-population problem in the future.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the New England Fishery Management Council are respond-

ing. At their request, ICF Consulting developed a data management system to support assessment of American lobster stocks, as well as other animals.

Data are collected when lobstermen bring their catch to market, and from at-sea trawl surveys. By comparing these data to historical data, the stock assessors can identify trends in lobster populations, including the number of lobsters caught in an area during a period of time, size, sexual maturity, and general health of the lobsters. This feedback allows state and federal fisheries to manage catch number and size limits, length of season, gear specifications, and the overall effectiveness of fishery regulations. Last year, the lobster fishery alone accounted for an estimated \$483 million in the Maine economy. Ensuring the vitality of lobster fishery is essential for both the environmental and economic health of the Atlantic states.

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