

New lobster fishing rules on the way amid warming waters

May 9 2017, by Patrick Whittle

New restrictions are coming to southern New England's lobster fishery in an attempt to save the area's population of the crustaceans, which has dwindled as waters have warmed.

An arm of the interstate Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission voted on Tuesday to pursue new management measures to try to slow the decline of lobsters in the area. Management tools will include changes to legal harvesting size, reductions to the number of traps and seasonal closures to fishing areas.

The board's move was "a recognition that climate change and warming water temperatures play an increasingly role in [lobster](#) stocks, especially in southern New England," said Tina Berger, a spokeswoman for the commission.

The board's goal, approved on Tuesday, is to increase egg production in the area by five percent. Decreasing the amount of fishing pressure will give the lobsters a better chance to reproduce, scientists working for the commission have said.

Crafting the specifics of the management measures will take months, and a final vote on them is expected in August.

Some members of the lobster industry have been critical of the board's plan to approve new restrictions, as they believe the fishery is already subject to too much regulation. But the board has spent more than a year

working on new [management](#) measures, and walking away from them now would be a failure, said Mike Luisi, a fisheries manager for the state of Maryland.

"We've been trying to get the best science available to make these decisions," he said. "It would be unfortunate if it had to go to the feds because the board decided not to do something."

The U.S. lobster fishery is mostly based in Maine, where lobster catch has reached record highs in recent years. The price of lobster has also been high to consumers all over the U.S., in part because of increased demand for live lobster in Asia.

But, catch off of Connecticut, Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts has declined while Maine has boomed. The number of adult lobsters in New England south of Cape Cod was estimated to be about 10 million in 2013. That's a fifth of the total from the late 1990s.

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