

# Island Ad-Vantages

Account Recovery

Latest News Forum Topics ▾ Calendar ▾ Remembrances ▾ Classifieds ▾ Archives ▾

Subscribe or renew online

Click here to access our online form

## Lobster industry seeks gauge-change reprieve

May 16, 2024

BY JACK BEAUDOIN



Unless regulators reverse their decision, the new minimum size of legally harvested lobsters in Maine will increase from 3-1/4 inches (shown here) to 3-5/16 inches. Critics say the small change could have oversized impacts on lobstermen and dealers. COURTESY OF THE MAINE LOBSTER MARKETING COLLABORATIVE

STONINGTON—The fate and date of an impending change to the minimum size of Maine lobsters remain uncertain following an April 30 meeting of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Lobster Management Board.

In a message to lobstermen following the meeting, Maine Department of Marine Resources Commissioner Patrick Keliher, who chairs the board, said that he asked his colleagues to delay implementation of a gauge change that would increase the minimum size of a "short"—a lobster that needs to be thrown back so that it can grow some more—from 3-1/4 inches to 3-5/16 inches.

Originally scheduled to go into effect next month, Keliher had previously won a seven-month reprieve to put off the change until January 2025. Now he's calling for even more time before the rules go into effect in the face of push back from lobstermen who question the data that triggered new rules on lobster size.

"The goal of the addendum was to ensure the lobster stock is resilient in the face of a changing climate and to avoid the collapse experienced in Southern New England," Keliher explained. "That said, based on comments from industry and the public, it is clear to me that the board hasn't fully considered the ramifications of lost revenue by U.S. harvesters and loss of market share to Canadian harvesters, as well as lost supply and revenue by dealers."

While the board has not set a date publicly, Keliher indicated that board members agreed to take more time to digest the comments it has received, to compile 2023 data, and to meet again to determine whether the rules need further modification. The next scheduled meeting of the ASMFC is in early August, according to the commission's own published calendar, but DMR spokesman Jeff Nichols said that Keliher had no further comment on the timeline for reconsideration.

Despite the uncertainty, many local lobstermen are cheering the news.

"I think the gauge change should be delayed/reevaluated because there are so many variables that go into gathering the data," lobsterman Nathaniel Lane said. "There could be a lot of collection bias because out of the entire lobster ecosystem you are only gathering in one location at one point in time. That becomes a tiny snapshot that may not be reliable."

### Abundance measures

The gauge-size change was triggered when data from a rolling three-year period ending in 2022 showed a decline in recruit abundance—essentially a measure of the population of juvenile lobsters—of 39 percent from the 2016-2018 average. According to Addendum XXVII, which lays out the management plan, after just a 35 percent decrease in juvenile lobsters the first gauge change would be followed by a second increase to 3-3/8 inches, and then a change in vent sizes, which allow undersized lobsters to escape a trap. The intention is to reduce the number of lobsters harvested, and increase the overall population by giving lobsters more spawning time.

Over the last five years Stonington's landings—measured by live weight—have remained remarkably consistent, from this year's low of 11.42 million pounds to a high of 11.92 million pounds in 2021. At the 2024 Maine Fishermen's Forum in March, DMR scientist Kathleen Reardon predicted that the implementation of the gauge changes could reduce the catch by as much as 10 percent. However, she added, "[t]he number of lobsters will be less, but the weight will be the same or potentially greater."

But Hugh Reynolds, owner of Greenhead Lobster in Stonington, says in this case size matters. If the gauge change occurs, Maine dealers and processors will face significant disruptions in the global marketplace, he said. Reynolds points out that only one in 10 lobsters harvested actually ends up whole on an American consumer's plate. China consumes a quarter of the harvest while the rest is processed and sold around the world.

Have news to share?  
Want to add your event to our calendar?

Click here to submit content

Penobscot Bay Press  
Community Information Services

Let's make your vacation happen!

Are you a property owner?  
Trust us to manage your vacation rental!

### Special Sections



### Penobscot Books Store



Let's make

harvest, while the rest is processed and sold around the world.

If the lobster catch in the Gulf of Maine decreases, Reynolds said, "how do we keep our plants running?"

Reynolds said the change could eliminate entire product categories if larger lobsters are caught. "This will obliterate the three-to-four-ounce tail supply in Maine," he said, offering one example. "The four-ounce tail is hugely popular in grocery stores and it will not be in existence."

Reynolds said instead of rushing to adopt gauge-size changes that were implemented in states to the south, the board should have done a better job asking Maine fishermen and dealers for ideas about assessing the biomass to ensure it really is in decline, and for more practical ways of sustaining and rebuilding stocks. That might include returning all females to the water regardless of size for a period of two to three months, or restarting lobster hatchery and breeding programs.

"This whole thing is just very sad," Reynolds said. "I'm not discounting the council's work, but they haven't considered the damage and destruction this action will have."

#### Surprise, surprise

While lobstermen had mixed feelings about the resiliency strategy, many in the industry believed—as did Keliher—that the trigger would not be reached so quickly.

"Was I surprised? I think absolutely everyone was," said Carla Guenther, chief scientist with the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries in Stonington. "When the concept and percent downturn of a trigger were first discussed, we were at a twenty-something percent downturn.... So 35 percent seemed pretty far away. But the very next year the combined index blew past the 35 percent to 39 percent."

"I am surprised it was reached instantly," Lane added. "I'm curious, since the juvenile stock is measured using the trawl surveys, settlement surveys and the ventless trap program. If there is enough margin of error involved, the 'trigger' we are facing could be in the margin of error."

Lane and other lobstermen in the area also say they are seeing more tiny lobsters, or snappers, in their traps, which makes them question the accuracy of the survey data.

Another issue for fishermen is equity. Stonington lobsterman John Williams, who supports implementation of the gauge change, said the vast majority of Maine lobstermen and dealers are worried that Canadians will be able to sell smaller lobsters into Maine and other markets, giving them an unfair advantage.

"Ninety percent of them are totally against it," Williams said of the gauge change's current timetable. "The associations and the unions are against it. Of 100 fishermen at a meeting in Ellsworth, only two of us spoke in favor of it."

For his part, Williams considers the resiliency measures a necessary but bitter pill for current lobstermen.

"This isn't going to help them," he said, noting that the lobster's life cycle means it will take about seven years to see the benefits of Addendum XXVII. "But this is to ensure that our kids and grandchildren have the same opportunities we did. We want to keep that going."

If Keliher is successful in persuading the ASMFC's lobster board to delay implementation, it's also unclear how long it would take to clarify rules—known as the "Mitchell Provision" of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act—that would ensure all Canadian imports meet the minimum gauge size Maine lobstermen would face. He called for the board to urge Canadian regulators to increase the minimum size for lobster on the same schedule or as soon as possible as indicated in Addendum XXVII. He added, "I believe it is vital that we take the time to see if this happens."

Guenther said that suggested at least a year's delay.

"Nothing happens soon," she said. "They'd have to start their process like we did over a year ago."



### Coming Events

Use our regional events calendar to plan your week!

May 2024						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		



### Weekly E-News

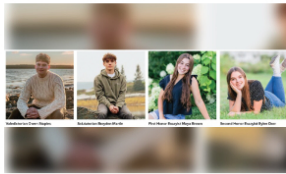
Get the headlines delivered to your inbox every week. Sign up for our free weekly newsletter so you never miss a story!

Email	...
Subscribe	



### More From Island Ad-Vantages Latest News

[Go To The Island Ad-Vantages Latest News Section](#)



[Deer Isle-Stonington High School names honor parts for Class of 2024](#)



[\\$25 million for working waterfronts ready for applicants](#)



[Deer Isle board accepts design bid for new fire station](#)



[Jane's Walk and the meaning behind Shop - Eat - Experience - Stay Local](#)

Date	Temp Lo	Temp Hi	Precip	Wind and General Conditions
May 5	46	62	20"	SE clouds, a HRG rain, showers.
May 6	43	61	0	SW fog, clouds, late afternoon sun.
May 7	42	71	0	SW to NW, sunny, warm.
May 8	44	59	45"	NE, a lot of sun early, clouds, rain.
May 9	42	64	0	N, mostly cloudy.
May 10	38	59	0	NE, wind clouds and sun.
May 11	39	59	0	NE, mostly sunny, bright blue sky.

[May's weather - a month of contrast](#)



[Aurora borealis](#)

Contact Us  
Subscribe  
Advertise with Us  
Visit Our Book Website



Penobscot Bay Press  
Community Information Services

Castine Patriot  
Island Ad-Vantages  
The Weekly Packet  
Bay Community Register

Stonington: 69 Main Street, PO Box 36, Stonington ME 04681. 207-367-2200  
Blue Hill: 12 Main Street, PO Box 646, Blue Hill ME 04614. 207-274-2241

Powered by  
**Our  Hometown**

Newspaper website content management software and services

[DMCA Notices](#)

©2024 Penobscot Bay Press | [All Rights Reserved](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)