



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

251 Causeway Street, Suite 400, Boston, MA 02114
p: (617) 626-1520 | f: (617) 626-1509
www.mass.gov/marinefisheries



CHARLES D. BAKER
Governor


KARYN E. POLITO
Lt. Governor

BETHANY A. CARD
Secretary

RONALD S. AMIDON
Commissioner

DANIEL J. MCKIERNAN
Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC)
FROM: Daniel J. McKiernan, Director 
DATE: August 12, 2022
SUBJECT: **Electronic Tracking of Federal Permitted Lobster Fishery**

Overview

To comply with the requirements of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's interstate management plan's most recent addendums for American Lobster and Jonah Crab—Addendum XXIX to Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for American Lobster and Addendum IV to the Jonah Crab FMP—the Commonwealth must enact new regulations to be effective during 2023. These regulations will require electronic cellular tracking devices on all commercial fishing vessels with a state issued Coastal or Offshore Lobster Permit and federal trap allocation. To this end, I intend to hold public hearings on this issue in the fall with final enactment before the end of the year.

Background

The Addenda establish electronic device tracking requirements for federally-permitted vessels in the American lobster and Jonah crab fisheries. The goal is to collect high-resolution spatial and temporal effort data to improve stock assessments, create effective and surgical changes to regulations to protected species (i.e. right whales) that may interact with lobster trap gears, improve marine spatial planning efforts, and enhance inspections by law enforcement in federal waters.

The Addenda require federally-permitted American lobster and Jonah crab vessel permit holders with commercial trap permits to install approved electronic tracking devices to collect fishing location data beginning in 2023. This program will be based on the success of a pilot study conducted by staff of DMF, ME DMR and RI DEM to test prototypes to determine their efficacy and utility.

The data collected through these electronic tracking devices will greatly improve the resolution of the stock assessment and refine the estimate of annual exploitation and abundance for American lobster by providing size composition data at a finer resolution than what is currently available. Also, the models used to assess the risk of entanglement risk will be enhanced with improved accuracy of fishing locations, which could have an impact on federal risk reduction requirements for the fishery.

Due to a lack of vessel monitoring systems and inconsistent reporting requirements among jurisdictions, the lobster fishery's "footprint" is among the least documented among its counterparts (e.g., scallops, multispecies groundfish, and surf clams). With a better delineation of the spatial footprint of the U.S. lobster and Jonah crab fisheries, managers will be better positioned to minimize and mitigate the impacts of other ocean uses such as aquaculture, marine protected areas, and offshore energy development on the fisheries. Furthermore, vessel tracking data will enhance the efficiency and efficacy of offshore law enforcement efforts.

The Addenda establish minimum criteria that must be met by tracking devices and vendors to be approved for use in the fishery. These include a data reporting rate (at least one ping per minute) and other technical specifications. Coupled with a new electronic Vessel Trip Report (VTR) federal reporting requirement, data on landings, effort and fishing location will be more comprehensive.

Thanks to congressional funding provided through ASMFC, states will be providing financial support (i.e. grants) to permit holders to pay for these devices for the first few years. DMF is in the process of securing the funds through the Commission and we intend to commence the program in the late summer/fall of 2022 with a goal of installing trackers in 2023. To execute the program, we anticipate the need to hire a full-time employee to assist the fishermen with securing funds, trouble-shooting installation and operations and managing the data.

ASMFC will be posting a Request For Response (RFP) to get cost estimates of the units from various companies. It is DMF's intent to determine a cost estimate for the purchase of the hardware and a multi-year data service plan and provide financial assistance to eligible permit holders. We estimate that about 300 Massachusetts permit holders who hold federal permits will be required to install the trackers, and all those permit holders will be eligible for the financial assistance.