Successes and Challenges working with the Atlantic Large Whale TRT

Patrice McCarron
Maine Lobstermen’s Association
Challenging issue – Maine context

- Few lobstermen have ever seen a right whale
- Inshore – a lot of gear and few whales
- Offshore – little gear and more whales
- Gulf of Maine is warming, whale patterns changing

- Little is known about entanglements in fishing gear:
  - Which fishery
  - Where it happens (country, state, region)
  - Which gear component
  - How whale gets entangled
Challenging Issue

• Regulated community
  – feel like they have everything to lose

• Management has a cost
  – no guarantee that measures will solve the problem
Maine Lobster Industry…. Billion + $ industry

- Maine coast is dependent upon lobstering
- Maine lobstermen live along 3,500+ mile coastline in small, rural communities
- Our communities are located on remote peninsulas and 15 year-round islands
Maine Lobster Fishery at a Glance

- 2014 landings 124 million lbs valued at $457 M
- 4,300 active lobster licenses
  - 80% of lobstermen fish only in state waters
  - Federal permit required to fish offshore
- ~2.4 million trap tags associated with landings
  - Max limit of 800 traps (or less)
Challenging Culture

- Proud stewards of the resource
  - many do not believe there is a problem
- Many do not trust government or science
- Coast, bathymetry and fishery vary widely

- Fishing styles and conditions vary significantly along the coast
  - Vessel size, # of traps, gear configuration, age, inshore vs offshore, etc.
- Lobstermen don’t like change, period
- Maine lobstermen don’t agree
  - no single solution will work in Maine
Tools of the Fishery
ZONE A OFFSHORE
3-15 Traps Per Trawl*

*Anchors not used in Western Zone A.
Bullet Buoy (5x 11”)

Polyball
Weak Link
Sink Line
Splice
Float Line
Trap Weight: 40-65 lbs.
Bridle
Gangion
Sinking Groundline
Knot (Double Bowline)

Anchor Weight: 25-100 lbs.

Ave. length of vertical line is 90-120 Fa

Ave. 10 Fa
Overarching Challenges

• It’s a challenging issue to solve, regardless of which management process
• Mandate is difficult
  – Is it achievable with right whales?
• Inadequate data to inform the process

Dwight Carver, Beals Island lobsterman, TRT member
Challenges with TRT

- Atlantic Large Whale Team is very large
- Covers large geographic area and many different fisheries
- TRT members have diverse constituencies
- It requires compromise

Maine TRT members, Lobstermen Jim Tripp and Dwight Carver
Challenges with TRT

• Process is intimidating for fishing community
• A lot of technical science and policy information
• Many TRT members are experts in their field
• Requires compromise; you can’t get what you want

Stevie Robbins III, Stonington lobsterman, TRT member
Successes with TRT

- Tremendous progress has been made
- Right whale population is growing
- Management measures in place for ground and vertical lines, gear marking
- Process has been responsive and become more flexible

Pat While, York lobsterman, former TRT member
Successes with TRT

• Leadership is essential
  – TRT members must be able to represent constituency and negotiate

• NMFS staff are very accessible and responsive

• Facilitators ensure that all have an equal voice

Jim Tripp (left), Spruce Head lobsterman and TRT member
Successes with the TRT

• Realistic expectations
  – timeframe for rule development
  – monitoring plan to guide next steps

• Large group size provides perspective
  – i.e., gear marking

• Finding compromise and consensus can be rewarding
Successes with the TRT

• Flexibility
  – Good balance of formal meeting time and downtime to caucus
  – Creation of subgroups and working groups
  – Create management measures by area
  – Create a process to make changes to rules

Mike Myrick, Cushing lobsterman, former TRT member
Thank you