

Lobstermen question need for restrictions to help species

31 January 2017, by Patrick Whittle

Some lobster fishermen expressed skepticism Tuesday about a plan to try to revive the dwindling southern New England lobster stock through new fishing restrictions.

Lobster fishing in the U.S. is experiencing a boom that has lasted several years, and prices have also been high. But the population of the species has diminished in the waters off southern Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Long Island, New York, where it was once plentiful.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is considering a host of options to try to rejuvenate the region's lobster stock, which scientists have said is falling victim to rising ocean temperatures. An arm of the commission voted Tuesday to send the options out for public comment.

Fishermen and fishing groups at the meeting said it might not make sense to restrict fishing when the environment itself is what's hurting the lobster population.

George Dahl, a spokesman for the Long Island Sound Lobstermen's Association, asked: "What good is it to penalize the fishermen with more restrictions if the environmental conditions are not good enough for the lobster population to survive?"

The regulators could pick new restrictions for the fishery by May.

The selection of those measures will follow public comments that will be solicited in the coming months, the commission has said. Possibilities for managing the fishery include changing the legal harvesting size limit for lobsters, reducing the number of traps in the water and enforcing seasonal closures.

Megan Ware, a fishery management plan coordinator for the commission, said it's important to find a way to increase egg production among

southern New England lobsters so the population can rebuild. The new management options are geared at accomplishing that, commission members have said.

Fishermen seek lobsters off of New England and Canada, with the U.S. fishery based mostly in Maine. The southern New England lobster fishery is a small piece of a larger American lobster fishery that was worth a record of more than \$620 million at the docks in 2015.

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