

To Interested Readers,

It is no secret the lobster fishing industry is facing hard economic times. Wholesale lobster prices are at lows not seen in twenty years. Some fishermen have had their dealers turn them away while other boats have been sitting at the docks for several days before they could find a dealer to purchase the product they had on board. We have seen the fuel prices pulling back some (funny how we think \$2.50 a gallon is a deal) but all the other operating expenses are still at all time highs. The current conditions do not bode well for this industry but in time this will pass. It seems we were caught in a perfect storm we had no control over. The US economy tanked, the World economy tanked, lines of credit disappeared for the processors during the banking crisis, Maine started catching a lot of lobsters and the Canadian season is just starting. Add to all this that November is always a tough month for lobster sales. Bottom line, lobsters are cheap and it's going to take a while to straighten out.

As if things are not bad enough, there appears to be a storm brewing for the Rhode Island fishing industry in the form of what is being called the Ocean Special Area Management Plan (SAMP). It is a plan to zone our oceans for uses beyond what the fishing industry has ever had to deal with before. This plan, best I can tell is about wind energy, but one does not have to imagine very much as to what else may be on the horizon for the grounds we all share and depend on. RILA was in attendance at the earliest meetings on wind energy and there seems to have been a lot going on since the last meeting we were invited to. The first of the stakeholder meetings for the SAMP project took place on October 29th at the Coastal Institute. The fishing industries are the only stakeholders whose livelihoods could be in jeopardy if this project goes forward in the wrong manner. RILA will continue to work through this process in a responsible manner hoping for a win, win scenario for all Rhode Islanders. The industry association leaders from the Rhode Island Commercial Fisheries Center who may be negatively impacted due to this project recently met to work on a strategy that allows us to be meaningfully engaged in this process rather than be along for the ride. All of us support alternative energy if it is conducted in a responsible manner that does not negatively effect our commercial fishing industry. That being said, if need be, we will fight for our livelihoods. My first impressions are that the train has left the station and they would like us to ride along quietly. Here is a list of bullet points from the first SAMP meeting and some links to the SAMP process.

CRMC [Coastal Resources Management Council] feels that they have the statutory authority to zone uses in both state waters and federal waters off the coast. They are calling it "ocean zoning" as derived from an "ocean spatial planning" process. They expect to be the first in the U.S. if not the world to do this.

50 scientists are involved (mostly URI) who have been "working in RI waters for 30 years or more".

The funding is coming from the state's "Renewable Energy Fund" which is derived from a surcharge on everyone's electric bill. The Economic Development Corp. disburses these funds.

- They have \$3.2 million approved for this project - \$1.6 million each year for two years.
- The funds have been allocated. There is no field research being done in fisheries
- The budget has not been made public (yet anyway).
- D. Beutel and L. Skrobe have been contracted to work with the fishing industry to gather data on fishing grounds and to learn of the industry's concerns.
- The original research proposal was put together by a team of scientists from URI. The proposal went to EDC. The University is being used to achieve "economic efficiency." Ten days time of the RV Endeavor is being "given" as a match from the University as a bonus – the Endeavor is already outfitted to do the work - to have gone any other route "would have cost us considerably more".
- Fisheries is so important they have a separate information gathering process in place [i.e. David and Laura's work] to gain more substantive input than just from the stakeholder group.
- Project managers want this process to be "transparent" and everyone to be aware. They stand ready to cooperate with any group that needs more information.
- It was stated that using GSO/URI researchers was important because they "have unpublished data that we will get access to" and they "know these waters".
- 1. - A "high quality" SAM Plan may reduce the "regulatory burdens" for the process of reviewing proposals for these offshore waters.
- There is a state agency roundtable for this process and an interstate group to coordinate other states' interests.
- To have gone any other route that to have used the Endeavor "probably would have cost us significantly more".
- The list of research projects funded is listed at <http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/oceansamp/research.html>
- The map showing the planning area is found at http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/oceansamp/maps/oceansamp_boundary_map.pdf

SKATES...

It seems we have another management plan to pay attention to. NMFS is taking comment on a Skate Management Plan. There was a public hearing at the Narragansett Town Hall on October 29th. Thanks to those of you who took the time to go. As all of us know, a steady supply of skate is crucial for the lobster fleet both inshore and offshore. NMFS is putting a TAC on skates. After speaking with our area bait dealers and boat owners that land the majority of our bait, RILA supported Alternative 4 of the options presented. We recommended a trimester approach within the annual quota in order to keep the supply of bait as level and available as possible. We also asked that any disruptions in bait supply for the lobster fleet be part of the Economic Impact Study. We feel strongly that any disruption in skate availability will have a huge negative impact on the lobster fleet, the most valuable fishery on the East Coast. We will be submitting written comment on this. The last day for public comment is November 10th.

On another note, Addendum XII was passed at the recent Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission meeting. Although it will be going through another round of public comment due to the changes that were made to the document after the first round of public comments. This is not the plan industry envisioned by any means. We have worked on this long and hard and believe it is necessary to go forward in this restrictive manner to get it up and running. It was more important to have it be uniform and able to withstand legal challenge rather than go forward with inconsistencies that may not have held up to challenges. Unfortunately, we will have to take this in little steps. We will have the opportunity in the future to address and try to make the changes we all feel are necessary to make this plan work as intended i.e. most restrictive, interstate transfers, state to fed and fed to state transfers. The ASMFC web link for making public comment is listed below and comments will be accepted until December 1.

<http://www.asmfc.org/americanLobster.htm>

The Area 2 lobster fishing community recently lost a great advocate for the industry. Henry Cebula passed away recently after a long battle with cancer. He was the past Area 2 LCMT Chair, worked tirelessly for our industry and will be sadly missed. Our condolences go out to the Cebula family.