



# The Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association Annual Report 2025

# President's Letter from the Wheelhouse



For more than sixty-three years, the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association (MLA) has worked to protect the livelihood of commercial lobster fishermen across the Commonwealth. The mission of this Association has always been clear: the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association is a member-driven organization that recognizes and supports the interdependence of species conservation and the collective economic interests of our members. In 2025, that mission has never been more important.

Over the past year, one of the MLA's highest priorities has been our continued effort to stop federal funding for ropeless fishing mandates that threaten the economic survival of our industry. While new technologies may have a role in the future, ropeless fishing remains prohibitively expensive, operationally unrealistic, and unproven for large-scale commercial use. For many fishermen, the cost of converting to ropeless systems could exceed the value of their vessel and gear. The MLA has worked aggressively with policymakers, regulators, and industry partners to make clear that forcing this technology on working fishermen would devastate coastal communities and family businesses across Massachusetts.

We have continued pressing federal decision-makers to ensure that taxpayer dollars are not used to advance policies that would effectively remove traditional fixed-gear fishermen from the water. Sound management must be grounded in practical experience, economic reality, and credible science. The MLA will continue to stand firmly against regulations that place unnecessary and unrealistic burdens on our fleet.

At the same time, the Association has placed renewed emphasis on strengthening the lobster market and improving dockside prices for fishermen. Market volatility, rising operating costs, and global competition continue to challenge the economic stability of our industry. The MLA has been working with dealers, distributors, industry partners, and policymakers to promote the value of Massachusetts lobster, expand market opportunities, and support efforts that help ensure fishermen receive fair and sustainable prices for their catch.

The Association also continues to represent members through ongoing engagement with federal and state fisheries managers, legislative leaders, and regulatory agencies. Our advocacy work covers a wide range of issues, including fisheries regulations, offshore development impacts, marine spatial planning, and the long-term sustainability of the Gulf of Maine ecosystem. These efforts ensure that the voices of Massachusetts lobstermen are heard wherever decisions affecting our industry are made.

Equally important are the programs and services that support our members directly. The MLA continues to operate our long-standing boat insurance program, provide regulatory guidance and industry updates, and maintain active communication with fishermen across every port in the Commonwealth. The staff in the MLA office work tirelessly on behalf of our membership, and I thank them for their dedication and professionalism.

Our members—including commercial fishermen, marine supply companies, bait dealers, lobster dealers, and other industry partners—remain essential to the strength of the Massachusetts lobster industry. These businesses supply the equipment that keeps our boats working and help bring our catch to market. Their partnership and continued support play a critical role in sustaining our fishing communities.

Serving as President of the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association has been one of the greatest honors of my career. I have had the privilege of working alongside an outstanding group of MLA officers, Executive Committee members, our Executive Director, and our Area Delegates. Their commitment, experience, and leadership have been vital in guiding the Association through a period of significant regulatory and economic challenges.

The road ahead will not be without obstacles. The lobster industry continues to face uncertainty—from regulatory pressures and offshore development to shifting markets and environmental change. However, the resilience of Massachusetts fishermen has always been the foundation of this industry, and your Association will continue to work every day to protect that future. For more than sixty-three years, the MLA has stood alongside Massachusetts fishermen, and we remain committed to carrying that legacy forward for the next generation.

The Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association remains committed to defending the interests of our members, strengthening the lobster market, and ensuring that commercial lobstering continues to thrive along our coast for generations to come.

Thank you for your continued support of the MLA, and for the hard work each of you put into sustaining this proud industry.

**Best regards,  
Sooky Sawyer  
President, Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association**

# Securing the Future of the Lobster Fishery

One of the primary goals of the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association (MLA) is to ensure that commercial fishermen—especially lobstermen—can continue harvesting seafood for generations to come. The organization works to balance economic livelihoods with the long-term sustainability of marine ecosystems.

Fisheries around the world face challenges such as overfishing, climate change, habitat loss, and increasing regulatory pressures. In response, governments and international organizations have introduced programs to reduce harvest levels and limit the number of fishing vessels operating in certain fisheries, particularly those considered "overcapitalized," where fishing capacity exceeds what fish populations can sustain.

While these measures aim to protect marine resources, they can also threaten the livelihoods of fishing communities. The MLA advocates for policies that protect lobster populations while preserving fishermen's ability to operate viable businesses. By promoting balanced regulations and responsible fishing practices, the MLA works to protect both the resource and the coastal communities that depend on it.



# Advocacy in Action

The Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association (MLA) plays an important role in representing fishermen in government and regulatory meetings and discussions. Having a "seat at the table" means actively participating in meetings where decisions about fishing regulations, conservation measures, and industry policies are made.

The MLA works closely with the Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Commission, which develops and enforces fishing regulations in Massachusetts waters, ensuring the perspectives of commercial fishermen are considered before policies are finalized.

The Association also engages with regional and federal bodies such as the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Through these relationships, the MLA ensures that fishermen's experience and knowledge contribute to policy decisions. This ongoing engagement helps promote regulations that are practical, science-based, and fair to the fishing community.



# Educational Outreach

Educational outreach is an important goal of the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association (MLA). Through outreach, training, and information sharing, the organization helps everyone to stay informed about changing regulations and conservation practices. These programs help fishermen operate responsibly while protecting both the marine environment and the long-term future of the fishing industry.

Educational outreach is especially important because it connects fishermen, scientists, regulators, and the public. By sharing knowledge and experiences, these groups can work together to improve fishing practices and better understand the challenges facing marine resources. Outreach events such as workshops, community presentations, and industry meetings allow fishermen to learn about new research, updated regulations, and conservation of the resource that support sustainable fishing.



In addition, outreach programs help educate the public about the role of commercial fishing in coastal communities. They highlight how fishermen contribute to local economies, provide fresh seafood, and actively participate in conservation efforts. By increasing public awareness and understanding, these programs help build support for sustainable fisheries and responsible seafood harvesting.

Overall, participation in educational outreach programs and events helps strengthen the entire fishing industry. It promotes cooperation, improves safety and environmental stewardship, and ensures that the lobster industry remains sustainable and respected for generations to come.

# Advancing the Industry's Voice

In 2025, the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association (MLA) submitted a letter to Tom Cole, Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, expressing strong opposition to continued federal funding for on-demand (ropeless) fishing gear research. The MLA emphasized that federal investment in this technology lacks economic justification, operational feasibility, and accountability, and does not reflect the realities faced by working fishermen.

The MLA raised concerns that, despite years of federally funded research and pilot programs, on-demand gear has not demonstrated real-world viability, scalability, or enforceability in the dense fishing grounds of the Northeast. The MLA also highlighted the significant financial burden associated with conversion to this technology, citing a Massachusetts report estimating costs exceeding \$150 million in the first year alone—approximately \$200,000 per fisherman.

The MLA further noted that Massachusetts' lobster industry has already achieved an estimated 92 percent risk reduction for the North Atlantic right whale through existing conservation measures, including seasonal closures, weak-rope requirements, and gear marking. The Association urged Congress to end federal funding for on-demand gear research and instead prioritize proven conservation strategies that protect marine species while maintaining the economic stability of the domestic lobster industry.



## Lobster Management

Lobster management remains a critical issue for the future of the fishery, and the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association (MLA) remains actively engaged in the process. As regulators and scientists continue to evaluate the status of the lobster resource and consider potential management changes, the MLA will ensure the voices of Massachusetts lobstermen are represented in every discussion.

The MLA will continue working with state and regional partners, including the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, to advocate for science-based management that protects the resource while preserving the ability of fishermen to operate sustainable businesses. The MLA remains committed to defending the industry's interests and ensuring that future management decisions reflect both conservation goals and the realities of the working lobster fleet.



# Thank You to Our Officers, Board Members, Delegates, and Active Members



We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to our Officers, Board Members, Delegates, and all our Active Members for their continued dedication, leadership, and service. Your commitment, time, and hard work are the foundation of everything we accomplish as an organization.

Our Officers and Board Members provide the vision, guidance, and leadership that keep our mission moving forward. Our Delegates represent our collective voice with integrity and professionalism, ensuring that our interests and values are heard and respected. And to our Active Members—your participation, energy, and willingness to step up whenever needed are what truly make our organization strong.

Because of each of you, we can grow, support one another, and continue building a community that reflects our shared goals and values. Thank you for your dedication, your teamwork, and the pride you bring to this organization every day.

**For full list of MLA Officers and Delegates scan the QR code here:**



# How to Get Involved: Become a Delegate!

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Members who are interested in taking a more active role in the organization are encouraged to consider becoming a Delegate. Delegates play an important role by representing the voices, concerns, and ideas of our membership while helping guide decisions that shape the future of our organization.

Serving as a Delegate provides an opportunity to participate in meetings, contribute to discussions on important issues, and help ensure that the interests of our members are heard and represented. It is also a great way to build leadership experience and strengthen your connection with fellow members.

If you are interested in becoming a Delegate, we encourage you to speak with one of our Officers or Board Members to learn more about the process and upcoming opportunities to serve.



## Looking Ahead

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As we look to the year ahead, our organization remains committed to strong advocacy and responsible stewardship of the lobster industry and the waters we depend on. We will continue working to oppose and defund the implementation of on-demand gear requirements that threaten the safety, practicality, and economic viability of the lobster fishery.

At the same time, we will continue advocating for sound, science-based conservation management that protects both the lobster resource and the North Atlantic right whale while recognizing the long-standing sustainability practices of Massachusetts lobstermen.

Supporting the next generation of lobstermen will also remain a priority. By encouraging young fishermen, protecting working waterfronts, and ensuring that opportunities remain available for those entering the fishery, we can help preserve the future of our coastal communities and the traditions that define them.

Through collaboration, advocacy, and the continued engagement of our members, we will work together to ensure a strong and sustainable future for the lobster industry.

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