

Regulators consider what to do about collapsed lobster stock

November 9 2015, by Patrick Whittle

Interstate fishing regulators are considering what to do about southern New England's collapsed lobster population, and fishermen fear new restrictions could land on them as a result.

The lobster population has sunk to the lowest levels on record in southern New England waters, affecting once-productive fishing grounds off Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts. The catch off Rhode Island is a third of the size that it was in the late 1990s, and it has all but disappeared off Connecticut.

A science committee of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is working on a report about the lobster stock that the commission's lobster board will see in February. The board could then make a decision about the future of the fishery, including changing quotas or enacting new restrictions.

William Adler, a longtime Massachusetts lobsterman and a member of the lobster board, said that a moratorium is not likely on the table but that something needs to be done to conserve the region's lobsters, which are beloved by restaurant diners.

"You can't let them go free, and you can't shut them down," he said.
"Both extremes are not workable."

The declines in lobsters off southern New England are largely in response to continued fishing pressure and adverse environmental

conditions, including higher water temperatures, the commission said in a summary of a report it issued about the subject this summer.

The outlook for lobsters is much better in Maine, by far the most productive lobster fishing state in the country. Fishermen there have landed more than 100 million pounds of lobster for four years in a row.

Overall, [lobster](#) availability and price have both been fairly high in recent months. The high price has allowed fishermen to reinvest in gear and boats, and new restrictions would curtail that growth, said Beth Casoni, executive director of the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association.

"We want to make sure the measures aren't overly burdensome," she said. "You could lose infrastructure—piers, bait suppliers, marine stores."

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