



March 19, 2012

To Area 2 Lobster Permit Holders,

This letter provides an update on recent and upcoming lobster management actions designed to address the changes to stock status for southern New England lobster.

At the February 6 meeting of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Lobster Management Board, a suite of area-specific conservation measures was approved. For LCMA 2, a mandatory V-notch program was approved, for implementation beginning this year (2012). The measure was supported by industry representatives serving on the Lobster Conservation Management Team, and in turn by the Rhode Island and Massachusetts delegations on the Lobster Management Board. Both states are now moving forward with their respective rule-making processes to codify the measure, and we anticipate having the mandatory v-notch program in effect by this summer.

Given the industry's strong support for this measure, and recognizing that it will take time for the program to bear fruit, it behooves the commercial lobster industries in both states to initiate the program, voluntarily, in advance of the onset of the rule, and for the industries to promote broad involvement and compliance. There is much to be gained by moving forward quickly and effectively with this program. Alternatively, there is tremendous risk – including but not limited to calls for more draconian conservation measures, such as winter/spring closures, in future years – if the v-notch program is not fully and successfully implemented.

We are therefore respectfully urging all members of the industry to begin v-notching all egg-bearing female lobsters in LCMA 2, effective immediately, and to continue doing so throughout 2012 and subsequent years.

As you know, it is nearly impossible for field officers to enforce a rule that requires fishermen to notch egg-bearing females before releasing them. However, a similar, long-standing program in Area 1 (Gulf of Maine) has been highly successful thanks to the widespread involvement and support of the industry. We are looking to emulate the success of the Area 1 program here in Area 2. The proof of the program's effectiveness will come from ongoing sea

sampling and fishery-independent monitoring programs, which will need to be maintained by the two states. Protection of V-notched female lobsters will need to increase incrementally over the 2012 and 2013 fishing seasons to meet the conservation goals by the end of 2013. If the program fails to meet the targets, the Area 2 fishery will face much more onerous restrictions.

On a separate but related note, it is becoming increasingly apparent that ecological changes are occurring in southern New England waters, and those changes are having a significant impact on lobster abundance and catches throughout the region. Although the future is impossible to predict, a return to the robust landings of the 1990s seems highly unlikely for the foreseeable future, even if the v-notching program proves successful. In recognition of this, the Lobster Board is examining options for enabling the industry to consolidate so as to better align harvest capacity with resource availability and thereby maintain the long-term viability of the remaining fishermen in the fishery. That initiative will take the form of a new, proposed addendum aimed at downsizing the industry via a significant reduction in trap allocations, along with increased opportunities to transfer trap allocations among permit holders. There will be ample opportunities for industry input as that proposed initiative moves forward through the ASMFC process.

In closing, we recognize and sympathize with the challenges many of you are facing, we urge you to participate immediately in the industry-supported V-notch program as the most workable means of meeting the conservation targets, and we look forward to your input and support as the Lobster Board seeks ways to adjust the scale of the fishery to match the reduced condition of the southern New England stock.

Sincerely,



Paul Diodati, Director

MA Division of Marine Fisheries



Jane Coit, Director

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