Atlantic States Marine Fisheries COMMISSION

Technical Committee Report

May 4, 2026

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries COMMISSION

Background – impacts of gauge change

- Task: "to estimate the benefits to the GOM/GBK fishery that would have resulted from implementing the minimum gauge size increases under Addendum XXVII that were ultimately repealed."
- Year 1: Increase minimum gauge size from 3 ¼" (82.55mm) to 3 5/16" (84.14mm) in LCMA 1
- Year 3: Increase minimum gauge size from 3 5/16" (84.14mm) to 3 ⅜" (85.73mm) in LCMA 1
- Year 4: Increase vent sizes in LCMA 1:
  - From 1-15/16" x 5-3/4" to 2" X 5 ¾" rectangular vents
  - From 2 7/16" to 2 ⅝" circular vents
- Year 5: Decrease maximum gauge size from 6 ¾" to 6 ½" in LCMA 3 and Outer Cape Cod

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Approach

- Challenge: originally scheduled implementation would have had 1st gauge change in 2024, 2nd in 2026…
  - Uncertain data from terminal year of assessment (2024)
  - Significant uncertainty in projection of recruitment
- Decision: work with an earlier implementation schedule so we had good data to work with
  - Recruitment and fishing mortality estimates from the 2025 assessment
- Focus: short-term estimate of impacts of management measures
  - We do not attempt to model relationship between eggs/settlers and lobsters impacted by the changes

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Approach - Simulation

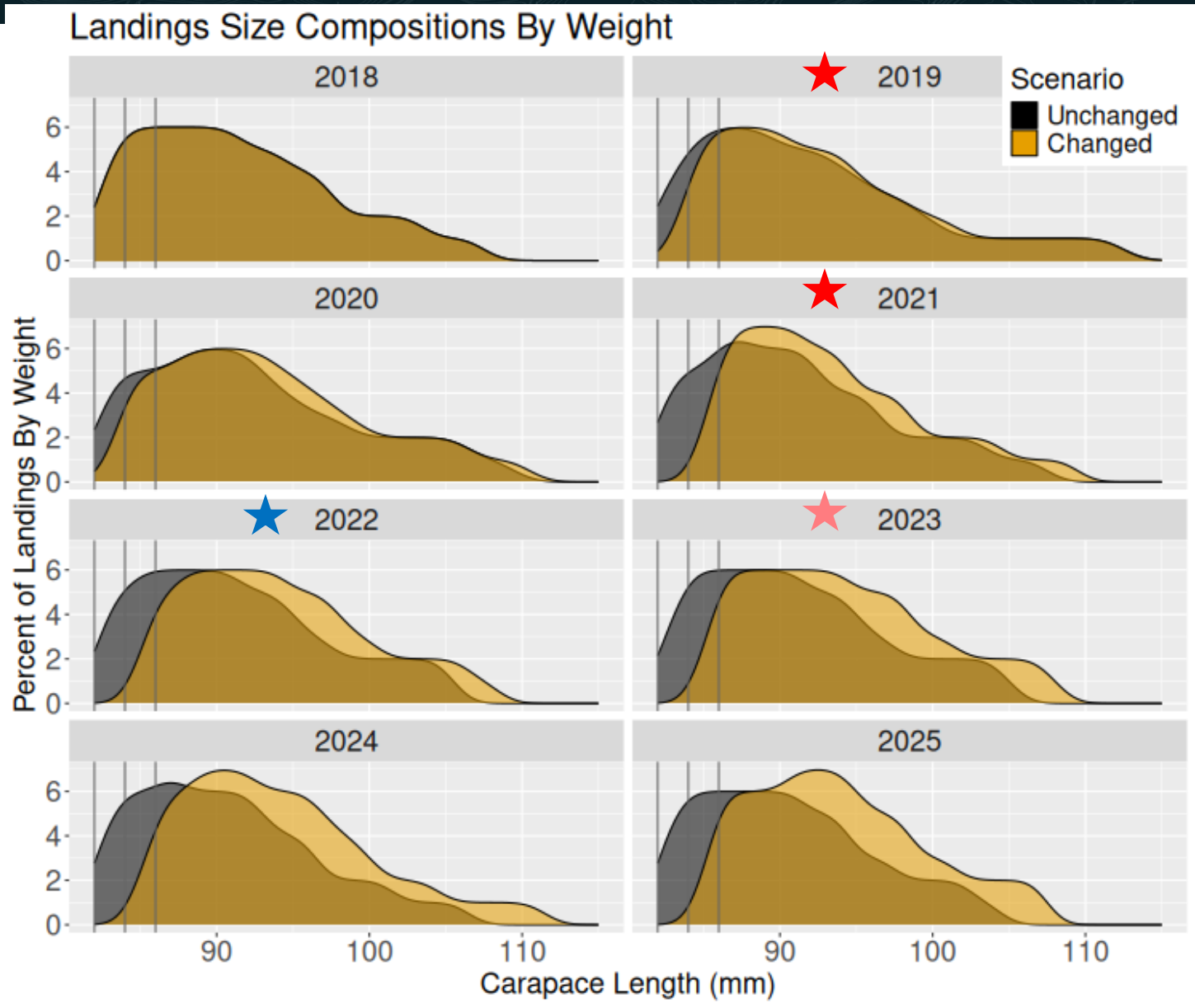
- Implementation schedule used:
  - Year 1 minimum gauge increase: 2019
  - Year 3 minimum gauge increase: 2021
  - Year 4 vent size increase: 2022
  - Year 5 maximum gauge decrease: 2023
- Started with model-estimated size structure for Q1 in 2018
  - Had to modify model size bins from 5 mm to 1 mm to capture small changes in gauge size
- Adjusted commercial selectivities to capture the changes in gauge and vent size
- For 2018 – 2023 recruitment and fishing mortality from assessment
  - For recruitment through 2030 - equivalent of the “smoothed trend” developed for stock assessment projections
  - For fishing mortality 2024-2030 = average quarterly F (1982-2023)

Approach - Simulation

- 2 scenarios:
  - “Unchanged” – no changes to gauge or vent sizes
  - “Changed” – changes implemented starting in 2019
- Most of the results are focused on 2018 – 2023
  - What would catch composition look like if changes had occurred?
- Relative change in catch (numbers, weight) through 2030
- Estimate of exploitation from 2018 – 2030
- MEDMR analysis based on sea sampling data
  - 1st year decline in landings by quarter and ME Zone

Results – landings in weight

- Each year of change landings lose the smallest, previously legal-sized lobsters
- Weight of landings increase as they shift to larger sizes compared to Unchanged
- Estimated catch stabilizes after year 4



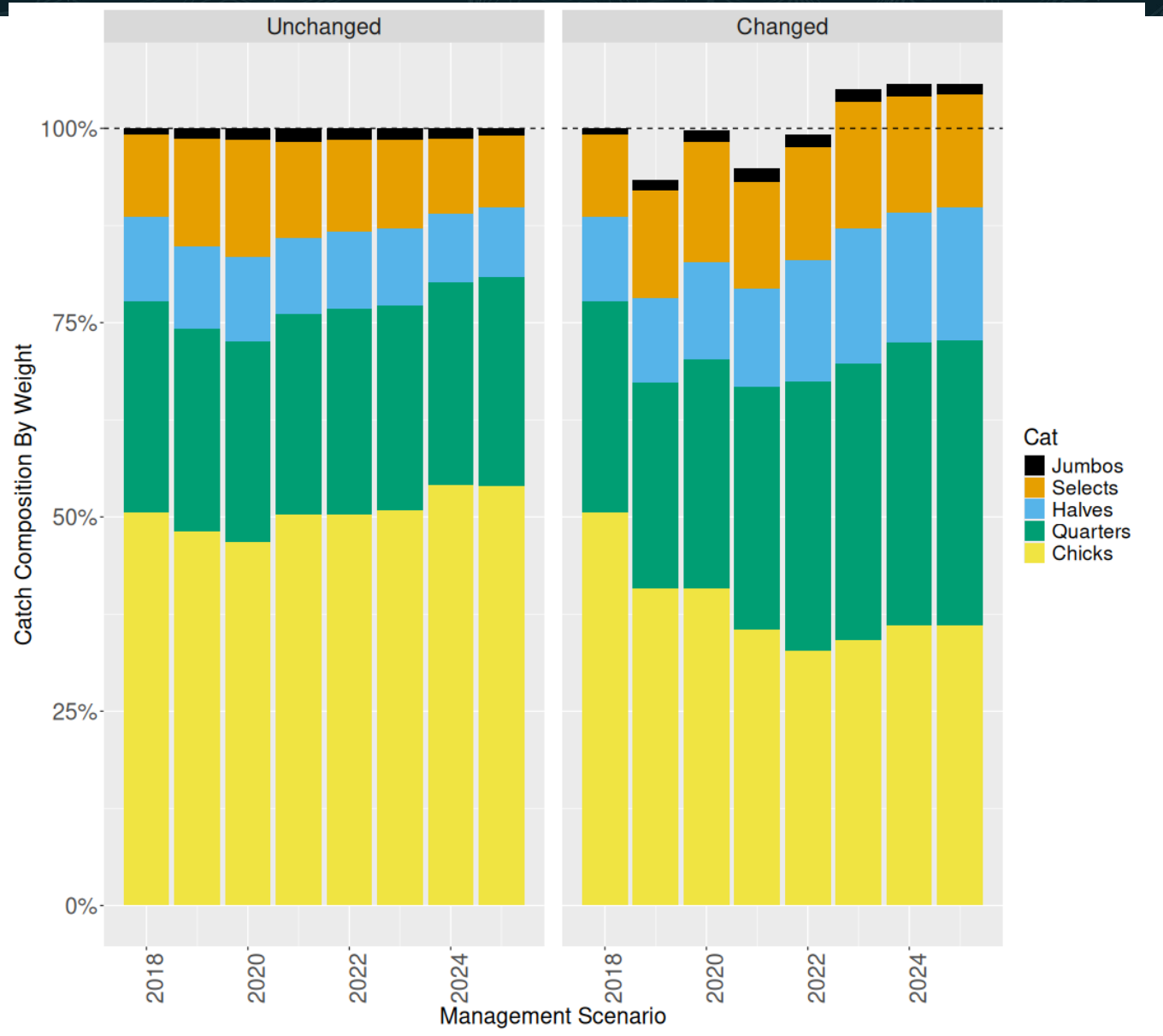
Results – relative to unchanged

- Each year of change catch decreases in both numbers and weight relative to unchanged
- Recoup in alternate years
  - More in weight than numbers
- After the vent change year (Y4), increase then stabilization
  - ~4-5% fewer in numbers
  - ~6% higher in weight

Year	Difference_in_Number	Difference_in_Weight	
2018	0.0%	0.0%	
2019	−9.4%	−6.6%	Increase gauge
2020	−3.4%	−0.2%	
2021	−11.6%	−5.1%	Increase gauge
2022	−9.2%	−0.8%	Increase vent size
2023	−4.7%	5.1%	Decrease max (3, OCC)
2024	−4.7%	5.7%	
2025	−4.8%	5.7%	
2026	−4.2%	6.4%	
2027	−3.9%	6.7%	
2028	−4.1%	6.5%	
2029	−4.3%	6.3%	
2030	−4.3%	6.3%	

Results – market categories

- Impact to market categories mostly in the Chicks, Quarters, and Halves
  - Percent of landings in Chicks category decreases from ~50% to ~33%
  - Quarters increases from ~27% to ~35%
  - Halves increases from ~11% to ~16%
  - Selects increases slightly, jumbos mostly unchanged



Results – Reference abundance & SSB

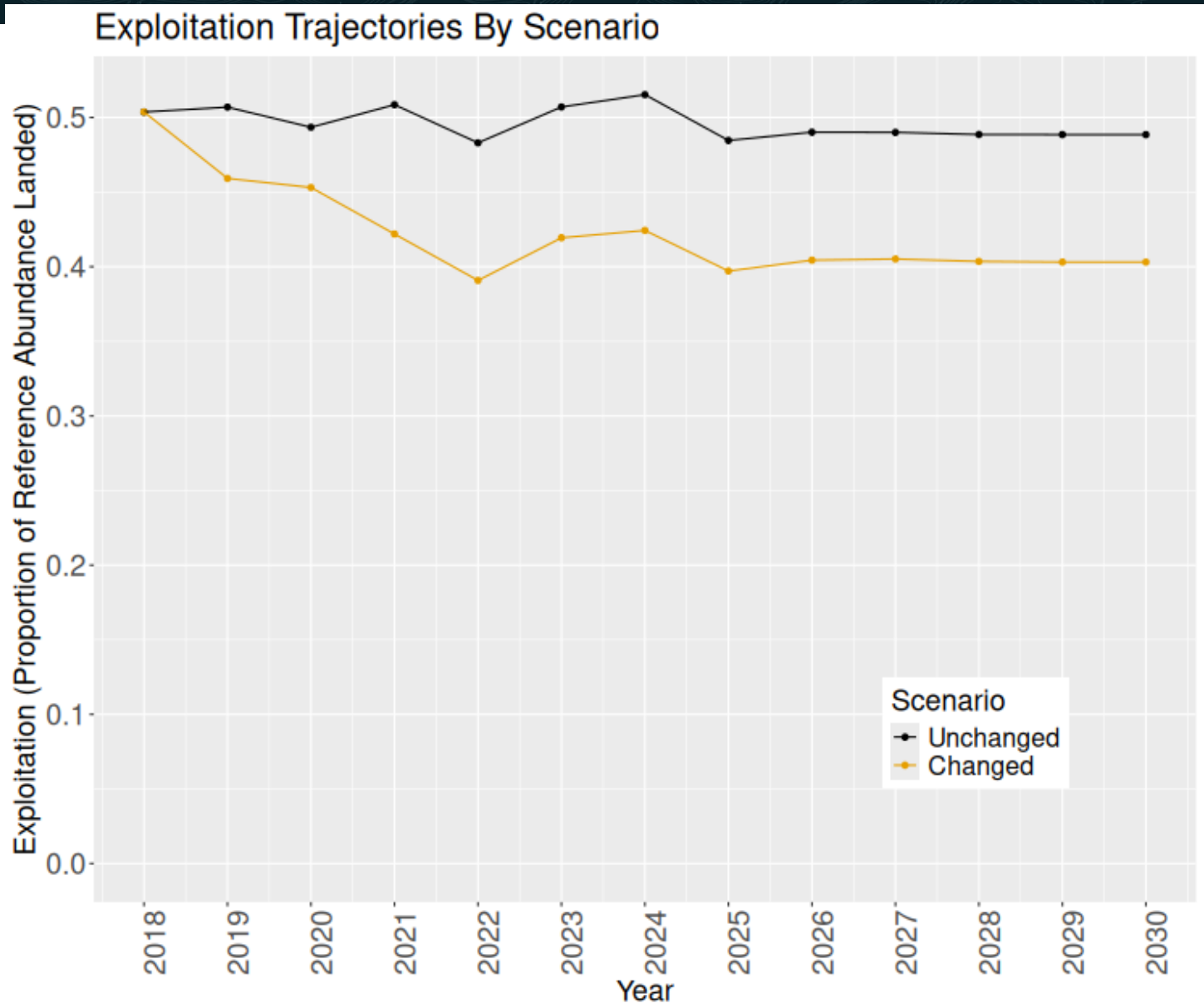
- Protecting smaller individuals adds them to Reference abundance
- Compared to the Unchanged scenario, implementation resulted in increases to
  - Reference N ~16%
  - SSB ~ 46%
- Ref N impacted in sizes from minimum legal size and ~90 mm
- SSB impacted in broader range of sizes up to ~ 120 mm
- Reminder – did not simulate a feedback to recruitment (no S-R relationship)

Year	Change_in_RefN
2018	0.0%
2019	0.0%
2020	5.2%
2021	6.5%
2022	12.3%
2023	15.3%
2024	15.7%
2025	16.2%
2026	16.1%
2027	16.2%
2028	16.1%
2029	15.9%
2030	15.9%

Year	Change_in_SSB
2018	0.0%
2019	0.5%
2020	8.7%
2021	15.6%
2022	27.7%
2023	37.2%
2024	42.3%
2025	47.3%
2026	47.0%
2027	46.5%
2028	46.2%
2029	45.9%
2030	45.8%

Results – Exploitation

- Remember Exploitation = landings/RefN
- Newly protected individuals are no longer landed, but remain in Reference abundance – results in decreased exploitation compared to Unchanged scenario
- Results of simulation suggest that implementation of the management changes would decrease exploitation below overfishing threshold



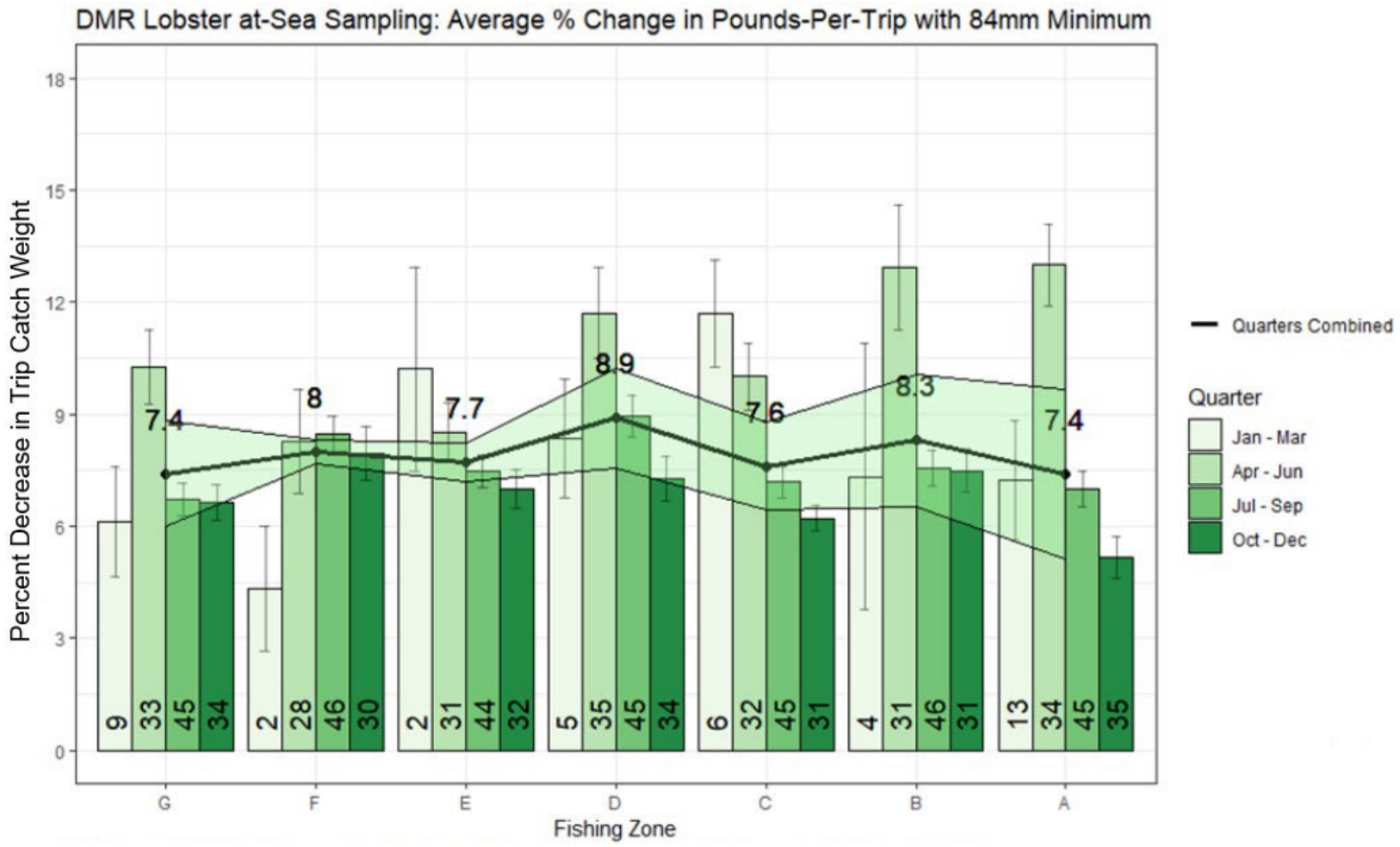
Results – comparative analyses

- 2021 analysis by TC
  - Several differences in parameters used (size resolution, growth, maturity, selectivities, recruitment)
  - Didn’t include escape vent aspect
- Eventual results were similar in directionality as current analysis
  - Decrease in catch by numbers
  - Increase in catch by weight
  - Scale differed slightly

Metric	2021	2026
Landings_Number	−3.6%	−4.3%
Landings_Weight	5.0%	6.3%
Spawning_Biomass	38.0%	46.0%
Exploitation	−14.4%	−17.5%

Results – ME DMR analysis

- DMR examined sea sampling data for the 1st gauge change
  - 83 mm to 84 mm
- Data from 2016-2021
- 1st year percent decrease in trip catch weight due to making 83 mm sublegal
- Impacts in 1st year varied by quarter & Zone
  - Ranged from 7.4% - 8.9% decrease by weight
- Similar, slightly higher impact estimated than simulation results for 1st year of change



Summary

- Simulation studies show that implementation of management changes ultimately resulted in increased Ref N and SSB compared to the Unchanged scenario
- Nearly all of the estimated impacts were driven by the increases in minimum legal size (not the decrease in max size)
  - Vast majority of the GOMGBK stock is within a size range below that impacted by the maximum size changes
- Impacts more pronounced in SSB than Ref N because at the sizes impacted by minimum legal size, proportion of females that are mature is rapidly increasing
  - Allowing many more mature females the chance to spawn prior to harvest
  - Mature females then gain additional protections by becoming egg-bearing and being v-notched
- Ultimately, landings numbers decrease, but weight increases realtive to status quo
  - Catch decreases in implementation years, but once changes have completed, protected lobsters grow into the larger harvestable range
  - Market category chicks are replaced by quarters and halves
- Exploitation estimated to decline below overfishing threshold


Questions?

Background – LCMA 5 seasonal closure

Current

- No lobster retention Feb 1 – Mar 31
- 2 week grace period Feb 1 – Feb 14 to remove all traps
- 1 week period Mar 24 – 31 to set traps
  - Traps cannot be re-hauled until April 1

Proposed

- No lobster retention Jan 16 – Mar 15
- Allow traps to be set and re-hauled starting Mar 9
  - 15 days earlier
  - Target black sea bass
- Effectively shifts timing of lobster closure earlier by 2 weeks

TC evaluation

- No recent landings data for relevant time periods to conduct analysis
- Qualitative evaluation
  - TC concerned that shift in timing of closure could increase lobster exploitation
    - Catchability in March likely higher than January due to warming waters
    - Change in exploitation would likely be small
- Suggestion to Board
  - Because proposal is focused on increasing access to black sea bass
    - Board could modify timing of setting gear to accommodate request for BSB access starting Mar 9, allowing traps to be re-hauled for BSB harvest
    - Maintain current prohibition on lobster possession (Feb 1 – Mar 31)
    - TC expects negligible discard-related mortality to lobsters
      - Hard-shelled, not molting during the window for earlier BSB access
  - Accommodates request to access BSB while maintaining intended purpose of the seasonal closure to reduce lobster exploitation (Addend. XVII)


Questions?

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American Lobster
MSE Process Steering Committee Nominations

May 4, 2026

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Background

- Lobster Board reviewed 2025 Benchmark Stock Assessment in October 2025
  - Abundance of the GOM/GBK stock not depleted, but declined 34% from time series highs of the 2020 assessment
- Board tasked TC with updating guidance on process for initiating a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for the GOM/GBK stock
  - TC provided guidance at the 2026 Winter Meeting

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TC Guidance on MSE Process

- TC Recommended:
  1. Forming a Steering Committee (SC) to scope and coordinate all parts of an MSE process, including a process to **elicit management objectives from a variety of stakeholders as a first step.**
     - ~12 SC members, including Board, TC, Commission staff, CESS, industry, and members of the Commission's ASC or MSC with past experience in MSE.

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TC Guidance on MSE Process

- TC Recommended:
  2. Initiation of a formal process to **develop management goals and objectives** for the future of the GOMGBK lobster fisheries
     - SC would develop design and scale of process
     - Likely include a series of meetings at local (e.g., state management zones and/or LCMAs) and regional stock wide scales

Steering Committee Nominations

NAME	ROLE	NAME	ROLE
Carl Wilson	Lobster Board – ME	John Drouin	ME (Zone A)
Renee Zobel	Lobster Board – NH	Richard Howland	ME (Zones B, C, D)
Jason McNamee	Lobster Board – RI	John Jordan Jr.	ME (Zones E, F, G)
Bob Glenn	Lobster Board – MA	Michael Flanigan	NH (Inshore)
Kathleen Reardon	TC– ME	Beth Casoni	MA (MLA)
Tracy Pugh	TC – MA	Brendan Adams	MA (Outer Cape)
Burton Shank	TC – NMFS	Hank Soule	Offshore (AOLA)
Todd Guilfoos	CESS	Jeff Kipp	ASMFC Staff
		Caitlin Starks	ASMFC Staff

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Proposed SC Timeline

- *Steering Committee nominations approved by Board at May meeting*
- ***Mid-June*** meeting on existing management objectives
- ***July:*** Meeting to discuss management objectives process (stakeholders, meeting details)
- ***September***: Meeting to discuss management objectives process (cost estimates, final report)
- *Management objectives process report delivered to Board at Annual meeting****

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Board Action

- Consider approval of Steering Committee nominations

- Provide guidance on proposed timeline

Questions?

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Outstanding Management Changes

May 4, 2026

Background

- 2026 Winter Meeting: request from Board to review recommendations for management changes at the next meeting
  - LCMT recommendations

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Management Recommendations

- LCMA 2
  - Maintain maximum of two permits with 800 traps each, not ownership cap of 800 (Addendum XXI and XXII)
  - Ability to bank up to 800 traps
  - Allow individuals to transfer traps within an entity without transfer tax
- LCMA 3
  - Do not reduce active trap caps (i.e., reductions in Addendum XXI)
  - Do not reduce ownership caps (Addendum XXII)
- LCMA 5
  - Change in closure dates from February 1 to March 31 to January 16 to March 8 (no gear in the water)