



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: American Lobster Management Board

FROM: American Lobster Advisory Panel

DATE: January 20, 2026

SUBJECT: Advisory Panel Input on 2025 Benchmark Stock Assessment

The American Lobster Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on January 12, 2026 to review the 2025 Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report and provide input to the Management Board on the assessment findings and state of the fishery. Tracy Pugh, Technical Committee Chair, summarized the 2025 Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report for the AP.

Advisory Panel Attendance: Lanny Dellinger (RI), Joe Fiorentino (NJ), Sonny Gwin (MD), Eric Lorentzen (MA), Grant Moore (MA), Jeff Putnam (ME), Sooky Sawyer (MA), John Whittaker (CT)

Staff: Caitlin Starks, Jeff Kipp, Tracy Pugh (TC Chair)

Other Attendees: Renee Zobel, David Borden, Raymond Kane, Josh Carloni, Nick Hagler, Heidi Henninger, Kevin Guiney, Frank Macalik

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The AP discussed and asked questions about the assessment results, data, and methods. The comments provided by the AP are summarized below. These do not reflect consensus agreements, but rather individual perspectives.

Lanny Dellinger (NY) commented that he sees some issues with the assessment with regard to the Southern New England (SNE) stock. He noted that predator species (e.g., scup, black sea bass) are well above their management targets in the region and the large numbers of predators are doing damage to the lobster stock. He stated that there are no federal estimates for striped bass in the offshore area, and it seems like there are high numbers. He also noted that there have been significant losses of habitat for lobster production in major estuaries due to nitrogen reduction, and the decline of kelp and rockweed has lowered lobster productivity. Policies for habitat management and predator fishery management are in conflict with a healthy lobster resource. For these reasons it does not make sense to restrict the lobster fishery in SNE. Tracy Pugh noted that the assessment team tried to account for predation through using different natural mortality rates in the assessment model. Lanny Dellinger noted it could be useful for the Habitat Committee to consider these issues.

Sonny Gwin (MD) commented that the lobster effort below the Delaware Bay is really only from three fishermen. Any more regulations would mean nothing is left for those fishermen. He noted that he has

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been fishing off of Ocean City for over 30 years and is seeing more small lobsters now than ever. Divers down there are also seeing an abundance of lobsters.

John Whittaker (CT) stated that there is hardly any effort in Area 6. He wonders if making cuts to the fishery would make any difference because effort is so low. He also commented that he thinks fishing bait is providing food for the remaining lobsters in the area, and removing bait by cutting fisheries could negatively impact the population.

Grant Moore noted that since the assessment found that overfishing is not occurring in SNE, the recommendation to further reduce fishing mortality with additional measures for that stock would be hard for the industry to swallow. He also commented that unless enforcement improves, additional regulations will not be successful. He stated that the lobster management plan is great, and that a lot of effort could be removed if the current regulations were fully enforced.

With regard to the GOM/GBK stock, Jeff Putnam asked for clarification on the recruit-dependency indicators and why high recruit-dependency would be negative for the fishery. Tracy Pugh explained that high recruit-dependency means the fishery is vulnerable to decreases in settlement; if settlement and recruitment decline, landings, which are dependent on recruits, will be depressed.

Jeff Putnam also noted that it is important to recognize regional differences within the stocks when thinking about management. He said some areas are quite stable and the future looks healthy, whereas other areas seem to have issues. In contrast to the southern areas of Maine, the areas where he fishes are seeing fewer predators and colder water temperatures, which are encouraging. So it needs to be considered how regulations may have different effects in different areas. In Maine they have also lost fishermen through the entry/exit ratios with much fewer licenses than there used to be, and trips may be down as well.

Eric Lorentzen commented that consideration of regulations should be tabled until the new right whale rules come out in a few years to see how those interact with conservation efforts for the lobster stock. If there are more closed areas to the lobster fishery for the whales that will serve as lobster conservation too.

Grant Moore concluded the meeting by stating that he is looking to step down as Chair and asked the advisors present to consider taking on the role.