



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA 22201  
703.842.0740 • 703.842.0741 (fax) • [www.asmfc.org](http://www.asmfc.org)

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** American Lobster Management Board  
**FROM:** American Lobster Technical Committee  
**DATE:** April 20, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** Evaluation of Proposed Change to LCMA 5 Season Closure

The American Lobster Technical Committee (TC) met via webinar on April 10, 2026 to review and provide input on a proposal to modify the lobster fishery season closure in LCMA 5, as tasked by the Board at its February 2026 meeting.

The current rules for the LCMA 5 season closure are as follows:

- Lobster permit holders are prohibited from possessing or landing lobster taken from LCMA 5 from February 1-March 31.
- Lobster fishers have a 2-week grace period from February 1 to February 14 to remove all lobster gear from the closed area, during which time traps hauled may not be re-set and any lobster caught in traps cannot be retained.
- Lobster fishers have a 1-week grace period from March 24 to March 31 to set gear in the closed area, during which time set traps may not be re-hauled and LCMA 5 lobster permit holders are prohibited from possessing any lobster on board.

The proposed change to these rules is to allow traps to be set 15 days earlier (March 9 instead of 24) and to be re-hauled for harvesting black sea bass, require gear to be removed by January 15, and prohibit the retention of lobster from January 16 to March 15. Effectively, this change would shift the closure earlier by two weeks. The intent of the proposed changes is to allow LCMA 5 lobster permit holders to target black sea bass earlier in the season.

First, the TC noted that recent landings data are not available to project the change in lobster exploitation that could occur under the proposed changes because the closure was implemented in state waters in 2013 and federal waters in 2015. Thus, the TC's evaluation was qualitative based on general knowledge of the lobster stock and fishery.

The TC believes that shifting the closure dates earlier by two weeks has the potential to marginally increase lobster exploitation because catchability in March is expected to be greater than in January based on increasing lobster activity as waters warm up. However, at that time of year any change in exploitation is likely to be small.

The TC suggested that if the goal of the change is only to increase access to black sea bass, managers could consider modifying the rules governing the setting and hauling of trap gear during the closure (e.g., allowing pots to be set and fished for black sea bass March 9 instead of March 24, as proposed) while maintaining the dates during which lobster harvest and

possession is prohibited (i.e., no lobster possession from February 1-March 31). Lobster discard mortality from trap gear is assumed to be zero, particularly during this time period when nearly all lobsters should be hard shelled and molting is not occurring. Therefore, an increase in trap effort to target black sea bass with no lobster harvest would not be expected to increase lobster mortality. The TC feels that this option is consistent with the originally intended purpose of the lobster harvest period closure to reduce exploitation in the Southern New England stock by 10% as required by Addendum XVII.