

INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Jonah Crab

Species Range and Stock Units

Biological range and management unit: ME – VA

Stock Status

The first benchmark stock assessment for Jonah crab was completed and peer reviewed in 2023. The assessment identified four stock areas: the inshore Gulf of Maine (IGOM), offshore Gulf of Maine (OGOM), inshore Southern New England (ISNE), and offshore Southern New England (OSNE) stocks. Given data limitations and a poor understanding of Jonah crab life history, no stock assessment models could be developed to estimate abundance, fishing mortality, and biological reference points. Instead, simple, empirical stock indicators were developed from available data time series. Indicators selected for stock abundance conditions included YOY settlement and recruit abundance, exploitable abundance, and spawning abundance indices from trawl surveys. Stock condition was evaluated relative to historical levels. If the indicator in any given year is below 25% of observed values during its time series, it is considered a negative condition. If it is above 25% of observed values, but below 75% of observed values, it is considered a neutral condition. If it is above 75% of observed values, it is considered a positive condition. Fishery performance indicators were also developed, including landings, the number and proportion of pot/trap trips that landed Jonah crab, and the number and proportion of active lobster/crab permits that landed Jonah crab.

According to the stock indicators, IGOM, OGOM, and OSNE recruit, exploitable, and spawning abundance conditions in the last three years of the time series were neutral or positive. The one exception is from the ME/NH Trawl survey, but this is due to the shorter time series of this survey not capturing historical lows observed in earlier years by other surveys. Indicators generally agree across these stocks that abundance has not been depleted to historical lows observed in the 1980s and 1990s. There are no reliable abundance indicators for the ISNE stock and the assessment did not make a conclusion on the condition of this stock's abundance.

There was insufficient information to make statements about fishing mortality or exploitation with confidence and these population parameters remain major uncertainties. Recent landings have steadily declined in the OSNE stock which is the primary stock with targeted/mixed effort for Jonah crab and the stock accounting for the vast majority of coastwide landings. This trend is believed to be influenced by factors other than available abundance. Although the recent decline is not well-detected in fishery-independent stock indicators, there is some evidence of declining CPUE in the fishery, creating substantial concern and uncertainty for the status of the stock.



Involved States and Jurisdictions

ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, DE, MD, VA, NEFMC, NMFS

Active Boards/Committees

American Lobster Management Board, Jonah Crab Technical Committee, Jonah Crab Stock Assessment Subcommittee, Jonah Crab Advisory Panel, Jonah Crab Plan Development Team, and Plan Review Team

Chairs

Board Chair – Renee Zobel (3/2025); Vice-Chair – Vacant
Technical Committee Chair – Derek Perry
Advisory Panel Chair – Earl Gwin

Staff Lead

Caitlin Starks, cstarks@asmfc.org

Management Plan History

[Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Jonah Crab \(August 2015\)](#)

Jonah crab is managed under the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP), which was approved by the American Lobster Management Board in August 2015. The goal of the FMP is to promote conservation, reduce the possibility of recruitment failure, and allow the full utilization of the resource by the industry. The plan lays out specific management measures in the commercial fishery. These include a 4.75" minimum size with zero tolerance and a prohibition on the retention of egg-bearing females. The FMP also specifies the fishery be strictly whole crab except for those individuals who can prove a history of claw landings in the states of New Jersey through Virginia. To prevent the fishery from being open access, the FMP states that participation in the directed trap fishery is limited to lobster permit holders or those who can prove a history of crab-only pot fishing. All others must obtain an incidental permit. In

the recreational fishery, the FMP sets a possession limit of 50 whole crabs per person per day and prohibits the retention of egg-bearing females. Due to the lack of data on the Jonah crab fishery, the FMP implements fishery-dependent data collection. The Plan requires both harvester and dealer reporting along with port and sea sampling.

[Addendum I \(May 2016\)](#)

The Addendum establishes a bycatch limit of 1,000 pounds of crab/trip for non-trap gear (e.g., otter trawls, gillnets) and non-lobster trap gear (e.g., fish, crab, and whelk pots) effective January 1, 2017. In doing so, the Addendum caps incidental landings of Jonah crab across all non-directed gear types with a uniform bycatch allowance. While the gear types in Addendum I make minimal contributions to total landings in the fishery, the 1,000 crab limit provides a cap to potential increases in effort and trap proliferation.

Addendum II (January 2017)

The Addendum establishes a coastwide standard for claw harvest. Specifically, it permits Jonah crab fishermen to detach and harvest claws at sea, with a required minimum claw length of 2.75" if the volume of claws landed is greater than five gallons. Claw landings less than five gallons do not have to meet the minimum claw length standard. The Addendum also establishes a definition of bycatch in the Jonah crab fishery, whereby the total pounds of Jonah crab caught as bycatch must weigh less than the total amount of the targeted species at all times during a fishing trip. The intent of this definition is to address concerns regarding the expansion of a small-scale fishery under the bycatch limit.

Addendum III (February 2018)

Addendum III addresses deficiencies in the harvester reporting and biological data collection requirements for the lobster and Jonah crab fisheries. Specifically, the Addendum improves the spatial resolution of data by requiring fishermen to report via 10 minute squares, which further divide the existing statistical areas. In addition, the Addendum establishes a one year pilot program to explore electronic tracking devices in the fishery. Regarding harvester trip reports, the Addendum requires additional data elements including 'number of traps per trawl' and 'number of buoy lines' in order to collect information on gear configurations. The Addendum also requires the states to implement 100% harvester reporting within a five year deadline, with the prioritization of electronic harvester reporting development during that time. In the interim, jurisdictions with less than 100% harvester reporting should redistribute the current effort associated with harvester reporting to focus on active, as opposed to latent, permit holders. Finally, the Addendum improves the biological sampling requirements by establishing a baseline of ten sampling trips per year in the lobster/Jonah crab fishery and encourages states with more than 10% of coastwide landings in either the American lobster or Jonah crab fisheries to conduct additional sampling trips.

Addendum IV (March 2022)

Draft Addendum IV implements electronic tracking requirements for federally-permitted vessels in the American lobster and Jonah crab vessels with commercial trap gear area permits for LCMA's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and Outer Cape Cod. Specified permit holders would be required to install an approved electronic vessel tracking device to their vessels prior to beginning a fishing trip to collect and transmit spatial data.

Annual Events

- Compliance reports are due August 1
- PRT reviews compliance and prepares FMP Review prior to the next meeting