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Marine
Science
for Maine
People

Working Together for a Sustainable Future

Maine has the most valuable fishery on the East Coast. In 2001, Maine landed nearly 302 million pounds of commercial fishery products with a value of more than \$300 million. Many coastal Maine communities depend on commercial fishing for their livelihoods, as they have for generations. Maine Sea Grant's Marine Extension Team (MET), a collaboration of Sea Grant and University of Maine Cooperative Extension, works with the fishing industry and coastal communities on projects that promote sustainable fisheries.

Atlantic Halibut Studies

Atlantic halibut is one of the state's most prized seafood items. However, it was over-exploited at the end of the 19th century, and only a small fishery exists today along Maine's downeast coast. Very little biological information has been collected on Atlantic halibut stocks in the Gulf of Maine, which is needed for future fisheries management decisions. To provide this, the MET has been working with Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR), NOAA Fisheries, University of Maine, and participating fishermen to collect data on age, maturation, and abundance of halibut caught in state and federal waters along the Maine coast. MET staff helped to develop the data collection tools and methods and trained fishermen.

There are currently 100 fishermen participating in the program. They collect samples from their catch, record geographic and environmental information, and tag and release sub-legal halibut for future studies on growth and migration. The information gathered from the program has been used to formulate state rules

for the halibut fishery, such as those governing size limit, catch limit, and length of season.



Sea Urchin Management

With rapidly declining landings, the future of the commercial sea urchin fishery is in question. To reverse this decline, the DMR commissioner called for a reduction in landings by 25% for the 2001-2002 season. The Sea Urchin Zone Council (SUZC)—representing harvesters, dealers, processors and scientists—was charged with recommending regulations to accomplish this goal. MET staff, working with DMR and the SUZC, organized and facilitated a full-day meeting of 60 urchin harvesters, dealers, scientists, and regulators who recommended new regulations. Guided by the regulations, the SUZC decided on a more restrictive season and size limits. These changes in the regulations will hopefully begin a process of sustainable management of the fishery.

In April 2002, the MET organized and facilitated a one-day sea urchin summit to stimulate more innovative and effective urchin

management. Urchin fishermen, processors, scientists, and regulators came together to discuss new management actions. As a result, the sea urchin research funding process was revised and a decision was made to present research results in a new format that would be more useful in making management decisions.

Scallop Stock Enhancement

MET staff members have been heavily involved in several industry-led efforts to enhance sea scallop stocks off the coast of Maine. They helped to develop the technology for collecting, marking, and dispersing scallop seed; and worked with DMR divers to assess seeded areas. About 100 fishermen statewide are covered by the special licenses needed to collect scallop seed, with approximately half of them actively involved in setting spat collectors in the fall of 2001.



Clam Tenting

Although soft-shell clams represented only 5% of Maine's commercial fishery landings in 2001, they ranked third in value. Compared to the value of its landings, the soft-shell clam industry in Maine has had little research applied to the important problems of settlement, predation, and recruitment. In 2000, MET staff initiated a study using a technique known as "tenting" to capture juvenile soft-shell clam seed. Working with local industry members, researchers at Maine Maritime Academy, University of Maine at Machias, DMR, the Army Corps of Engineers, and riparian landowners, MET staff helped to install eight clam tents in a cove in the Damariscotta River. Analysis revealed that clam settlement had increased twenty to thirty times. Activities in 2001 and 2002 have continued to show the potential for the

Did You Know?...

The Maine Fishermen's Forum was initiated and organized in 1976 by Sea Grant-funded researchers. The Forum, the largest educational event of its kind in the nation, was a success and Sea Grant continued to run it until 1982. The commercial fishing industry assumed primary responsibility for sponsoring and organizing the Forum in 1983, and the Maine Fishermen's Forum was incorporated in 1984 as a nonprofit organization. The Forum has been held every year for 28 years.

A Sea Grant-supported marine economist at the University of Maine helped to establish a live fish display auction, which became the Portland Fish Exchange in 1986. The display auction eliminated historic price differentials between Maine and southern New England, dramatically increasing the landed value of fish and the amount of groundfish processing in the state. Portland went from being the fourth ranked groundfish port on the Atlantic coast to being the first, and the Portland Fish Exchange has been widely imitated in ports throughout the country.

technique, and several towns along the coast are now experimenting with spat collection for soft-shell clams.

Lobster Co-management

Lobster is Maine's most valuable fishery, with an estimated value of \$151 million in 2001. Under a recently instituted co-management program, lobstermen elect representatives to their districts and zone councils, which are tasked with making recommendations on new management regulations. The MET is working with DMR and the Maine lobster industry to help improve the participation in, and effectiveness of, the Lobster Zone Management process. MET staff members also have helped to facilitate meetings and they have assisted with administrative duties.