

Government criticizes European proposal to ban US lobster

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A Swedish proposal to ban imports of American lobsters by European Union countries isn't supported by science, U.S. and Canadian scientists say.

The assistant administrator for fisheries from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration wrote to the European Commission on Monday with preliminary findings from scientists in both North American countries as she sought to forestall the proposal before an EU panel meets later this month.

Assistant Administrator Eileen Sobeck wrote that there's too much at stake to proceed with the proposal without "robust, peer-reviewed science."

Sweden has asked the European Union to bar imports of live American lobsters into the 28-nation bloc after 32 American lobsters were found in Swedish waters. American lobsters represent an invasive species that could spread disease and overtake the European variety, Sweden said.

The ban, if adopted, would harm U.S. and Canadian lobstermen, who together export \$200 million worth of lobster to European markets each year.

Other European countries have previously expressed concerns about American lobsters in their waters, but they didn't press for a ban on them.

Sobeck's letter was accompanied by preliminary analyses of the Swedish data by NOAA National Marine Fisheries and Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans, along with a paper by a scientist in Maine, the largest U.S producer of lobsters.

Robert S. Steneck, at the University of Maine, wrote that the American lobsters found in EU waters were "held or released illegally."

Steneck contends American lobsters don't pose a threat to European lobsters for a number of reasons. Among them, he noted, was that winter ocean temperatures along the coasts of EU countries "are too warm for successful reproduction" of American lobsters.

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