



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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American Lobster Board Approves Addendum XXVII Addendum Establishes Measures to Increase Protection of Spawning Stock Biomass of the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank Stock

Arlington, VA – The Commission’s American Lobster Management Board approved Addendum XXVII to Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Lobster. The Addendum establishes a trigger mechanism to implement management measures – specifically gauge and escape vent sizes – to provide additional protection of the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank (GOM/GBK) spawning stock biomass (SSB). It also implements changes to management measures for Lobster Conservation Management Areas (LCMAs) 1, 3, and Outer Cape Cod (OCC) to improve the consistency of measures across the GOM/GBK stock.

The Board initiated the Addendum as a proactive measure to improve the resiliency of the GOM/GBK stock. Since the early 2000s, landings in the GOM/GBK stock have rapidly increased. In Maine alone, landings have increased from 57 million pounds in 2000 to a record high of 132.6 million pounds in 2016. Maine landings have declined slightly but were still high at 97.9 million and 108.9 million in 2020 and 2021, respectively. However, since 2012, lobster settlement surveys throughout the GOM have generally been below the time series averages in all areas. These surveys, which measure trends in the abundance of juvenile lobsters, can be used to track populations and potentially forecast future landings. Persistent low settlement could foreshadow declines in recruitment and landings. In the most recent years of the time series, declines in recruitment indices have also been observed.

In response to these trends, Addendum XXVII establishes a mechanism where changes to the current gauge and escape vent sizes in LCMAs 1, 3 and OCC will be implemented automatically based on observed changes in recruit abundance indices. If the index of recruit abundance declines by 35% from the reference level (equal to the three-year average from 2016-2018), a series of gradual changes to gauge and vent size will be initiated in the following fishing year. These include two increases to the minimum gauge size in LCMA 1 (Gulf of Maine) and a single decrease to the maximum gauge size in LCMA 3 (offshore federal waters) and OCC. The gauge and escape vent size changes are intended to increase the proportion of the population that is able to reproduce before being harvested, and to enhance stock resiliency by protecting larger lobsters of both sexes.

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 diadromous species.

Additionally, Addendum XXVII implements measures that resolve discrepancies between the regulations for state and federal permit-holders, provide a more consistent conservation strategy, and simplify interstate commerce and enforcement across management areas. Specifically, the Addendum implements a standard v-notch definition of 1/8" with or without setal hairs in LCMA 3 and OCC, and a standard maximum gauge size of 6 3/4" for LCMA 3 and state and federal permit holders in OCC. It also modifies the management program such that for LCMA 1 and 3 permit holders, states must limit the issuance of trap tags to equal the harvester trap tag allocations unless trap losses are documented. The implementation date for these changes is January 1, 2024.

The following table specifies the timing of management changes for each of the three LCMA's addressed under Addendum XXVII.

When change(s) will be implemented	What change will be implemented		
	LCMA 1	LCMA 3	Outer Cape Cod
January 1, 2024	Trap tags issuance limited to harvester allocation		v-notch definition: 1/8" with or without setal hairs; Maximum gauge size: 6 3/4"
Fishing year following an observed 35% decline in the trigger index (Year 1)	Minimum gauge size: 3 5/16"		
Year 3	Minimum gauge size: 3 3/8"		
Year 4	Escape vent size: 2 x 5 3/4" rectangular; 2 5/8" circular		
Year 5		Maximum gauge size: 6 1/2"	Maximum gauge size: 6 1/2"

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