

DMF and MEP Roundtable Discussion - 2025



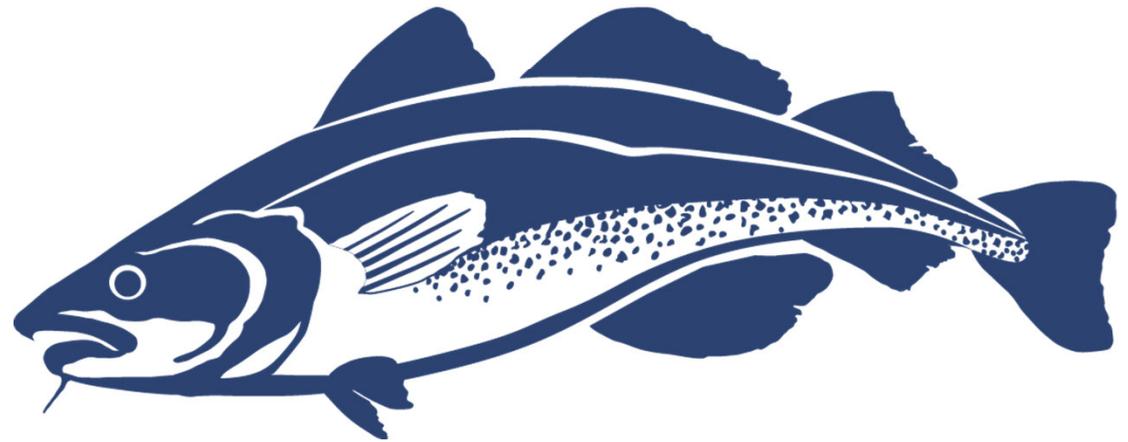
MLA Annual Weekend – February 1, 2025



Lobster
Permitting &
Statistics Update

Marine Fisheries

Commonwealth of Massachusetts



Online Permit Renewals Available!

System accepts credit cards and electronic checks

- Fees apply
 - CC: 2.59%
 - DC: 2.49%
 - ACH: \$0.35 flat fee
- Cannot accept credit cards in the office.

Phone help desk available daily

- 617-626-1520
- Operated by DMF Staff, not a call center
- Available during business hours Monday-Friday
- Not available on holidays/weekends

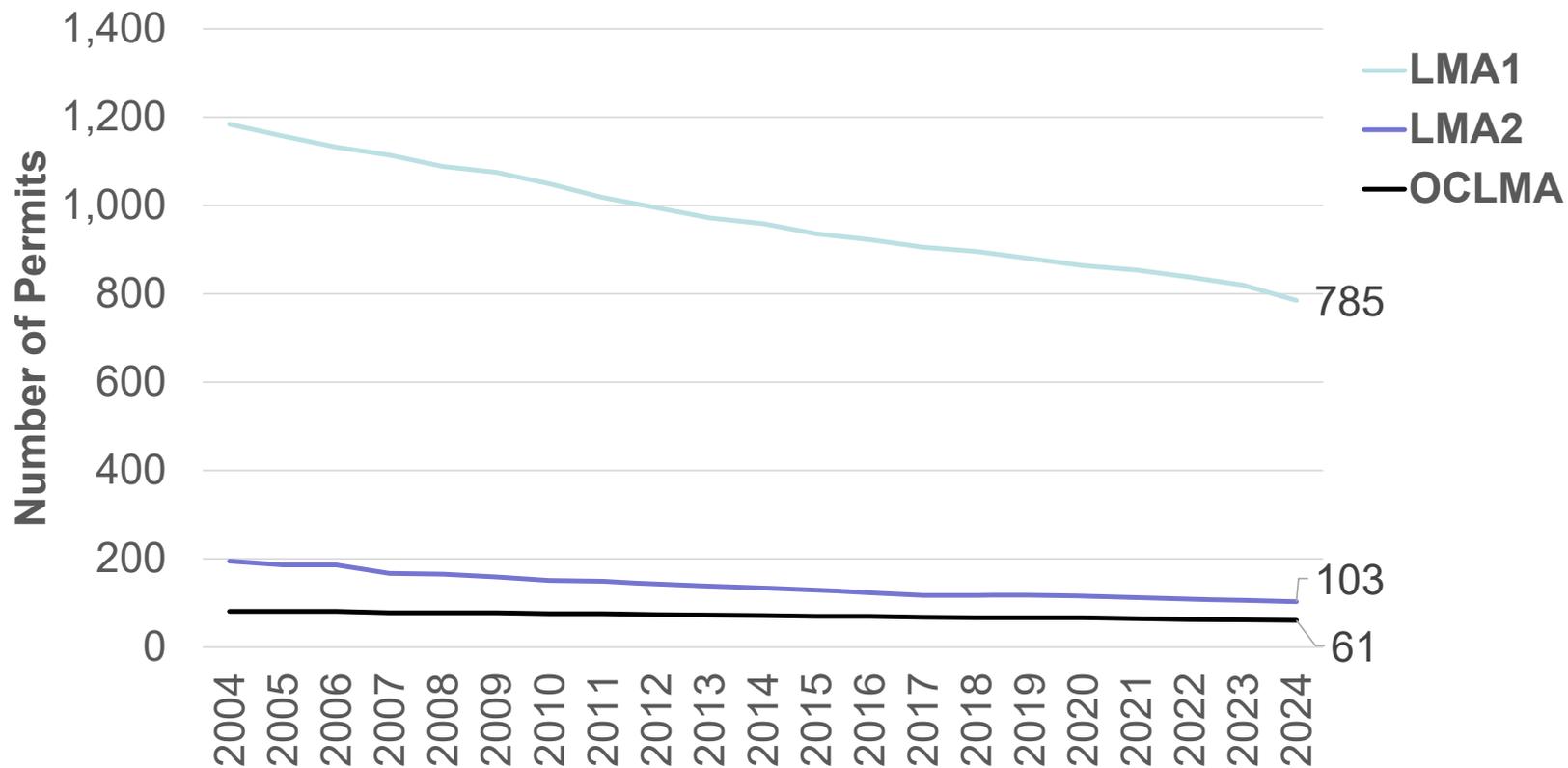
Webpage on how-to renew or apply for permits online

- Computer or tablet recommended over a phone.
- Linked from the commercial & dealer permit application sites
- Includes a series of pdf help guides (English only currently but will have other languages)



Coastal Lobster Permit Trend

Coastal Lobster Permits Issued by LMA



Data Source: Massachusetts permit data, as of January 2025.



February 3, 2025

Division of Marine Fisheries

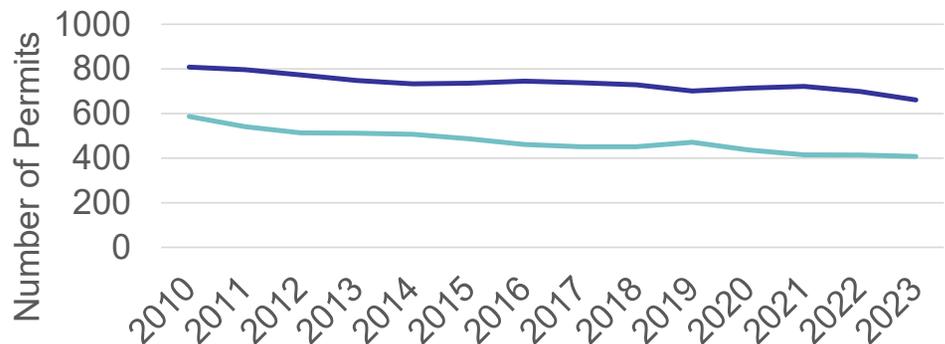
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Marine Fisheries
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

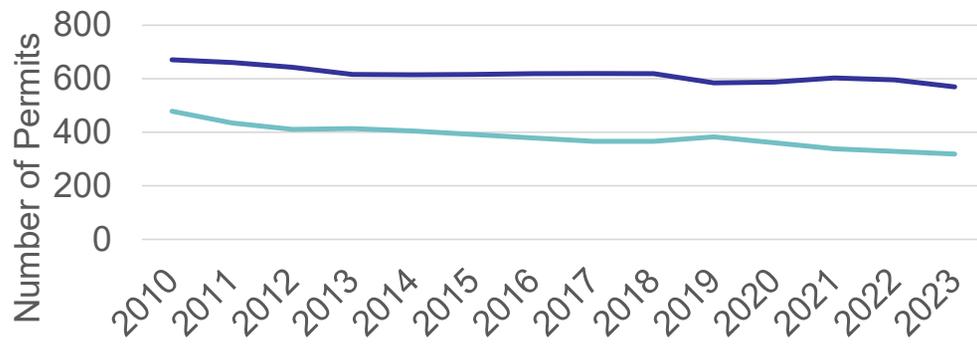


Coastal Lobster + Seasonal Lobster Permits & Activity Status by LMA

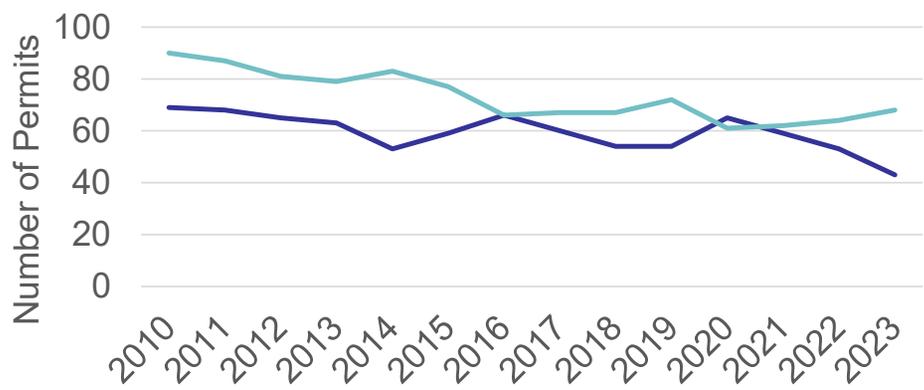
Total Permits



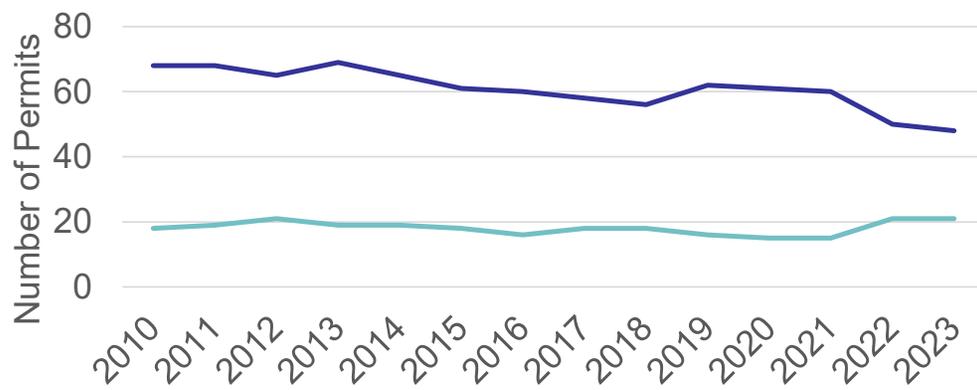
LMA1



LMA2



OCCLMA



— Active — Latent

Data Source: Massachusetts trip-level reports, federal vessel trip reports, & permit data, as of January 2025. In any given year, active means a permit holder fished lobster traps during at least one trip.



Coastal Lobster + Seasonal Lobster Permits & Activity Status by LMA

Active Status	LMA	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Active	LMA1	671	661	643	616	615	616	619	620	619	585	588	603	596	570
	LMA2	69	68	65	63	53	59	66	60	54	54	65	59	53	43
	OCLMA	68	68	65	69	65	61	60	58	56	62	61	60	50	48
Latent	LMA1	479	435	411	414	405	392	379	366	366	383	361	338	329	319
	LMA2	90	87	81	79	83	77	66	67	67	72	61	62	64	68
	OCLMA	18	19	21	19	19	18	16	18	18	16	15	15	21	21
Total Issued	Active	808	797	773	748	733	736	745	738	729	701	714	722	699	661
	Latent	587	541	513	512	507	487	461	451	451	471	437	415	414	408

Data Source: Massachusetts trip-level reports, federal vessel trip reports, & permit data, as of January 2025. In any given year, active means a permit holder fished lobster traps during at least one trip.



February 3, 2025

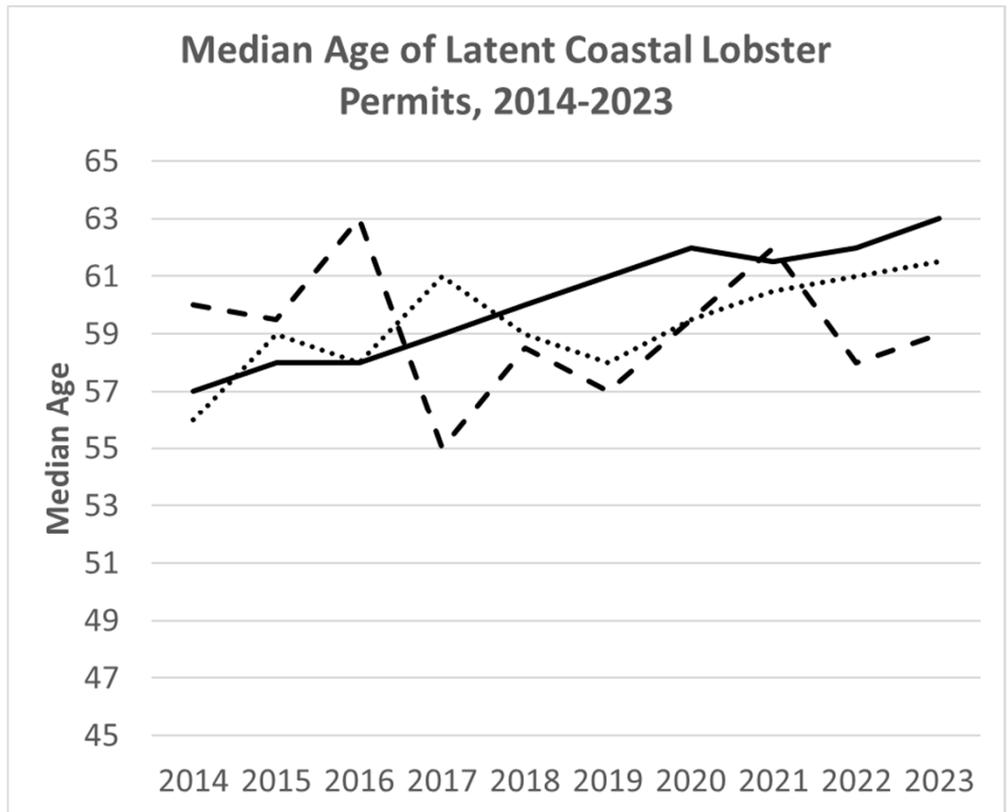
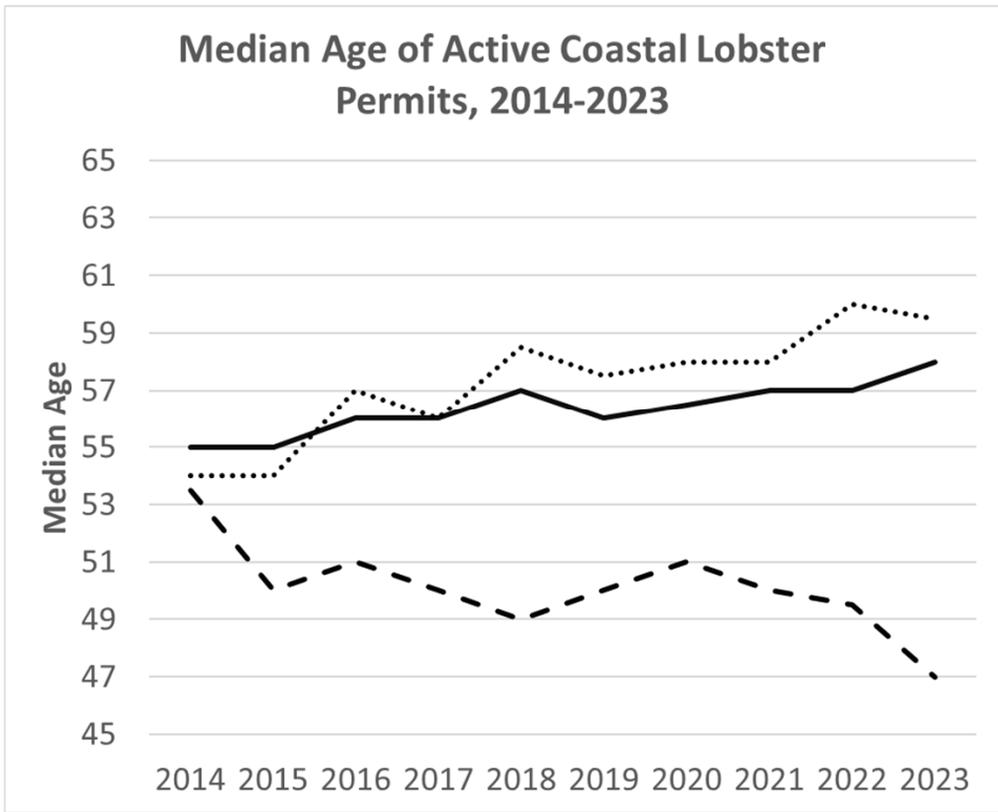
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Marine Fisheries
Commonwealth of Massachusetts



Coastal Lobster Permits, Median Age, & Activity Status by LMA



— LMA1 LMA2 - - OCLMA

Data Source: Massachusetts trip-level reports, federal vessel trip reports, & permit data, as of January 2025. In any given year, active means a permit holder fished lobster traps during at least one trip.

Transfer Updates

24 total Coastal Lobster permit transfers in 2024

- 8 of these were immediate family member transfers

Coastal Lobster Permit Transfer Bundle

- Sea Bass, Fluke, Tautog, and Horseshoe Crab endorsements may be transferred as a package regardless of individual activity levels provided the Coastal Lobster permit has been actively fished.

Relaxed Rod & Reel Fluke, Sea Bass, and Tautog Actively Fished Criteria

- Endorsement must have been actively fished in 2 of the past 5 years.
- Two or three of these endorsements may be transferred as a bundle provided that at least one meets the actively fished criteria.



2025 Lobster Trap Tags

Changes

- No 10% extra for LMAs 1 & 3
- If you need extra tags due to gear loss during the year, fill-out DMF's Gear Conflict/Loss form on the website and submit

Trap Tag Order Forms

- Mailed in early January
- Cambridge Security Seals has shipped 136 orders through yesterday
- 315 orders have been received through January 30th.
- Up to 12 week delivery time
- Contact Kerry Allard (Kerry.allard@mass.gov) with any questions



LMA1 Coastal Lobster Permits & Trap Tags Ordered

Tags Ordered	% of Active Permit Holders	% of Latent Permit Holders
880 Tags	70%	21%
>700 Tags	78%	26%
Between 1 and 400 Tags	13%	18%
0 Tags	n/a	54%

- Among Active harvesters who do not order 880 tags (pre-2025), most order some multiple of 100.
- Around 20 active harvesters order tags in each 100-count bin between 1 and 600 tags.
- Very few harvesters order between 601 and 799 tags.

Data Source: Massachusetts trip-level reports, federal vessel trip reports, & permit data, as of March 2024. In any given year, active means a permit holder fished lobster traps during at least one trip.

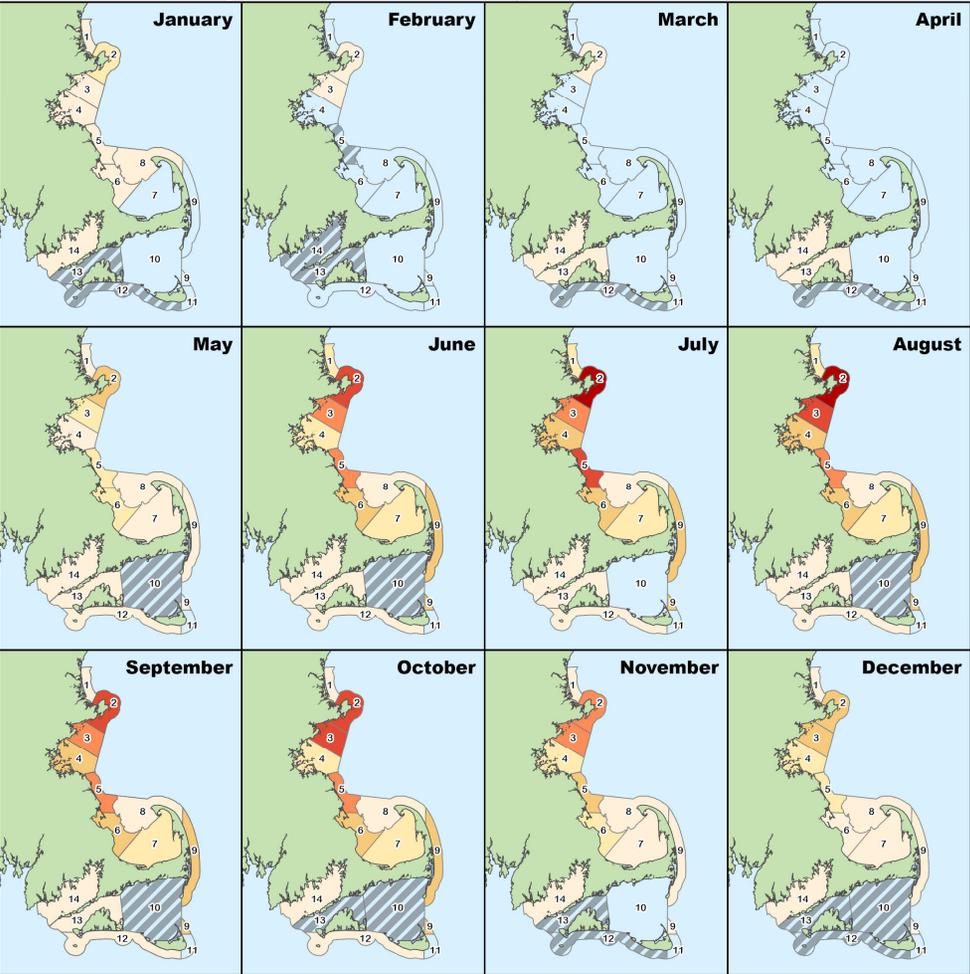


2025 Trip-Level Reporting Notes

- As of April 1, 2024, all federally permitted lobster vessels must report via electronic federal vessel trip reports.
 - Port agents are available for assistance (they are at this show!).
 - [Vessel Trip Reporting in the Greater Atlantic Region | NOAA Fisheries](#)
- Any state-only permit holder with the menhaden or either horseshoe crab endorsement must report electronically daily regardless of target species/gear type.
 - Reporting rules generally mimic federal VTR rules.
 - An appeal process is available to either move the endorsement to a holding permit if you do not intend to fish the endorsement or to exempt the electronic portion of the requirement with a documented hardship.
 - Those exempted from electronic reporting must keep copies of paper reports on board and submit forms to DMF weekly.
- 100% electronic reporting is expected for 2027, stay tuned for more information this summer.



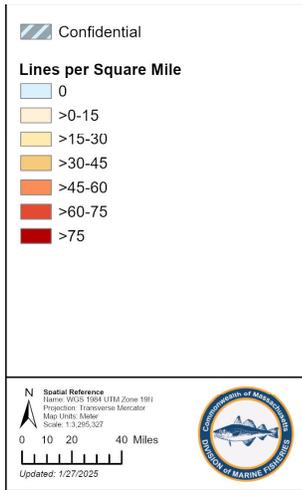
2022 Lobster Trap Vertical Line Density



Vertical Lines Summary

Total MA Lobster Pot Vertical Lines by LMA, 2018-2023

LMA	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
LMA1	60,776	58,982	54,657	55,535	56,359	54,592
LMA2	6,188	6,162	5,665	4,722	3,977	3,471
LMA3	1,714	1,883	1,743	1,829	1,944	2,019
OCCLMA	13,449	13,041	11,917	10,999	10,096	8,710
Total	82,127	80,068	73,982	73,085	72,376	68,792



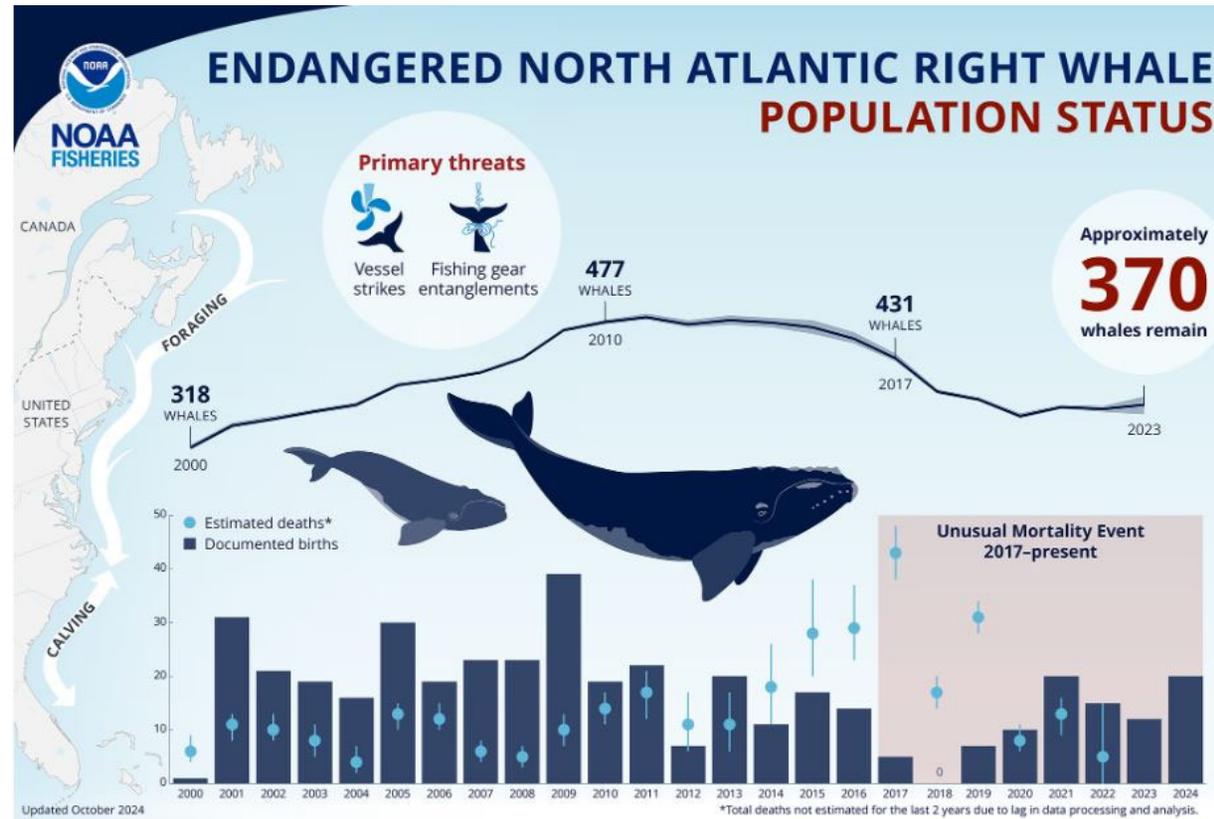
- The MRA opened to trap fishing on May 16 in 2022.
- 2023 density figure is not yet available.
- Table references total lobster vertical lines by year and LMA. 2023 is preliminary.

Data source: Massachusetts monthly harvester reports, federal VTRs, and annual supplemental reports with data as of September 2023. 2022 density plot is not yet available.



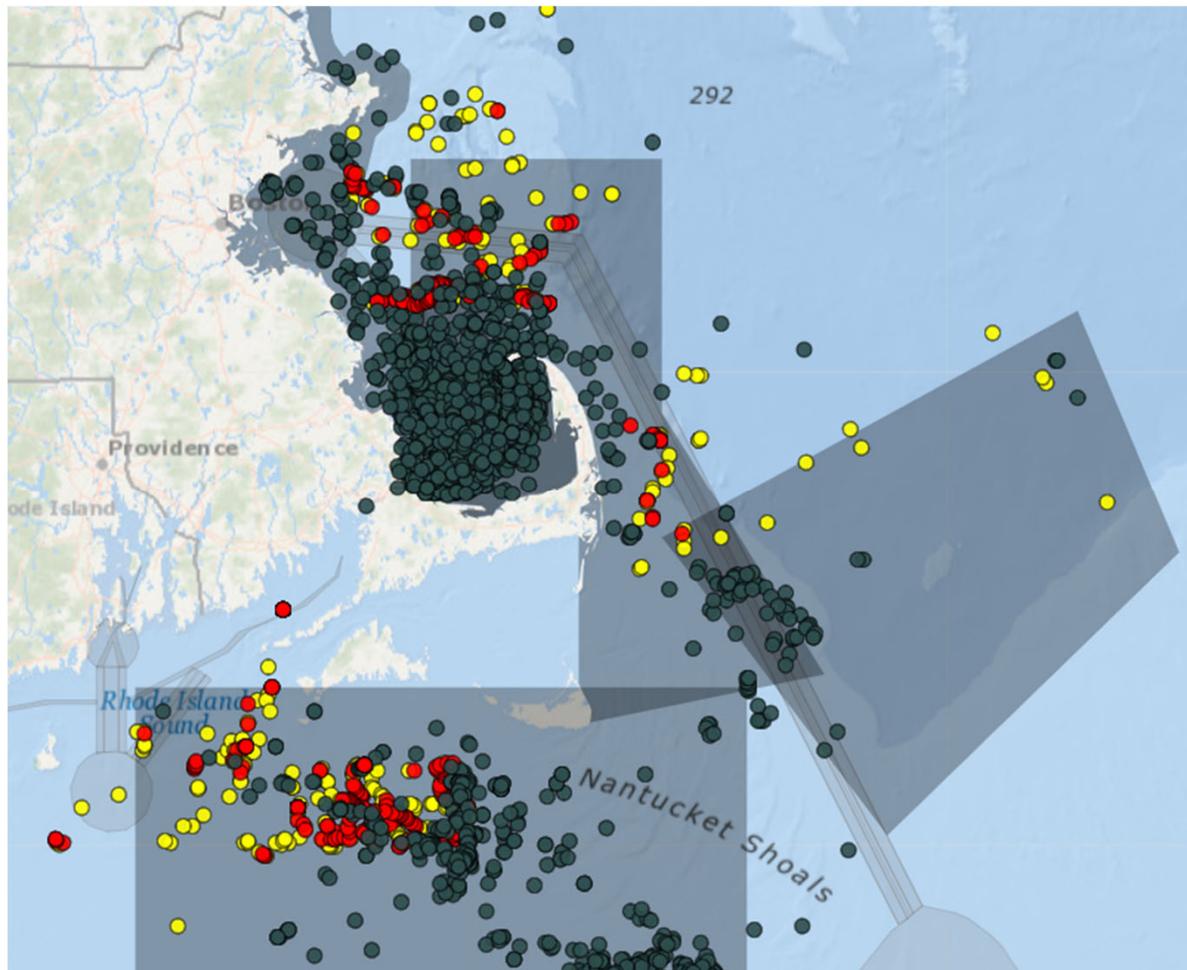
Right Whale Population Update

- Right whale population estimate approx. 370 individuals in 2023.
- Increase from 356 individuals in 2022.
- Sharp population decline since 2010 has slowed, due to lower mortality rates and higher birth rates.
- Entanglements and ship strikes continue to impact RWs at higher than allowed rates.
- 20 calves born in 2024 but 5 of them died or missing/presumed dead.



Right Whale Visual Sightings and Acoustic Detections

Feb 1 – May 15 for 2022, 2023 and 2024



Take Reduction Team next steps and schedule

- Pause on new rules until Dec 2028.
- Implementation timeline calls for vote on recommendations at Feb 2026 meeting.
- Scoping in 2025 and two TRT meetings (April and Nov).
- Potentially less severe risk reduction needed due to RW population changes.

2025	2026	2027 and Beyond
<p>January -April 90 Day Scoping Period</p> <p>March Updated DST fishery layer Fishery layers updated with data through 2023</p> <p>March 18-19 Team Meeting (in-person**) Purpose: Provide members with TRT process training/refresher and information on updated DST</p> <p>Summer Updated Whale Layer in DST Whale layer data to incorporate sightings through summer 2023</p> <p>Summer Webinars TBD Purpose: Provide members with the latest information on the DST, population, risk reduction targets, etc.</p> <p>Nov 17-20 Team Meeting (in-person**) Purpose: Preliminary package development</p>	<p>February Team Meeting (in-person**) Purpose: Develop and vote on recommendations</p> <p>TBD Updated DST Lobster/Jonah crab fishery layer Fishery layers expected to be updated with electronic vessel tracking data for federally permitted lobster vessels as it becomes available</p> <p>** Locations of in-person meetings TBD, but likely Providence, RI</p>	<p>Late 2026/Early 2027 Proposed Rule</p> <p>Public Comment Period</p> <p>Late 2027/Early 2028 Final Rule</p> <p>December 31, 2028 Final Rule effective</p>



On-Demand Gear Grant Program

- DMF recently implemented a grant program for fixed gear and mobile gear fishers to invest in equipment related to on-demand (“ropeless”) fishing.
- Up to \$25,000 reimbursement for fixed gear fishers and up to \$6,000 for mobile gear.
- Cover costs including:
 - On-demand fishing gear
 - Equipment to signal on-demand gear (through hull transducer)
 - Satellite services needed to provide on-demand gear locations
 - Devices or software to receive and display on-demand data
- To date, 4 fixed gear fishers and 1 mobile gear fish have applied.
- Funding will also be available for the program in 2026.
- To date, 26 fixed gear permit holders have received LOAs from DMF to conduct on-demand fishing in certain portions of state waters.



Derelict Gear Removal

- Collaborate with MEP and contracted commercial vessels to remove lost or abandoned fixed gear.
- Monitoring for compliance with gear marking and weak rope requirements too.
- Removal trips start Feb 1
- Change to statute language means any gear left in the closure can be considered derelict and disposed of.



2024 Observations

- Overall compliance with gear marking and weak inserts around 75%
- Around 80% of traps were commercial

Adjudicatory Hearings

- *Matter of Chaprales* – Incident involved trap limit and trap tag violations. Permit holder was found to have cut up and sunk gear in Cape Cod Bay. DMF reached a settlement agreement that required the permit be forfeited. Tangential family permit involved was renewed with reduced trap allocation and condition that the violator not be on the vessel when commercial fishing is occurring.
- *Matter of Edwards* – Incident involved individual's failure to comply with prior settlement agreement that involved gear hauled-out by November 30. DMF reached a settlement agreement that allowed the permit holder to transfer out of the fishery and permanently forfeit privilege to commercial fish.
- *Matter of Nee* – Incident involved individual's failure to comply with trap gear closure. DMF reached a settlement agreement that placed permit holder on final probation, reduced trap limit to 200, and mandated removal of gear by October 31 for 3-year period (2024-2026).
- Hold on reissuance of a single recreational fishing permit for prior violations of gear marking, trap limit and buoy line rules. DMF intends to deny permit reissuance.
- Individuals who remain non-compliant with vessel tracker requirement may face administrative proceedings.



Landing of Trawler Caught Lobsters in Massachusetts

Existing Rules

- No retention of lobster by trawlers in state waters but may retain and land lobsters caught in federal waters with Offshore Non-Trap Lobster Permit.
- Offshore Non-Trap Lobster Permit holders must annually declare the various LMAs they intend to fish in any year.
- Must comply with the most restrictive minimum and maximum size and v-notch rules for the various LMAs declared, not the LMAs fished on a trip.
- May retain 100 lobsters per 24-hour day provided no more than 500 lobsters are landed on any trip that exceeds 96 hours.
- May not land lobsters from 8PM to 6AM from February 1 – April 30.

Concerns

- Continued non-compliance with annual declaration and most restrictive rule requirement.
- Trawler catch of lobsters is directed catch not an incidental catch, stretching definition of bycatch.
- Complaints related to high grading, trip limit non-compliance, and landing lobsters multiple times on a single groundfish trip.
- Trawler catch occurs during winter when price is high and trap gear closure is in effect.



Landing of Trawler Caught Lobsters in Massachusetts

DMF Analysis

- ~14-day groundfish trips do include multiple 5-day plus sub trips where lobsters are targeted and offloaded. This is allowed under federal rules.
- NEFOP data suggests groundfish tows produce a small amount of incidental lobster catch, but there are tows where lobster are targeted (e.g., east of Provincetown and Georges Bank). Targeted lobster tows generally occur outside of trap gear closure area.
- When lobsters are targeted landings are generally around 1,500 – 2,000 pounds per five-day period. This indicates that large lobsters are being landed. NEFOP data does not suggest discarding or high grading is occurring at a significant level.
- Enforcement of daily limit does not occur without an at-sea intercept or at landing if a trip is cut short. Trip limit compliance also difficult to monitor through SAFIS reports given trip limit is in count and landings are reported in pounds.
- Lobster has become an increasingly important component of trawler income, but trawler landings of lobster remain ~5% of total lobster landings (through 2023).

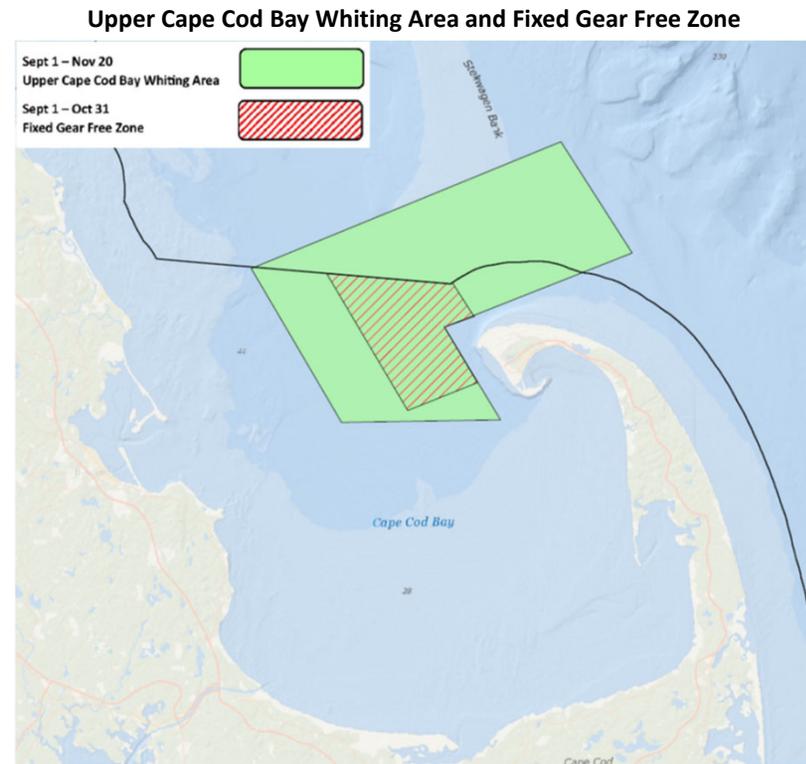
Consideration

- DMF has interest amending interstate FMP to adjust how the lobster catch limit for trawlers applies, particularly moving to a poundage rule rather than a count rule. Strong preference to accomplish any change through FMP to prevent “squeezing the balloon”.



Upper Cape Cod Bay Whiting Area and Fixed Gear Free Zone

- In late 1990s changes were made to federal multi-species FMP that restricted small mesh trawl fishing to address groundfish bycatch issues
- In response NOAA and DMF develop the Upper cape Cod Bay Whiting Area to provide trawlers seasonal (September 1 – November 20) access to whiting using small-mesh raised foot rope trawls.
- Fixed gear free zone was implemented in 2000 response to proliferation of lobster traps in area that limited trawlers access.
- Rule pre-dated seasonal lobster trap closure to protect right whales.
- Activity in whiting fishery has waned, but several (5-11) vessels are still active and utilize the area.



Potential for One-Time Permit Trade In – CLP for OLP

- Owner-operator rule in the lobster fishery applies to the permit. Therefore, for a vessel to possess and land catch taken under the authority of the Coastal Lobster Permit the named permit holder must be onboard, regardless of whether the fishing was taking place in state or federal waters.
- Several Coastal Lobster Permit holders with a federal lobster trap permit have expressed interest in hiring a captain to run their lobster operation in federal waters but are constrained by the owner-operator requirement.
- To address this, DMF could consider a one-time trade-in to allow Coastal Lobster Permit holders with a federal lobster trap permit to forfeit their Coastal Lobster Permit in exchange for an Offshore Lobster Permit making the operation federal waters only.
- This would require a regulatory change but is something DMF could pursue for 2026.



Questions?