

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION  
AMERICAN LOBSTER MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**The Westin Crystal City  
Arlington, Virginia  
Hybrid Meeting**

**February 3, 2026**

**Approved May 4, 2026**

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**INDEX OF MOTIONS**

1. **Approval of agenda** by consent (Page 1).
2. **Approval of Proceedings of October 2025** by consent (Page 1).
3. **Move to task the Technical Committee/Stock Assessment Subcommittee to develop and evaluate GOM/GBK candidate biological reference points that account for non-stationarity of environmental conditions/productivity. Report back to the Lobster Management Board in advance of the Fall/Annual 2027 meeting, and annually before the next stock assessment** (Page 11). Motion by Steve Train; second by Jay McNamee. Motion passed by unanimous consent (Page 15).
4. **Move to form a Steering Committee (SC) to**
  1. **Review existing management objectives, as outlined in Amendment #3 and subsequent addenda, relative to the current GOMGBK stock status, and social/economic conditions facing the fishery today.**
  2. **Develop a process that would clearly identify new management objectives (across all stakeholders), to better understand socioeconomic status and concerns, and to identify potential management tools.**

**Representation on the SC shall follow recommendations outlined in the January 20, 2026 Technical Committee memo. The SC will recommend a process for both tasks for the August 2026 Lobster Management Board** (Page 17). Motion by Carl Wilson; second by Jay McNamee. Motion passes by unanimous consent (Page 20).
5. **Move to approve the nomination to the American Lobster Advisory Panel for Joe Florentino, a recreational diver from Pennsylvania, representing New Jersey** (Page 23). Motion by Joe Cimino; second by Dennis Abbott. Motion passes by unanimous consent. (Page 23).
6. **Move to adjourn** by consent (Page 25).

**ATTENDANCE**

**Board Members**

Carl Wilson, ME (AA)	Bill Hyatt, CT (GA)
Steve Train, ME (GA)	Rep. Joseph Gresko, CT (LA)
Rep. Allison Hepler, ME (LA)	John Maniscalco, NY, proxy for M. Gary (AA)
Renee Zobel, NH (AA)	Emerson Hasbrouck, NY (GA)
Doug Grout, NH (GA)	Joe Cimino, NJ (AA)
Dennis Abbott, NH, proxy for Sen. Watters (LA)	Adam Nowalsky, NJ, proxy for Sen. Gopal (LA)
Bob Glenn, MA, proxy for D. McKiernan (AA)	John Clark, DE (AA)
Ray Kane, MA (GA)	Roy Miller, DE (GA)
Jason McNamee, RI (AA)	Craig Pugh, DE, proxy for Rep. Carson (LA)
David Borden, RI (GA)	Michael Luisi, MD, proxy for K. Charbonneau (AA)
Eric Reid, RI, proxy for Sen. Sosnowski (LA)	Ethan Simpson, VA, proxy for J. Grist (Acting AA)
Matthew Gates, CT (AA)	Allison Murphy, NMFS

**(AA = Administrative Appointee; GA = Governor Appointee; LA = Legislative Appointee)**

**Ex-Officio Members**

Corinne Truesdale, Technical Committee Chair	Rob Beal, Law Enforcement Committee Rep.
Tracy Pugh, Technical Committee Chair	

**Staff**

Bob Beal	Caitlin Starks	Chelsea Tuohy
Toni Kerns	Tracey Bauer	Katie Drew
Tina Berger	James Boyle	Jeff Kipp
Madeline Musante	Emilie Franke	Samara Nehemiah

The American Lobster Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Jefferson Ballroom of the Westin Crystal City Hotel, Arlington, Virginia, via hybrid meeting, in-person and webinar; Tuesday, February 3, 2026, and was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chair Renee Zobel.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

CHAIR RENEE ZOBEL: We're going to get started. Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Arlington. I feel like I always have the opportunity to welcome everybody to whatever the meeting is. I typically end up chairing the first Board meeting. I'm going to go first to Toni Kerns; who is going to give us an update of those who are attending online today.

MS. TONI KERNS: Online we have Steve Train and Emerson Hasbrouck for Commissioners. If there is anybody else online, I apologize. I am just not aware of you. Then I just wanted to introduce Bob Glenn is a new ongoing proxy for Dan McKiernan from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Ethan Simpson, I think this is maybe one of your first Board meetings from Virginia as an ongoing proxy.

CHAIR ZOBEL: The first thing I want to do this morning is we had a tragedy up in New England last week, and so in recognition of the 7 individuals who lost their lives out on the ocean, now this is a dangerous job and it's a reminder for us to take our job seriously in the regulatory aspect of things. Go ahead, Eric.

MR. ERIC REID: If you don't mind, Madam Chair, you can add Tommy Williams, Jr. from Stonington, Connecticut to that unfortunate tribute. Thank you.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Thank you, Eric. I would like to have a moment of silence for the 8 individuals who lost their lives this past week or so on the ocean.

(Where upon a moment of silence was observed)

Thank you, our hearts are with the Gloucester fishing community and the Connecticut fishing community as well.

### **APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS**

CHAIR RENEE ZOBEL: The first item on our agenda is Approval of the Proceedings from the annual meeting. Do I see any changes that need to happen to the proceedings? Okay, seeing none; is there any objection to approval of the proceedings from the annual meeting? Seeing no objection, they are approved by consent.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Apologies, I just did those in reverse. The agenda now that we have in front of us. I know of one item for Other Business that has been brought up. Are there any other items to come before the Board today that need to be added to the agenda? Caitlin.

MS. CAITLIN STARKS: John Clark from Delaware made a request to discuss the LCMA 5 closure issue for lobsters under Other Business.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Okay, other than that are there any other changes that need to happen to the agenda today? Seeing none; our agenda is approved by consent.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

CHAIR ZOBEL: The next item up is public comment for items that are not on the agenda. Do we have any members of the public who would like to comment on items that are not on the agenda today? Seeing none online or in the room, we are moving right along.

### **CONSIDER ANNUAL DATA UPDATES**

CHAIR ZOBEL: Next item is to Consider Annual Data Updates and for that I'm going to turn it over to Tracy Pugh; who is online with us today.

MS. TRACY PUGH: Are we going to do Jonah crab first or Lobster first?

CHAIR ZOBEL: They are listed Jonah crab first, so apologies, Tracy, let's go to Corinne Truesdale online, she's going to give us a presentation on Jonah crab.

**JONAH CRAB OFFSHORE SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND INDICATORS**

MS. CORRINE TRUESDALE: Good morning, everyone, just giving an annual TC report update for Jonah crab. I'll try to keep this brief, I know we have a lot to get through. I'll go through a brief management history for Jonah crab, along with a stock assessment overview from our assessment in 2023, and then get right into the Annual Indicator Update, where we have indicators, we presented last time updated through 2024 or with a couple of additional ones, and then we'll end with the Technical Committee's recommendations from doing this update in 2026.

The fishery management plan for Jonah crab published in 2015, and this is the first known for the species; limits participation in the Jonah crab fishery to those who already possess a lobster fishing permit or can prove participation in the Jonah crab targeted fishery as of control date in June 2015. It established a 4.75-inch minimum size carapace width with no tolerance, with a prohibition on retention of egg-bearing females. In that FMP they also had a 50 whole crab recreational limit.

Then we've had a series of Addenda since then. Addendum I establishing a 1,000-crab bycatch limit for non-trap gear and non-lobster trap gear. Addendum II establishing a coast wide standard for claw harvest and the definition of bycatch, and then Addenda III and IV are both addenda for the Lobster Management Plan as well, improving harvester reporting and data collection for those fisheries, and then with Addendum IV adding vessel tracking requirement.

The first assessment for Jonah crab was published in October 2023. Within this

assessment 4 stocks were established for Jonah crab, and these are based mainly on the way that the fishery operates within those different areas. We have offshore Gulf of Maine, inshore Gulf of Maine, offshore Southern New England and inshore Southern New England, with the majority of the landings, more than 75% coming from offshore Southern New England stock area historically.

From that assessment it was determined that 2022 abundance for Jonah crab was above historical lows for the Gulf of Maine and offshore Southern New England and status was unknown for the inshore Southern New England stock, and that was largely due to data limitations that we had there. However, fishing mortality rates were still unknown at the end of the assessment. There wasn't able to be determined a linkage between fishery harvest and the status of the stock, again, due to the limitations that we have with the data sources there.

Again, stock status overall is relatively uncertain for Jonah crab, and we'll get into some of those limitations with the updates that we have. In 2024, just following the assessment, the TC recommended annual updates of offshore Southern New England indicators from the assessment, plus a few additional indicators to be reviewed in upcoming assessments, and some of those to be automatically included.

Those were some of them reviewed during the assessment process. From this, which is the second annual indicator update for Jonah crab, the TC met on January 8, 2026 to review indicators and to review tasks that we were given this year. Included in this update we'll have fishery independent abundance indicators, which are only available every other year.

This will be the first update since the assessment where we are reviewing the fishery independent indicators, namely the NOAA Seasonal Trawl Survey. The TC also recommended at the last update to revisit the commercial fisheries research foundation ventless trap sampling as a potential indicator following that first annual update.

We reviewed that this year and will be presenting from that in this update. Getting right into our indices, so for our fishery independent indices, focusing on the NOAA Fisheries Seasonal Bottom Trawl Survey, we're looking at three different size sex classes here. We have updated indices through 2024, with spring on the left and fall on the right.

Here we have Jonah crab recruits. These are male crabs between 90 and 119 millimeters, so those are individuals that would be molting into the commercial fishery at their next close event. Updated through 2024 as I indicated, but I wanted to mention too that we had a data review and there were some corrections that were made to historical data for these trawl survey indices, and I can get into those as needed.

But this did update some of the historical time series. The only impact that has had in terms of historical status of the stock is with these recruit indices for spring. For all of these plots you will see in the red asterisks the most recent three-year average, and the black asterisk would be the status at the end of the last assessment in 2021, that was the terminal year that was reviewed.

We can see in this plot on the left that the status for 2021 changed from a neutral to a positive status for that 2021-time status. I will also note that vessel calibration factors are not available for Jonah crab, so we see a vessel change from the Albatross to the Bigelow in 2009, and we don't have correction factors available there.

That needs to be taken into account when interpreting these indices. One other thing that I want to mention too, just to call your attention to the fact that these indices are really low in the amount, so the average catch-per-tow of Jonah crab is highly variable and very low across the board for this trawl time series. Again, for these recruits you can see it went from a positive to neutral status on the left for the

spring, and then for the fall remained at a positive status from the assessment time period to this update. We'll go to the next slide where we have exploitable Jonah crabs, these are males who are above the legal minimum size for harvest. We remained in the same status for the spring on the left and the fall on the right at neutral and positive respectively.

Here with this size class, you can see the greatest difference, and this is where we might be seeing those vessel factors come into play, where you can see especially for the fall that the catch is much higher with the Bigelow than it was for the Albatross, so taking that into account when interpreting these.

Going to the next slide we have spawning females, so those are females above the size at maturity. We remain neutral for both the spring and the fall there. Moving right along to trip indicators will be trips landed in Southern New England for the offshore Southern New England stocks specifically, so this is all trips across all states that we're landing from that southern area.

The same thing with the asterisk in the red and the black, so the most recent three-year average would be in red. You can see we've remained in the negative status for trips overall on the left landing Jonah crab, a quantity of Jonah crab from that stock area. Then on the right we have the proportion of trap fits, so those trips that are using trap gear to target crustaceans that were landing any quantity of Jonah crab.

There we have gone from a positive to a neutral status. You can see we had a high time series high until the proportions of trips landing Jonah crab in 2020 and then the decline since then. The overall trips that are landing Jonah crab and the proportion of trap trips that are landing Jonah crab has declined over time.

Moving on to the next slide we have the trips landing Jonah crab for offshore Southern New England from Massachusetts specifically, and noting that Massachusetts lands the most Jonah crab from

that offshore Southern New England stock. This is nearing what we see for the stock overall, where the number of trips landing Jonah crab has really declined, to time series low in these most recent years' time series lows.

Focusing here on the number of permits landing Jonah crab, so these are permits that landed any quantity of Jonah crab in a given year for the offshore Southern New England stock. We have a number of permits on the left, and then the proportion of permits, and these will be lobster fishing permits, but are landing Jonah crab on the right.

Moving from a neutral to a negative status with a number of permits overall that they are landing Jonah crab, and you can see a decline, a concurrent decline in the proportion of permits that are landing Jonah crab. We know that we've had a reduction in the trap fishery overall, but it seems that the proportion of permits that are landing Jonah crab has also experienced a decline in the most recent years.

Looking at the landings of Jonah crab by state across all stocks. We're not able to assign the landings to stock areas outside of the assessment period. It's really time intensive to break those down according to stock. But if we look at the landings by state, Massachusetts and Rhode Island in the orange and the blue are going to comprise most of the landings for the offshore Southern New England stock. You can see we had time series high in 2018 in the offshore Southern New England stock, and the landings overall declined generally since then. I will point out though, it's notable to see that Maine has had a really drastic increase, relatively speaking, in the landings of Jonah crab, where there has been a doubling, so 100% increase in the average landings since the end of the assessment period. We have a couple of CPUE indicators for the stock. This first one we provided at the last update. This is Rhode Island catch per trip for a subset of highliner vessels.

These are vessels that are targeting Jonah crab and bringing in tens of thousands of pounds of them per trip generally. These are vessels that have been consistently targeting Jonah crab in the offshore fleet over the entire time series. Looking at the number of pounds landed per trip for Jonah crab, we can see there has been an increase in the most recent year to a time series high in 2024.

But at the same time, we've had a decline in the number of trips taken. Looking at some of the indicators that we have for that Rhode Island fleet, we also saw calculated catch per fishing day decrease, so the number of days they are at sea, taking the catch dividing it by the number of days at sea shows a decrease.

In conversations with some of the fleet members we see that there are market factors at play there, where the demand for Jonah crab has gone down. The number they say it can land has been limited, so there are decisions that they are making that do impact some of the indicators that we see there that are related to the fishery.

We have one more CPUE indicator, and this is that CFRF ventless trap CPUE time series that we mentioned before. This is a research fleet that the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation has, where fishers are deploying ventless traps within their own gear and then sampling the Jonah crabs and lobsters from within those traps.

This was reviewed during the assessment, but it was too short of a time series with limited sampling to be incorporated as an indicator at that point. But it was recommended that this be reviewed in future years as more data were available as the methods were modified. After reviewing this indicator in 2025, it was determined that we should include this in this year's annual update and potentially future ones.

We added this with data through 2024, and this has been standardized, so this is a standardized index using generalized additive models that account for depth and time of year. This is your index from 2015 to 2024. You can see lower values in more

recent years. We do note, and the CFRF wanted to emphasize this, that this sampling program was not intended to measure abundance.

It's intended to show the presence of sublegal lobsters and crab in an area and get an idea of length frequencies. There are some fisher behavior variables here, where fishermen can decide when to record sampling sessions and may decide not to record a session. Target species is not identified during these sessions, which may impact the catch within the trap, but that will be recorded moving forward so we have that information available. But really just emphasizing that there are some caveats in the interpretation of this index because of the intention in collecting these data. We have one more indicator related to price. When we looked at price of lobster and Jonah crab over the time series from 2010 to 2024. Here we added an adjusted for inflation time series for this species. At the top you have the nominal price per pound for American lobster on the left, Jonah crab on the right.

Then at the bottom you have both of those time series adjusted for inflation. You have that by state and for the coastwide mean. For lobster, you can see we had a peak in 2021 followed by a return to time series mean adjusted level, so if you're looking at the adjusted time series you are back to what we've seen historically, in terms of lobster price per pound, with a slow increase over time if we're looking at the nominal values.

For Jonah crab there was a time series high in 2022 in price, where we had an increase in landings to some degree. But we've had a steady decrease in the price since in both the nominal and the adjusted time series. I'll note as well that in conversations with industry members, kind of talking about what we've seen in fishery dependent indicators that the price plays into this and they have noted that that time series high in price has actually induced a decrease in demand for Jonah crab.

There has been some fisher behavior related to the price, and this relates to the global markets as well, where the price of Jonah crab being high has actually had a negative impact in terms of demand that we have shared. Moving right into conclusions and recommendations.

The conclusions from this annual update were that stock conditions are similar to those that we saw at the end of the assessment period in 2023, where the updated abundance indicators don't point to a change in status for Jonah crab. Again, data limitations preclude recommendation for management intervention, as we've seen we have a highly variable abundance index and then we have fishery dependent indicators that are related to market factors, which continue to influence fishing effort and harvest levels.

Our recommendations for this update are to include that CFRF ventless trap CPUE as an indicator in future updates. Again, to interpret those with caution due to those variables I discussed, and the survey's purpose not being to measure abundance of Jonah crab or lobster.

Another recommendation is to compare wind farm survey data that we have available in that offshore Southern New England area, and see if we can leverage those to what the Jonah crab abundance, where the fishery is occurring, because many of those offshore wind areas are closer to the center of biomass than what we have for currently available ventless trap surveys.

The third recommendation is to identify a process to track dealer or processor-imposed trip limits, for example maybe through an interview study. We know that there are factors in play that are influencing whether or not folks go out to fish Jonah crab, the number of trips they have per year is influenced by the market.

Having some sort of systematic way to understand what's happening year to year in the fishery and in the market would potentially help with the interpretation of the indicators that we have. Then finally, we support the development of a camera-

based survey for measuring Jonah crab abundance. This was a recommendation that was put forth in the assessment, and it remains a high recommendation based on the potential for that type of survey to get an idea of abundance in the offshore Southern New England area where we have these uncertain trawl indices. That concludes my presentation, I am happy to take any questions if there are any.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Thank you, Corinne, we'll go to the Board for any questions. With no questions from the Board, are there any member of the public that have questions for Corinne on Jonah crab? Seeing none; Corinne, thank you for your time.

**AMERICAN LOBSTER INDICATORS AND RECRUIT INDEX FOR GULF OF MAINE/GEORGES BANK (GOM/GBK) STOCK**

CHAIR ZOBEL: We will move on to Tracy to give us an annual update for lobster.

MS. PUGH: This is the data update that we have been providing to the Board, normally at the October meeting during the non-assessment years, but obviously this 2025 was the stock assessment presentation. The Board did request that we go ahead and update this anyways, to get the 2024 data in.

The stock assessments terminal year was 2023. This data update updates indices through 2024. The purpose of this is really to just sort of keep an eye on some of the abundance indicators that we think are particularly relevant to monitoring information and provide this information to the Board in between stock assessments.

It's intended to be strictly informational. There is no management action or required action of any kind tied to these updates. The indices that we focus on here are the Young of Year Index, so this is the scuba-based survey that the states conduct, and this gives us a signal of abundance for newly settled juveniles.

We have a trawl survey recruit abundance, specifically looking at the 71-80 mm size range, with the idea that these animals are going to be the ones that will molt into the legal-size range in the next year. The trawl surveys are coming from both the states and the Northeast Fishery Science Center.

We also have a trawl survey encounter rate, which is essentially the proportion of tows that encountered at least one lobster. This provides us with information on how widely distributed the lobsters are. We have the ventless trap surveys, which are conducted by the states, and this is providing an abundance index for lobsters 53 mm and above, and we do look at this one sex-specific.

Then we have the formally known as the Addendum XXVII Trigger Index. We are now calling this the Combined Recruit Index. Again, it focuses on animals 71-80 mm. This is coming from the ventless trap surveys and just the state trawl surveys. This is for the Gulf of Maine sub stock only, and it's combining a fall average, a spring average for those trawl surveys, and then the ventless trap surveys all into a single index.

Again, the purpose of these is to look at trends, so we are looking specifically for changes over time. The status for these is determined based on the most recent five-year average compared to that time series. For this data update the current status is going to be based on values from 2020 through 2024. We are also going to in this presentation and in the document make a comparison to the 2025 assessment. We'll compare the current status to the previous status. As you can see in the table here, essentially because these are abundance indicators, low values are considered to be negative, and the color coding for this is that anything colored black is considered negative, and this is underneath the 25th percentile of the time series. Anything between the 25th and 75th percentile is neutral and that is going to be shaded gray.

Then anything above the 75th percentile is considered positive, and that is going to be colored in white. I'm going to take a minute just to orient

you to these graphs, there is sort of a lot going on, on these slides. The first thing you'll see is on the right is going to be the series of graphs. Generally speaking, from top to bottom these are going to read from north to south.

On these graphs you can see these are the annual values. If you see there is a horizontal dash line in each of these. That horizontal dash line is the 75th percentile. The solid horizontal line is the 25th percentile, and then there is a red shorter solid line. That short red solid line is the five-year mean status.

The tables, essentially what I've done is taken the tables from the document and chopped them in half. You can see the top is showing you which indices we're looking at, and then I took just the bottom of the tables for these slides. The blue boxes here are going to draw your eye to the previous mean, so the 2019 to 2023 status.

Then the updated status is the lower blue box. This is sort of the comparisons we'll be making. This is for the Gulf of Maine Young of Year Indices. What we're looking at here is we're seeing that there has been an improvement in the status in Stat Area 512, which is the second of the graphs down.

That has improved from a neutral to a positive status. The status for all of the other statistical areas with section sampling data remain neutral. This is the Trawl Survey recruits. On the graphs the Federal Science Center Survey is on the top, Maine/New Hampshire is in the middle, Massachusetts is on the bottom, spring is on the left, fall is on the right.

If you look at the status here, we see that the status for all of these remains unchanged since the previous update. The Maine/New Hampshire and the Massachusetts Trawl are essentially remaining neutral, while the others are remaining positive. The Gulf of Maine encounter rates, again this is the proportion of

tows that saw at least one lobster, same order in the graphs as the previous slide.

The status here we've seen a change for the Massachusetts spring survey that has declined from a neutral to a negative status. The others have remained unchanged since the assessment time series. These are the ventless trap survey indices. The top is Area 511, then 512, 513, and 514 on the bottom. Females on the left here and males are on the right.

What we see here, we do have a status for Stat Area 513 males has improved from neutral to a positive status. That box has gone from gray to white there. For Stat Area 512 and 514, these both remain negative. The other Stat areas and sexes remain neutral. We did have a note here that relatively speaking Area 513 seems to be a little bit more stable than the other areas. This is the combined recruit index, formally known as the Addendum XXVII Trigger Index. What we're looking at here in the upper left with that red box around it, that is the combined index. Those other three graphs, the spring trawl, the ventless and the fall trawl are what are combined to make that Combined Index. The values in the circles of these graphs are essentially just the value on the Y axis, and those represent the proportional change from the combined index peak, and that index peak was the three-year average for 2015 to 2017.

The index was standardized to set that 2015 to 2017 value at 1. Everything is sort of compared relative to that. What we have seen here in this combined index is that we've got a little bit of stabilization since we've seen these decline. The last few years have sort of leveled out; we're not seeing the steep decline anymore. We're hopeful about that.

The 2024 value, which is essentially the average of the years from 2022 to 2024 is 0.56, and that represents a 44% decline from that index peak. We have not applied the positive, neutral, negative status to this particular indicator, because we think that it is doing something a little bit different. It's

already got a description of a percent decline sort of baked into it.

We're switching to the Georges Bank sub-stock area here. For Georges Bank we only have the Northeast Fishery Science Center Trawl Survey to work with. The graphs here you'll see the Science Center, spring is on the left and fall is on the right. What we have for recruit abundance is we see the status has been unchanged since the assessment, so they are both remaining neutral.

We did note that there has been an increasing trend in the annual values, so if you look at the graphics in particular you can see a little bit of an increased trend over the last few years with 2024 values representing the highest value we've seen in more than a decade here. The encounter rates for the Georges Bank Count Survey are both remaining positive, so this remains unchanged since the assessment.

Again, we have seen this sort of upward tick in the last few years with the 2024 values representing time series high for both seasons. Now we're switching to Southern New England stock. This is the Southern New England Young of Year Indices. If you are really on the ball, you'll notice that there are fewer of these now than there have been in the past.

We have discontinued presenting the Eastern Long Island Sound Index. Essentially, they made some changes to the methodology of that survey and those changes that they made essentially make it not comparable to past years. The last update we had for that was in 2021, and at the time it was negative. But we are no longer updating that, so that is not shown in the presentation or the document.

What is shown here is the Massachusetts on the top and Rhode Island on the bottom. As you can see, from the graphs and from the tables status has remained unchanged since the assessment. Both of these values the status are

negative. These are the recruit indices for Southern New England from the Trawl Surveys.

The top is the Northeast Fishery Science Center Survey followed by Massachusetts, then Rhode Island then Connecticut. Again, spring on the left fall on the right. As you can see, unfortunately we've got a solid line of black in that table. The status has remained unchanged since the assessment. All of the inshore and the federal surveys here are all negative. In 2024 values were time series lows for four of these surveys. For the Trawl Survey Encounter Rates, so same surveys as in the previous slide. Status again has remained unchanged since the stock assessment.

All of the inshore and the Science Center Surveys are all negative, and for 2024 the values were time series lows for three of these surveys. For the ventless trap survey we have, again this is by sex. Area 538, which is Southern Massachusetts, and then Area 539 which is Rhode Island, female on the left male on the right.

The status for the Area 538 females has declined from neutral into negative. That is the only change in terms of the status that we've got here. The 539, we did note that there was a relatively large uptick with the 2024 value. But we do note that first of all, this survey really has only been occurring since the depleted conditions in this stock have occurred.

It's sort of lacking the context of that really long history and the decline and change in the stock. Then it also needs to just apply a little bit of caution, in terms of talking about, interannual variations with that 2024 uptick. It's a little bit hard to interpret that without that longer context of the stock's history here.

In summary, for Gulf of Maine sub-stock, we see the conditions are really very similar to those reported in the 2025 stock assessment. It is not necessarily surprising; this is just one more additional year of data from the assessment. We're really seeing only marginal changes in the status of a few of the survey indicators, two of which improved, those

were the 512 Young of Year and the 513 Ventless Trap Survey male indices.

Then we had one decline, which was the Massachusetts fall survey encounter rate. We did note that as we were going through these that many of the 2024 annual values in the Massachusetts Area 514 were negative this time around. For the Georges Bank sub-stock, conditions are unchanged from those reported in the 2025 assessment. For Southern New England conditions remained unchanged and all of them were unfortunately continued to be negative. That is all I have; I can take questions.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Thank you, Tracy, a lot of information there. I'll look to the Board for any questions for Tracy. Carl Wilson.

MR. CARL WILSON: Tracy, please extend my gratitude or my gratitude to yourself and to the TC for the work for pulling this work together and adding the combined index again. I feel that these annual updates are really helpful for bridging the gap between the assessment, and really helps the concept that the assessment shouldn't be a surprise. I just wanted to send my appreciation to the group that were reading these and their work is valued.

I did have a question regarding other indices that might be out there, and specifically around an oceanographic or environmental indices. This was a major theme within the assessment. Just wondering if you guys have thought if there is anything outside of just survey indices that could be updated on an annual basis.

MS. PUGH: We haven't really talked about adding any of the environmental indicators into this data update. I think that when we originally developed this data update process at the end of the 2020 assessment, the idea was to sort of get us indicators that gave a good handle on what to expect in the relatively near future. Obviously the young of year indicators, which of these is not like the others here.

We've got a significant lag between the young of year and where we would expect things coming into the landings. But with the others, the idea being that we're using them to have a look at what we might be expecting down the pipeline within a short time future. I think that there are a couple of indicators that we use in the stock assessment that we could probably include here.

But I think the interpretation is a little bit different from the purpose of this data update, at least as I understood it. I think that is something that we could consider and think about, and if the Board has some specific recommendations on things they would like to see, it just would be, we'll leave it at that. There are some possibilities, but I'm not sure interpretation-wise for the purpose of these updates, we would have to think about interpretation of whatever we added.

MR. WILSON: Just a question for the Chair. Is it something that we would need to do through a motion, some sort of environmental oceanographic indicators or just as the TC to consider and bring something forward?

CHAIR ZOBEL: Yes, a task for the TC would probably be the best way to handle that.

MR. WILSON: Okay, maybe some more conversations and then we can come back.

CHAIR ZOBEL: I have Steve Train next.

MR. STEPHEN TRAIN: Tracy, I appreciate all the work you do to get this stuff, and I know it's not just you. It is beyond a lot of my understanding of this, but I can read a graph. I think when it's going up and down it probably shows that the fishing effort is not as large a contributor as we think it is.

But when it's stable, I think a lot of times it shows that the management has figured something out and we've got the effort and balance. The problem I have when those graphs go stable is I very rarely see them if they are stable for very long work back up. They tend to start working back down.

That makes me nervous, to have too long a stable period that is well below the levels that we're used to. If I can add on to what Carl just said, I would like to move to task. I think somebody has the motion there on the computer, and I would like to make this motion for a tasking for you guys. If it can come up, I will be happy to read it.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Carl, go ahead.

MR. WILSON: Steve, do you think we can get to this motion in a few minutes? For making motions I would like to move to the idea of adding oceanographic or environmental indicators to the annual update before we get to the padding to the assessment, which you have.

MR. TRAIN: With approval of the Chair, I will wait on my motion.

CHAIR ZOBEL: So approved, anything else, Steve, before we continue on with comments and we'll come back.

MR. TRAIN: Just let me know when you're back to me, thank you.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Got it. Jason McNamee.

DR. JASON McNAMEE: Thanks so much, Tracy, a lot of information, appreciate all of that work. I find kind of tracking these indicators valuable as well, not so much in Southern New England, because it kind of looks the same year to year. But good to know that as well, it's important information.

Going back to Carl's suggestion. I just had a thought. I like the idea of pulling in some of these environmental indicators, and maybe I thought there might be an opportunity. This is not necessarily for you, Tracy. Sorry, I just wanted to thank you for the information. This is for the Board. Rather than tasking the TC, I was thinking about the state of the ecosystem

reports that NOAA does, where they are kind of collecting all of this information.

I think I know with respect to like federal species, in the Regional Council's they have like there is this opportunity to kind of meet with the state of the ecosystem folks and kind of help them configure indicators that would be valuable. Maybe rather than asking the TC to do that work we could ask the federal government to kind of help us by taking the stuff they are already doing and kind of customizing it a little bit for lobster.

They have a couple of different products; there is like the big report that they do which may be valuable. But then they do some smaller like stock specific versions as well. I'll just offer that as a suggestion. Maybe that conversation happens first, we see what information there is, what is relevant for lobster, and see if we can kind of tap into that part before tasking the TC to kind of repeat, what I think would be repeating stuff that is already going on.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Carl Wilson.

MR. WILSON: Jason, you might be in a better position to capture that in a motion.

CHAIR ZOBEL: I don't think we need a motion for that, if that is a direction the Board wants to take and have some conversation with NOAA Fisheries. It sounds like Jason is willing to have some of those discussions and it can be noted at the Board level as well. We don't need a motion for that; we can just move in that direction. Toni, go ahead.

MS. KERNS: Renee, I agree with that. I think one of the things that maybe we should think about is whether or not we want to ask NOAA to present to the Policy Board on sort of bigger picture aspect of the state of the ecosystem report and include some specific criteria or actions for lobster at that time, or we only want to get a presentation to the Lobster Board on some specific things.

Jason, I think if you and Tracy, like we could figure out a way to have a conversation with Joe over at

the Science Center, who I think is coordinating most of this work. We could figure that out from there. I'm not sure we would be able to impact the upcoming State of the Ecosystem Report, because that is well underway. We do a lot of this coordination work with the core team and having a better understanding of what is going on in those reports.

I know that they will be finished and presented to the New England SSC at the end of March. Then the core team will get it in April. I think this could impact the following cycle. If there is value for other stuff that this Commission wants to see then I would think it would be the Policy Board, and we could get some specific lobster stuff within that.

CHAIR ZOBEL: That seems like a reasonable way to move forward, unless I see any opposition to that from the Board. Okay, seeing none; continue on with the conversation. Go ahead, Carl Wilson.

MR. WILSON: Kind of continuing this theme of annual updates leading into potentially some oceanographic or environmental updates. I've got a task that is keyed up that Mr. Train can bring forward. But what I'm hoping to do and if we have a conversation around this, is task the TC with developing reference points, biological reference points. But do it in a manner that is outside of the assessment cycle, to allow some scoping of that work and some time for consideration. Happy to have a conversation on that.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Okay, Steve, I think you tried to bring that forward earlier. I'm going to go back to you for the opportunity.

MR. TRAIN: I would like to **move to task the TC and SAS to develop and evaluate candidate biological reference points that account for non-stationarity of environmental conditions/productivity. Report back to the Lobster Management Board in advance of the Fall/Annual 2027 meeting, and annually before**

**the next stock assessment.** I can explain a little bit further if there is a second.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Is there a second to the motion? Jason McNamee. Go ahead, Steve.

MR. TRAIN: As I said earlier, I think it's important to have factors that take into more. We've been trying to manage fisheries in a different way, since we just used to use F10 and the old square. I think this meets more of the dynamics that go into fisheries management. It's one more, I don't know if you want to call it a tool or a set of tools that we can use to inform us, and that will be reported to us regularly.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Jason, anything additional to add?

DR. McNAMEE: I'm supportive of this. Thinking back, I think the Technical Committee has looked at biological reference points a number of times over the years, and I appreciate that. I don't know that there has been this kind of work though to kind of look at stock recruitment relationships incorporating directly in the math environmental covariates.

I think it can connect in with what we just talked about a couple minutes ago, if we get some different environmental indices that we can kind of bring to bear. I think this would be valuable. Then I'm also thinking prospectively a little bit about a potential conversation we have today about different types of evaluations that we might want to do, and this could be valuable in that context as well to sort of understand if we have this kind of a stock recruit relationship, what does that mean for some management options we might think about.

I think there is a lot of value here, I do. It's not an insignificant amount of work. I think the way you read this, people might think it's specific to just stock recruit relationships with environmental covariates. I read it a little broader than that, where I think we can just sort of collect different types of biological reference points, the ones we're already kind of using, however you want to characterize those.

But what we're doing now, some more like proxy type values, you know maybe some research on what do they use in other crustacean fisheries around the world by way of proxy values. Then this specific environmental covariate I see as having a stock recruit model with an additional couple of parameters in it.

Just kind of like getting a collection of different types of biological reference points that might be valuable to use for the lobster fisheries, the way that I kind of interpret the motion. I think it's worth the effort. Whether we use the Technical Committee to do this or contract it out, I think is maybe another part of the discussion here, depending on how folks are feeling about the workload of the Technical Committee. But to have it I think is really important for some of the work we're thinking about doing with the stock.

CHAIR ZOBEL: I'll open it up for Board discussion. I have Bob Glenn.

MR. BOB GLENN: Yes, I would express that similar to Carl and Jay that I think there is a lot of value to looking at biological reference points, and certainly incorporating environmental conditions and stock productivity conditions into them. I think that makes a lot of sense.

That said, I have some reservations about how this times; relative to our next agenda item to talk about, which is kind of essentially looking at the TCs advice around how to move forward with lobster management and the potential to do some scoping with the fishing industry, with the focus on defining what the management objectives are.

I'm just a little concerned timing wise that I think under having a better understanding of the management objectives would really inform the candidate biological reference points, and so I am just a little concerned that this may be premature relative to that process. I'm not sure how the two would run together. I just have

some fairly strong reservations about that, about the TC maybe getting ahead of and giving the Board a bunch of biological reference points that don't necessarily really match the direction what the management objectives are.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Next up I have Roy Miller.

MR. ROY W. MILLER: For Steve or Jason's consideration. I just wanted to make sure I understood what the term non-stationarity meant. I presume it means changes, or is there some other definition to non-stationarity? Jay.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Go ahead.

DR. McNAMEE: I don't need to jump out at Mr. Train if he wanted to offer. I think in this context non-stationarity would mean, you know you have a certain amount of productivity in the stock during a certain time period and things in the environment change, and that productivity drops, so it's changing. Exactly as you suggested.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Online I have Emerson Hasbrouck.

MR. EMERSON HASBROUCK: I have a question for the maker and the seconder. This motion is somewhat nonspecific. Is this for Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank and Southern New England, or just a subset of those three stock areas?

CHAIR ZOBEL: Go to either Mr. Train or Mr. McNamee for that.

MR. TRAIN: I'm sorry, Gulf of Maine, George Bank centric, so I should have been more specific, but it is for the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank Stock. It is broad in that we need to find what environmental factors or other factors may be affecting the stock, we don't know yet, so that is intentional.

CHAIR ZOBEL: I'm going to go to Jeff Kipp for some clarification.

MR. JEFF J. KIPP: Just for clarification on this, so just trying to understand what would be expected if they were to go forward on the report back to the

Board. Is the idea to report back on is this like a precursor to actual implementation of these types of reference points. To manage the fisheries as sort of a report back on potential reference points that could be used once we get to an assessment, where we have that background work done.

Then that could be pulled into an assessment and sort of expedite the use of these reference points, or would the idea be that these would be something that you would be looking from at the Technical Committee to make a recommendation on where we are relative to those reference points when we come back to the Board in 2027 to potentially act on them.

MR. WILSON: Steve, this is Carl, if I may answer. The former in that I think it would be good to do some of the work so you've banked that investment of thought process before the next assessment. My journey of having participated in a few of these assessments, reference points are kind of often left to the last bit once all the data and models have been run, et cetera, et cetera. This would be kind of a front load of something more.

CHAIR ZOBEL: David Borden.

MR. DAVID V.D. BORDEN: Maybe this is a question for Jeff or staff. How long might this change take to do? What do you think a realistic timeframe is, Jeff, to accomplish this? I'm not trying to push it forward or delay it. I'm just wondering what you think.

MR. KIPP: I think a 2027 annual meeting deadline is certainly doable for the Technical Committee to do some sort of exploratory work of potentially what may be out there that we could use, what kind of work has been done on non-stationarity for reference points to report back to the Board. I think that is a reasonable timeline.

I think that it kind of plays into the next discussion, which was brought up, and that

there is a potential workload coming to the TC for exploring management objectives and potentially management strategy evaluations down the road. You know that is another workload that we don't yet have defined, and so if that is the case we would have to think about how that might impact this task and that workload and how to balance those two out.

MR. BORDEN: Follow up. Jeff, would that include some kind of peer review of the results?

MR. KIPP: That's why I asked my clarification question. I would say if this was something to be implemented by the Board and that was the goal, then absolutely that would need to be peer reviewed. But my understanding from the clarification was that this would be sort of a background work from the TC, so that when we do get to the next benchmark assessment, we are more ready to go than if we didn't do that work, and that it would then be peer reviewed at that point with the assessment, and would then go to the Board for potential use in management.

MR. BORDEN: Okay, thank you.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Tracy, you had something you wanted to add?

MS. PUGH: Yes, thank you. I think that a number of us have probably already been thinking about this work, in terms of what we heard from the assessment peer review. You know we heard pretty loud and clear that we should be exploring reference points around productivity for the stocks. It certainly is on my to do list, independent of any kind of tasking here.

One of the things that I would ask for, in terms of some clarity moving forward. We can start diving into the literature now and start doing our homework on what's out there, what's available. But when it comes to actually developing something, the reference points are designed to essentially help you avoid certain conditions, or to help you maintain certain conditions.

I think that that is where we really need some guidance from the Board as to what are those conditions and what reference points are they looking to, to describe where we are in relation to those conditions. That comes back again to that management strategy evaluation and the tasking that hopefully will be talked about later, in terms of developing these goals and stuff.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Joe Cimino, did I see your hand?

MR. JOE CIMINO: I appreciate the clarifications that have come through with Jeff's questions and his response to David Borden. I have no objections at all to the exploration or a chance to visit this earlier. The unspoken part of this motion has at least been confirmed that it still falls in. As we may attempt to use new reference points it's going to fall back into the peer review process, and that is ultimately where the Board would be using that. I think that is a very important part of the process that kind of wasn't fully touched on in the motion itself.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Seeing no more hands to the Board, I am going to go out to the public if there are any questions or comments from the public on this. Patrice.

MS. PATRICE McCARRON: Patrice McCarron with the Maine Lobsterman's Association. I have I guess a question for Tracy that I think relates directly to this. I was wondering about the combined Gulf of Maine Index. My understanding is we've been using the reference period of 2015 to 2017, because it had coincided with the previous stock assessment, which was in place when it was developed.

Does that mean that the reference point will travel forward because we have a new stock assessment? Because it will make a big difference how much we've declined, which I guess feeds directly into this conversation, where I do think it makes sense to be looking at developing reference points.

Because it is kind of arbitrary what we're doing now, basing things off the peak or should we be basing things off something else. To Mr. Glenn's point, I do think it will relate to the management objectives as well. There is a lot of work to do. But specific to the Gulf of Maine Combined Index, I was curious what would happen to the reference period, since we have a new stock assessment.

MS. PUGH: Yes, so I can personally address that, I guess. We maintained that index essentially the way that it had been being calculated. We didn't make any changes to that. The 2015 to 2017, essentially what we've done is standardize the index around that value. The idea being that 2015 to 2017 average at the last stock assessment would be those animals recruiting into the fishable population for the terminal year of the stock assessment.

They are like one molt shy of the terminal year, which was 2018. It is the peak, like it was the peak of the stock. If conditions had gone up, you know we would have seen values higher than 1. It just happens to be that they went down, so we have values less than 1. It's really just sort of a centering of that index, and sort of watching how it changes again over time.

I'm not sure how much that helps, Patrice, answer your question. You know we could explore recentering it around another year, but essentially all that's going to do is move where 1 is on the graph. Whether we're going up and down doesn't necessarily matter, I think, depending on where we center it. Jeff, if you've got anything to add to that please feel free.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Caitlin is going to jump in and then we'll go to Jeff if there is anything additional.

MS. STARKS: Just to clarify. As Tracy was just mentioning, it's just a matter of where 1 is on that graph. At this point there is no management action tied to that indicator. Not that it doesn't matter how much percent decline, but it's not tied to a management action.

MR. KIPP: I was just going to add one note that this is new to this data update as requested by the Board, so we did discuss sort of how to present this. It's a little different than our other indicators. That is why we didn't have any lines on that figure. Like Caitlin said, there is no management threshold associated with that not so it is just an index, with the values sort of open to interpretation. There is no line or anything that relates it to an action or anything like that anymore, and that's how we decided to present that in this new format in the data update.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Any other questions or comments from the public? Seeing none; I'm going to bring it back to the Board briefly and then we'll move this forward. Seeing no more hands for the Board, do we need a minute to caucus? Let's try it this way. **Is there any objection to the motion on the board? Okay, seeing no objection from the Board, this carries by consent.** We're going to keep Tracy on the hook for a few more minutes.

#### **TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT OF BOARD TASKS**

CHAIR ZOBEL: We're going to move to some Technical Committee report on tasks that they've been up to per our request. Back to you, Tracy.

MS. PUGH: Okay, hopefully I have enough water left and I'm not going to cough all over you guys, sorry. This is essentially reviewing the memo that we prepared that was requested to sort of revisit some guidance around the development of management strategy evaluations, specifically for the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank Stock here.

Just a little bit of background. I think you guys already remember all of this, but the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank Stock abundance did decline 34% from the previous assessment. That previous assessment just happened to dip at all-time highs, so we have declined from

record highs. The abundance is currently below our fishery industry target reference point.

That target reference point was set really around sort of economic concerns and conditions. Declining below that target is essentially suggesting that we've got potential for degrading economic conditions. Abundance is above the biological limit, so the stock is not depleted. Exploitation is just above the threshold, overfishing technically is occurring.

But again, we should caution that that exploitation status and its interpretation is less certain than our abundance status. We have not specifically tied any management recommendations to the exploitation reference points. Our recommendation coming out of the stock assessment for Georges Bank/Gulf of Maine stock was to immediately initiate a Management Strategy Evaluation process.

The goals of this process that we see are really to clearly identify management objectives for the stock, and do this across all stakeholder, all industry stakeholders, to improve the understanding of the socioeconomic status and concerns, and to identify what potential management tools are out there that are going to have some sort of buy-in from the industry, that will then allow prevention declining towards the biological limits, you know what kind of tools can we apply.

We made two recommendations to essentially get this process started. The first recommendation that we've made is to form a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee would then be responsible for sort of the scoping and coordination of all of the different aspects of an MSE process.

We note that an MSE really requires an interdisciplinary approach, including a fair amount of expertise that will need to come from outside the TC. The Technical Committee membership does not include folks with socioeconomic backgrounds or expertise. That would be the biggest thing we really need to pull in.

Our recommendations for membership of the Steering Committee would be to include some representations from the Board, from the Technical Committee, from ASMFC staff, certainly from industry stakeholders, from members of the ASMFC Committee on Economics and Social Sciences, and then from members of the ASMFCs either the Science and Assessment or the Management and Science Committees, preferably with some past MSE experience.

We sort of would foresee this as being populated through nominations and then Board action to approve those numbers. One thing I wanted to note that we did think that the size of this group, getting the balance in the size of this group will be a little bit of a challenge. We want to make sure that it's not too big that it doesn't function very well.

But we do want to make sure that we tap the right people and get the right expertise involved in this steering committee. The second recommendation that we have is to start up a formal process for developing management goals and objectives for the fisheries in the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank. The Steering Committee would sort of develop and flesh out this process.

The TC is essentially recommending that this would include a series of meetings, and our idea here was that these would start sort of very small and local scale, to collect perspectives from industry members on smaller local scales, and then sort of iteratively feed those perspectives into broader and broader to get up to the regional or the stockwide scale, so that we're bringing in perspectives and compiling them as we go.

We would really like to reiterate that the development of these management objectives is a necessary first step for the Management Strategy Evaluation. But the development of these objectives doesn't necessarily commit the Board to continuing into pursuing a formal MSE.

We think that going through this process and getting these clear objectives identified will benefit both the Board and the industry, regardless of whether or not they decide to move forward with further pursuit of an MSE. The cost associated with these initial steps kind of depend on the scale. We do think that it would be extremely important to make use of a professional facilitator here. We think this will be critical to guiding respectful and productive conversations throughout these meetings and throughout the process. The cost for that could range anywhere, ballpark from \$40,000.00 to \$100,000.00; depending on the level of involvement of that facilitator, and then associated meeting costs, so for all of those meetings and things like that there would be cost involved. That is really all I have here, so I can answer any questions that folks have.

CHAIR ZOBEL: To the Board for any questions. Carl Wilson.

MR. WILSON: Thanks, Tracy, and thanks again for putting the time in to develop these recommendations for the Board. A question for you, in the document there is mention of across all stakeholders. Just sort of wondering if the TC had a preference on what stakeholders mean, in this case.

MS. PUGH: We did not talk in depth about what stakeholders means beyond the fishers themselves. I think that that could be up to the Board, and I think that if folks remember back to what Dr. Tom Miller reported from the Peer Review. You know I think the Peer Review talked about varying scales and scopes of an MSE process.

The more segments of stakeholders you involve, obviously the bigger it gets. Whether it's just fishers or we go fishers, dealers and et cetera. I think that would be up to the Board as decisions are made about the scale and what you all want to see with this.

CHAIR ZOBEL: David Borden.

MR. BORDEN: I think is a worthwhile effort, but I am a little bit skeptical, and I have to voice some of

my skepticism by stating that the Board and the Commission went through 7 years of Plan Development on the last addendum the last time. I would point out that the state of Maine in particular went through Herculean efforts to get a buy-in from the constituency.

When we start defining goals and objectives for the industry that fold in a lot of different parameters, how do we know that those won't change, or for the timeline of either the development of this or the development of an addendum to do something? They were at the point where that index that Tracy spoke about was down 42%. It's pretty dramatic. I don't have an alternative strategy, I'm just saying that I'm a little bit skeptical that things won't change, even if we do this.

There are a lot of positive aspects of this that were not followed the last time, because we're actually getting into the economics of the industry and trying to get some economic parameters. I'm a little bit skeptical, but that way, that we won't just fall into the same trap.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Any other questions? Go ahead, Carl Wilson.

MR. WILSON: Yes, I think skepticism is definitely warranted when it comes down the seas, and it really comes from the buy in of all stakeholders. I would agree with Tracy's point that stakeholders, in my mind in this case, represents the fishing industry.

This feels very much like a top-down approach, and my feeling in order for this to work, at least from a Maine perspective it needs to be a bottom-up approach. If the Board does feel the need to move forward with this, and we have a motion prepared to start that conversation. You know my first move would be to go as local as possible, to start to understand what objectives would be coming from the industry. I think anytime that government is telling people how to run their business and based on

economics, at least our state runs into sticky territory at that point.

Additionally, I think the step of going full bore into a modeling exercise feels a little bit premature. At this point, we're nearly 30 years since Addendum III was passed. I think it's a very worthwhile exercise for us all to think about the goals and objectives of what this FMP are, and how that might feed into a future MSE assessment.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Carl, you mentioned a motion, why don't you bring that forward.

### **GUIDANCE ON MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION FOR GOM/GBK**

MR. WILSON: Happy to modify as the Board chooses here too. **Move to form a Steering Committee (SC), to first;**

**1. Review existing management objectives, as outlined in Amendment#3 and subsequent addenda, relative to the current GOM/GBK stock status, and social/economic conditions facing the fishery today.**

**2. Develop a process that would clearly identify new management objectives (across all stakeholders), to better understand socioeconomic status and concerns, and to identify potential management tools. Recommend that the representation on the SC shall follow recommendations outlined in the January 20, 2026 Technical Committee memo. The SC will recommend a process for both tasks for the August 2026 Board Meeting.**

CHAIR ZOBEL: Do we have a second for the motion? Jay McNamee. Any additional rationale, Carl?

MR. WILSON: Yes, this motion would form the basis of a precursor to pursuing a management strategy evaluation of the current stock status in the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank warrant attention, as stock abundance fell below the fishing industry target, indicating potential for degradation of economic conditions of the lobster industry, but

remained above the biological reference points, indicating the stock is not depleted.

Certainly, and we'll talk a little bit about our updates from New England states. Certainly, the economics of the fishery are stressing the Maine fishery right now and we've heard that loud and clear. I think from the Maine perspective there is definitely utility to talking about what the objectives are and where we all want to go.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Jason, anything to add?

DR. McNAMEE: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. I mean this is exciting. I've been a proponent of moving forward with a process like this for a while. I think this is a really important first step. I agree with everything that the Technical Committee said. You know this is kind of the core of whatever you want to call it, any future analysis to kind of understand the objectives that you are trying to achieve is critical. It's not trivial, it's like hard to get. I like the idea of the Steering Committee approach and I'll just offer the approach. It's so dated now at this point, but we did an approach like this with menhaden, the EMOW, Ecosystem Management Objective Workshop, and so there is a model that folks can look at. It was like maybe a decade ago now that that occurred, but we still talk about it. Maybe it's just me talking about it. But I think it still comes up from time to time, so it was valuable to do that.

It was like a facilitated discussion. There is a model there to kind of look to on how we might want to structure something for lobster. Positive step forward, I am excited. I think it will be great to kind of in a vacuum get the objectives sort of locked down. Then we can move forward with the other mechanical pieces of doing a more comprehensive evaluation.

CHAIR ZOBEL: I'm going to go to Bob and Toni.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROBERT E. BEAL: I'm not trying to steer the outcome of this motion by

any means, but just a couple comments on the fiscal reality of all this. This motion doesn't really cost any money. Just forming a steering committee to tackle a few things. But it is the first step potentially in MSE, a facilitated workshop that leads into an MSE.

You know we did not set aside anything in this year's budget for the next step, as I see it after this steering committee gets their work done. It doesn't mean we can't do it, it just means we have to figure out exactly where that money would come from if we want to initiate anything later in this calendar year with a facilitator and a workshop and that sort of thing.

The range that was up there before, 40 to 100 thousand. If we're kind of on the lower end of that I think we can probably find some money to do it, either this year or early next year. We have some rollover money from a grant, a multi-year grant that believe it or not is still left over from COVID years when we didn't meet in person.

We've been rolling that board over and over. We have to use that money in the first half of this year, but that may free up some money for the second half of this year. I don't want to get into the weeds, but if we get to the point where the Board decides and the industry decides they want to pursue a full MSE, that has a bigger price tag on it, and that one we're going to need to sort of think about the source of that money if and when we get there.

Again, I think moving forward makes a lot of sense. That seems to be where the Board is going. I just want to sort of caution the Board and sort of set up that conversation down the road on where the money might come from for the full MSE if the Board ends up going that far.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Yes, those of us who have been involved in MSEs know that this is not a small task, nor do they cost zero money. Okay, on my list I have Bob Glenn.

MR. GLENN: I would echo and share Mr. Borden's skepticism to some extent. But that said, I also

think it's important for the Board to really look forward and try to align management objectives with expectations in the fishing industry. As Mr. Wilson said, I think to really achieve that I think we need to have more engagement and try to start up what is a bottom's up approach, and get some ownership and some buy in from the fishing industry and what the management objectives are going to be. Along those lines I am very supportive of this.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Doug Grout.

MR. DOUGLAS E. GROUT: I wanted to first of all say that I think that an MSE approach is more of a bottom-up approach than our current management approach, where usually the Board maybe with some AP advice comes up with the objectives of the plan. This I would see as an MSE, it tends to get the industry involved in a conversation of the developing objectives and goals of the management plan, and then we use modeling to help inform that decision with them. But I also understand what the size of our industry, from Maine down to Rhode Island.

It would be a huge, huge, very difficult, probably very long undertaking. I think this motion starts to get at a way to try and develop some; to look at some management objectives that would help us address some of the socioeconomic issues right now. I support this, but I hope at some point we might at least try the MSE approach, to try and get the industry involved. If it doesn't succeed, so be it. But I think that is the way we have to do it, we've got to talk to the industry about this.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Jason McNamee.

DR. McNAMEE: Yes, just going back to Bob Beal's comments. One thing that might be valuable to do is just taking a count of what elements that we are going to, maybe just mapping that out, like what are the elements that we need, and then figuring out what we already have. My information I think is probably a little dated at this point.

But I think there has been some thinking towards this goal already going on, and there may be pieces of the machine built already that wouldn't cost us money. I just think that kind of going, talking to in particular the Technical Committee and the Stock Assessment Committee.

In particular our federal partners on the Stock Assessment Committee and finding out what they have available that is kind of ready to go might be some savings. But it's going to help us know how much we're going to have to spend on this in the end. I think it's worthwhile, because I do believe there has been some thinking and building on this already.

CHAIR ZOBEL: David Borden.

MR. BORDEN: I support the motion, make this quick, and to me one of the key aspects of this is going to be the socioeconomic. What is destroying the current industry at this point is the input cost. You're going to have to get into the economics of the industry.

In order to do that you are going to get direct input from people in the industry that can talk about that and figure out ways that we can deal with the compression of the margins in the industry. It's something that we don't normally do routinely in fisheries management, and I think in order to get a good output we're going to have to really get into the economic issues.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Before we move this forward, I'm going to go out to the public. Any comments or questions on the motion on the board? Patrice.

MS. McCARRON: I'm Patrice McCarron with the Maine Lobstermen's Association. I just want to say that I also support the motion. I don't support a full MSE. I went through the MSE for herring and it was maybe the singular most confusing and complicated process. What came out of it was something that wasn't even understandable to me for having been through the process. I think engaging the industry on this is the place to go.

It is a big industry, but I think this is the opposite of what happened on Addendum XXVII. When Addendum XXVII started the industry got together to talk about resilience. I remember going to New Hampshire Fish and Game, and then that all blew up. What the industry got was a directive from the Commission that the indices were going down, that spawning stock biomass was chosen that resulted in the gauge.

We very much felt like we just received the management mandate. I think this is a real opportunity to go back, look at Amendment 3, figure out what we need to be doing given the changing economic conditions, and try to move this industry forward in a positive way. As the precursor to the MSE I strongly support that.

MS. ZOBEL: Any other public comments or questions? Yes, sir, in the back.

MR. JASON JOYCE: My name is Jason Joyce, I'm with NEFSA, New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association. I support this. I am not real familiar with the MSE, but I know in the creation of this from my understanding, I am on the Lobster Advisory Council in Maine, and we first talked about an MSE at our last meeting, which to me is under the context of resiliency and conservation equivalency.

If this is the way to get to that, under this MSE and creating this SC, I think that is a good thing. I would just remind everyone that with the previous gauge increase that was felt by the industry. I'm a lobster fisherman; I'm an 8<sup>th</sup> generation lobster fisherman and I currently fish. That was felt that it was from the top down. If this is a way to come from the bottom up, as Carl had mentioned, I think industry will support it and you'll get some great ideas. Thank you.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Thank you, Mr. Joyce. Seeing no other hands in the room or online, I am going to go back to the Board. Steve Train.

MR. TRAIN: I try not to echo what has been said, but on this topic, I think I have to. This motion is important. I think this needs to go forward, I fully support it. People have no idea the input cost in this fishery lately. As the stock biomass declines, stabilizing now, and as their landings decline, the costs have still continued to increase. It's not just on the boat, it's shoreside access and everything else. This is very important.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Ray Kane.

MR. RAYMOND W. KANE: I can support this motion. But my only reservation, we've heard from Carl and from Pat, is getting the stakeholders to come to the table and actually discuss an MSE. The Atlantic Sea herring MSE was the first one ever demonstrated in the northeast. I think we've come a long way with MSEs since then. That is my underlying concern that stakeholders, hopefully Steve Train can talk to his stakeholders, that they will actually participate in the MSE.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Seeing no other hands around the table. I haven't heard any objection to this, so we'll try. **Is there any objection to the motion on the board? Seeing no objection the motion carries by consent.** Thank you all. I just want to take a second to thank the TC for the amount of work. We've had a couple presentations with a lot of information from our Technical Committee. The lobster and crab Technical Committees are both very busy committees, and they do a monumental amount of incredible work. I just wanted to personally say thank you to the committee.

#### **AMERICAN LOBSTER ADVISORY PANEL REPORT**

CHAIR ZOBEL: Moving on to the Advisory Panel Report. Caitlin.

MS. STARKS: I'll keep this very brief. I'm reporting out on behalf of Grant Moore, since he couldn't make it to the meeting today. That is the Lobster Advisory Panel Chair. I'll just summarize very quickly the comments made during the meeting.

But the AP met on a webinar on January 12 to review the 2025 benchmark stock assessment and peer review report, and provide some input to the Board on the assessment findings and the state of the fishery from their perspective. Seven advisors attended the meeting and Tracy Pugh summarized the Peer Review and Stock Assessment Report, and then the AP had some questions and discussion on the results.

First, I will just summarize some of the comments related to the Southern New England stock. One advisor commented that he thinks the assessment does not necessarily account for the predator species like scup and black sea bass that are well above their management targets in the region. He thinks that those are negatively impacting the lobster stock.

This advisor also commented about the habitat lost that has occurred in the region and the associated decreases in lobster productivity. Then other advisors from Southern New England also spoke to the low amount of effort that is currently in the region, and there was general agreement that there is not a need to further restrict the fishery in Southern New England because of that.

More focused on the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank stock. One advisor expressed that unless there is an improvement in law enforcement, management measures won't be effective, and noted that there could be a lot of effort removed if the current regulations were fully enforced. Then another advisor emphasized that it's important to recognize the regional differences in Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank within that stock when thinking about management.

He highlighted that some areas are quite stable and the future is looking healthy, where other areas are more concerning. He added that when regulations are developed there needs to be consideration of how those can have different effects in different areas within the stock region.

This advisor also noted that there have been declines in the number of fishermen or fishing licenses in Maine, and that trips may also be declining. Then lastly, another advisor stated that the Board should not consider any new regulations until after the next set of rules related to right whales are established, because those could also serve for lobster conservation as well. That really sums up the AP meeting, and I can take any questions.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Any questions for Caitlin? David Borden.

MR. BORDEN: I would like to just follow up on one of the points that was just made, in terms of the predation issue. This is an issue that has come up repeatedly over the past couple of years. You literally cannot attend a meeting where lobstermen are present in Southern New England, where almost everybody gets talking about predation.

I don't have a resolution for it, but I would like to make a suggestion on how we proceed on this. I think it would be useful to refer this issue to the technical people, and the next time they have a meeting put this on the agenda, and talk about ways that we could develop an analysis that would delve into the whole issue and kind of test some of the concepts that I think needed to be tested, which is basically, what is the impact due to predation on Southern New England population.

What I'm looking for, and I want to be clear. I'm not asking them to do any analysis. I think they should just formalize some questions that come back to the Board, and then we might refer those questions to the ecosystem group down at Woods Hole, and ask them to integrate those concerns into whatever their outputs.

I spoke to Jason before the meeting and he said there are researcher's modelers now in New York that are looking at projects that we might be able to integrate those questions into that process. All I'm asking is for the technical people to look at it and give us some suggestions on how we would move

forward with an examination of those concerns, rather than just leave this.

My fear is, and this will be quick, is at some point somebody is going to suggest additional management measures in Southern New England for whatever reason. At that point the industry is going to go to the meeting and say, you have to address this concern, and we're not going to make any progress on those issues. I think we ought to do something in advance to try to address it.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Any other members of the Board with questions? Okay, seeing none we are going to go north to south for Industry Survey and State Updates. I'm going to move to Carl Wilson for the state of Maine.

#### **REPORTS FROM GULF OF MAINE STATES ON INDUSTRY SURVEYS AND MEETINGS**

MR. WILSON: Since our last Board meeting we've had another round of seven zone council meetings and one Lobster Advisory Council meeting. In those meetings we talked about the assessment results and started a discussion about, are there kind of small wins that might be had.

To that effect, our Lobster Advisory Council, which as a reminder is kind of a council of councils for Maine, created a subcommittee to pursue those ideas of if there are some small wins out there that are supported by the industry and developed by the industry. It's a way to continue to move the conversations forward. I think as we went through the assessment results, Maine is very much a tale of two different tapes, depending on which side of the state you're on. Northern and Eastern Maine has clearly seen some of the declines that the assessment spoke of, and I think that resonates well with the fishermen there. Meanwhile, in Southern and Western Maine, just as the assessment results are indicating, that there is a little bit more stability. They did not see the volatile increases in landings over

the last couple of decades, but they are also not seeing the declines as well. It is a bit of a mixed picture.

As we've also been talking about today, the economics of the fishery are very much front and center, regardless of where you are in the state, to Steve Train's earlier points about the input cost for this fishery are causing dramatic behavioral differences in how the fishery is pursuing lobsters right now. That's it.

CHAIR ZOBEL: I'll be super brief. I was scheduled to present our industry results and have a nice discussion at our Commercial Fishermen's Association meeting in January, which was canceled due to snowstorm and illness. This coming Wednesday our staff will be presenting and having that discussion. That's all I have, and then we move to Massachusetts. Bob, go ahead.

MR. GLENN: For us, this past weekend we had the opportunity to attend the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association Annual Trade Show, and during that trade show we hosted a two-hour seminar, where we basically went soup to nuts through all the major issues facing lobster management, including went through the stock assessment trends in catch and effort, updates on the industry survey about what management options the industry was interested in.

We talked about bait supply, menhaden and herring, and we talked about North Atlantic Right Whales as well. It was a good opportunity for us to really engage with the industry and start to gauge with them some of the things that they might be interested in considering. It was overall a good meeting. We got a fair amount of feedback back on that, and we plan to have some follow up meetings with some of the members coming up. I believe it's next week.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Thanks, Bob. Does anyone have any questions for any of the three of us? I am inclined to just move on, but I will check with the Board members. Next, we'll move to an update on a Request for Information of RFI for Alternative Gear

Marking Framework, so Alli Murphy for NOAA Fisheries.

**UPDATE ON REQUEST FOR INFORMATION FOR ALTERNATIVE GEAR MARKING FRAMEWORK**

MS. ALLISON MURPHY: Just wanted to update you all that our previous projected timeline for the RFI was impacted by the lapse in appropriations this past fall, so we are a little bit behind schedule that we have talked about. The RFI remains in development and our hope is that we can get it published before the May meeting, with a meaningful comment period, and that we'll provide you a full briefing at your spring meeting. But stay tuned and we'll stay in touch with staff on how that is proceeding. Thank you.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Thanks for the update, Alli. Go ahead, Toni.

MS. KERNS: Thanks, Alli, appreciate that update. I just hope that that RFI is out before the Maine Fishermen's Forum occurs. I think that is a great time to be able to reach out to the lobster industry by NOAA. With that RFI we already missed the Mass Lobstermen's weekend, and in our letter to the Councils we had stated that these were two benchmarks that we would really like to see NOAA active at those meeting and engaging with industry about this issue. Hopefully it will be out by then.

**REVIEW AND POPULATE AMERICAN LOBSTER ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERSHIP**

CHAIR ZOBEL: Going to look for Tina to update us on Review and Populate American Lobster Advisory Panel Membership. Caitlin can also do it, Tina, if you would prefer. Okay, to Caitlin.

MS. STARKS: A nomination was submitted for Joe Fiorentino, for New Jersey. He is a recreational diver that lives in Pennsylvania.

CHAIR ZOBEL: We're going to go ahead and get a motion up. Joe Cimino.

MR. CIMINO: I would **move to approve the nomination to the American Lobster Advisory Panel for Joe Fiorentino, as stated a recreational diver from Pennsylvania.**

CHAIR ZOBEL: Is there a second? Dennis Abbott. Go ahead, Dennis.

MR. DENNIS ABBOTT: A question for Joe, just curious of why New Jersey is nominating someone from Pennsylvania.

MR. CIMINO: There is ocean access, a lot of our representation for fisheries, you know we see that with striped bass as well. There is a lot of overlap for fisher's access. This was someone that kind of reached out and we are supportive.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Go ahead, Dennis.

MR. ABBOTT: I know that I would be very curious if someone from Maine was nominated to be an advisor in New Hampshire, just puzzling.

MR. CIMINO: I would just say, there are parallels with just the way some of the stuff works out. Even in the commercial fishing world, I know that a New Jersey person is a Maryland representative for horseshoe crab, so it does happen sometimes.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Okay, **is there any opposition to the motion on the board? Seeing no opposition; we will welcome Mr. Fiorentino to the AP.**

**OTHER BUSINESS**

CHAIR ZOBEL: I am aware of, we're moving on to Other Business and we only have one piece of Other Business, so I am going to move to John Clark to introduce that.

MR. JOHN CLARK: This is a small request from a very small fishery in the LCMA 5. Essentially under the current management measures, the pots are supposed to be out of the water from February 1 to

March 31. What they are requesting is for the TC to look at changing the dates, because most of these guys are also black sea bass fishermen, and those dates are interfering with the time they would like to get their pots in the water.

What they are asking is to change the closure dates that were set under Addendum XVII to allow them, instead of allowing them not to set gear in the water under the current addendum, they could not put pots out until March 24, so they would like to move that earlier to March 9. But on the first end of the closure, instead of having to have all the gear out of the water from LCMA 5 by February 1, they would say that they would have their gear out of the water by January 16. We just would like the TC to see that. These closures were part of Addendum XVII, as I said from 2012, and it was part of a 10% effort reduction that was required of all LCMAs then. Some of us geezers were on the Board back then during those arguments. But anyhow, it's a fairly simple request and we just would like the TC to take a look at that. Thanks.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Caitlin.

MS. STARKS: I just want to ask a clarifying question to make sure I have the right dates. The times the gear would be out of the water would be January 16 to March 8. Thank you.

MR. CLARK: Correct, Caitlin, yes. They just wanted to do that shift, like at two weeks on each end.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Toni, go ahead.

MS. KERNS: John, you're just asking for a Technical Committee evaluation on the move, you're not necessarily asking for a conservation equivalency, because I'm pretty confident in my remembering of this issue when it was first put in place, it would be almost impossible to figure out if it's an equivalence, since we haven't had fishing during that time in a very long time.

Then just to set expectations for the fishery itself. While we can figure out how to make that change here at the Commission level, and Caitlin and I will have to sit down and actually think about whether this would require an addendum or not. But this rule lies in the hands of NOAA Fisheries, and so it would have to go through the federal rulemaking process prior to.

MR. CLARK: Right, and our key lobstermen understand that. But like I said, this would just be by offsetting the dates they are hoping that the TC will find that its not really a change in the amount of effort that they're putting in, especially since they would not be taking lobsters.

Sorry, another factor, Caitlin that I forgot to add in there is they wanted to make clear that even if they can put their pots in on March 9, they would not take any lobsters between March 9 and the end of the month. This is solely so they can get the black sea bass pots out.

CHAIR ZOBEL: David Borden.

MR. BORDEN: John raises a good point, I think about the addendum, that's going to comment. But what it made me reflect on is we've had other comments from other LCMTs on changes that need to be made, either in the Interstate Plan or the Federal Plan.

For instance, the Area 2 committee got together and fashioned a memo that was already submitted to the Board with a whole series of recommendations for changes, for instance on the ownership caps that don't exist, what they wanted to replace those with. I think it would be helpful for Caitlin, not at this point but for the next meeting, to research those and basically bring back a whole list of the potential changes that at some point we might integrate into an addendum.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Joe Cimino.

MR. CIMINO: Yes, I'm just curious on David's question, so I guess I'll direct this to David. Is that just kind of an update on where all the LCMAs are

then? Getting an update on I guess the status of previous meetings?

MR. BORDEN: The intent is, we have received recommendations from some of these groups. All I'm asking Caitlin to do is put together a list of those recommendations, so that we can see a comprehensive list if other people around the table want to get recommendations from their LCMTs in their areas. Then I think it is their prerogative to have a meeting. The states really control the LCMT process. They could have a meeting with their LCMT between now and the next meeting, and bring recommendations to us.

CHAIR ZOBEL: All right, I think we have that documented if there is no opposition to that. Alli, go ahead.

MS. MURPHY: I have a question on another topic, so if there is any finalization to that I am happy to wait.

CHAIR ZOBEL: I'm not seeing any objection to that, so go ahead.

MS. MURPHY: Just a quick question on the closure period. You had mentioned resetting gear as of March 8, but then no fishing until the end of the month. Does the industry intend to fish for black sea bass during between March 8 and the end of the month?

MR. CLARK: Yes, that is their intention is they would fish for black sea bass, but they would not take any lobsters if they did get any lobsters in the pots.

MS. MURPHY: Thanks, I just asked that, because the way our regs are currently written is that resetting of traps are allowed, but fishing during that resetting period is not. That is something that I think we would want to look at our regs and would also be interested in the TCs analysis of impacts to lobsters being incidentally harvested during that time.

CHAIR ZOBEL: Is there any other business to come before the Board today? Go ahead, Hank. Sure, come up to the public mic.

MR. HANK SOULE: Thank you, Hank Soule with the Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen's Association. Caitlin, I was just going back to the Lobster AP meeting, I had a question. One of the advisors mentioned some concern with enforcement. I was just wondering just exactly what that concern was.

MS. STARKS: I believe their concern was just that they feel that, based on what they said, which was that if the current regulations were fully enforced there would be reductions in effort, that there might be some effort that fishing other traps. I think that was their concern.

MR. SOULE: To be clear, there was a concern about lack of enforcement of trap limits, is that correct, or you weren't sure?

MS. STARKS: Yes.

MR. SOULE: Okay, great, thank you very much.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

CHAIR ZOBEL: Okay, with that we are adjourned at eleven o'clock on the money. You are very welcome.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m. on Tuesday, February 3, 2026)