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Press Release – 9-3-13
CFRF Pilot Project – Lobster Research Fleet – "On-Deck Data Program"

Summary:

- The CFRF is pleased to announce that its pilot lobster research fleet project – ("On-Deck Data Program") has been launched this summer.
- The Pilot Project is aimed at developing an expedient, cost-effective way to fill existing data gaps, and reduce uncertainties in lobster stock assessments. Specifically, there is currently a marked mismatch between the location of primary lobster fishing grounds (>10 miles offshore), and the data used to assess the stock (<3 miles from shore).
- 12 lobster fishing vessels (6 in Lobster Management Area 2 and 6 in Lobster Management Area 3) are participating in the pilot project hailing from ports in NH, MA, and RI. It
- Crew members and captains are using 10" Google Nexus android tablets and digital calipers to collect much need data on lobsters coming up in their commercial traps. Data is recorded for both lobsters kept as well as lobsters discarded.
- Each vessel samples 3 times per month (3 separate trips if possible). Each sample set consists of 100 lobsters or 20 traps, whichever comes first for a minimum total of 300 lobsters or 60 traps each month.
- As of the beginning of Sept. 2013, data for over 10,000 lobsters has been submitted to the central database.
- Fishing areas being sampled extend from Narragansett Bay to the shelf break region of the Continental Shelf approximately 200 miles offshore.
- The tablets are pre-programmed to record the GPS location of the fishing vessel along with the date and time, and to randomly select which trawls the fishing vessels should sample out of the total number to be fished each trip.
- By using touch screen prompts, lobstermen are able to record the depth of the traps, soak time, and number of traps sampled. Lobster data includes length, sex, presence of eggs and/or shell disease, and V-notch. Lobstermen are also able to make notes about their observations and record images of interesting or unusual specimens.
- Once back onshore, the participating lobstermen connect to internet and relay the data to a central data base being maintained by the CFRF. Ultimately the data will be transmitted and used by scientists in state, regional, and federal agencies to better inform lobster stock assessments. Individual fishing vessels will also receive copies of the data they collect.
- In addition to recording data from the commercial traps fished by each vessel, lobstermen are also recording data from ventless traps placed in locations they deem important to sample.
- The overall goal of the pilot project is to test new technologies at sea and provide what will hopefully be an easy to use option for lobstermen to record data as they go about their normal fishing practices. Data being collected now is considered fishery dependent data.

- The pilot project will run until May 2014.
- Ultimately the data being collected by lobstermen will be used to begin to answer many pressing questions about the lobster resource, particularly the resources located in southern New England waters. These include questions such as:
    - What is the size distribution of lobster across the shelf/shelf break area? Are small juvenile lobsters being found in locations where scientists previously thought they would not be located?
    - Are lobster populations offshore significantly different (abundance, size, etc.) than lobster populations more inshore?
    - How are sexes distributed?
    - What is a sustainable level of harvest? Can we predict this with more certainty?
    - Is it possible that lobsters have a different stock structure than the way we are currently managing by?
    - Is the lobster resource being impacted by climate change? i.e. warmer waters, increased ocean acidification, etc.
- A Project Steering Committee composed of representatives from the RI DEM, MA Div. of Marine Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the local lobster industry are working with CFRF staff to direct and oversee the pilot project.
- An emphasis is being placed on lobstermen, scientists, and technical consultants working together collaboratively to establish a sampling scheme, develop and test tablet technology on the water, and develop means of sharing the resultant data.
- Efforts are underway to secure additional funding to evolve the pilot project into a 3 year program, encompassing additional vessels, and expanding the type of data collected to include environmental indicators such as bottom temperature. Additional lobster vessel captains and crew members have expressed interest in also becoming involved. Additional participation will help expand the ocean area covered, and help determine if these methods have applicability in other fisheries.
- For more information, see the CFRF website project page at: http://cfrfoundation.org/lobster-research-fleet

Additional information attached:

- List of Lobster Fleet Project Steering Committee members
- List of participating lobster vessels, and home ports
- List of CFRF staff and consultants working on pilot project
- Map showing ocean coverage by the research fleet

Statement by Peg Petruny-Parker, CFRF Executive Director:

- "The lobster fishery is a major component of the fishing industry here in Rhode Island as well as from Maine to New Jersey, yet the data used to manage this resource is lacking. The Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation is pleased to be able to sponsor this pilot project – there is much to be learned from it. By utilizing modern technology, the lobstermen's willingness to participate, and the input and guidance from lobster biologists, we hope to solve the data problem in a cost effective way."
- "This is a very interesting project – it is interesting and fun to see the coming together of these two worlds- a historic New England fishery such as lobstering with state of the art, modern technology such as Android tablets. In a way, it is a simple combination of the old and the new – and an application of new technology in a unique situation."

- "The lobster fishery has U.S Sen. Jack Reed to thank for helping provide the funding for this project – the funding comes through a couple of NOAA awards that Sen. Reed was instrumental in helping the CFRF obtain. The CFRF Board of Directors made the decision to support this pilot project – they think it is an important step in helping fishermen become involved in data collection".
- "Lobstermen have such a working knowledge of the marine environment. They are on the water every day and over time they are able to assess changes. Their input and their ability to contribute data to the science process are invaluable. It is best way to help us understand changing processes and how to best manage marine resources."

Suggested people to contact for further comments/perspectives:

- David Spencer, CFRF President, offshore lobsterman – (401) 465-9669
- Greg Mataronas, CFRF Board Member, lobsterman based out of Sakonnet Pt., RI – (401) 595-4782
- Alan Eagles – F/V based out Newport – (401) 862-0032
- Denny Ingram, F/V based out of Newport – (401) 486-5608
- Norbert Stamps, F/V Debbie Ann, based out of Pt. Judith, (401) 580-5019
- Peg Petruny-Parker, Executive Director, CFRF, Executive Director – (401) 515-4662
- Anna Malek, CFRF Program Administrator, (401) 515-4892; Cell: (207) 624-1713
- Genny Nesslage, Lobster Biologist, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (703) 842-0740
- Burton Shank, Lobster Biologist, National Marine Fisheries Service (508) 495-2363
- Heidi Henninger, staff, Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen's Association (603) 509-2473