

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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REPORT OF THE LEGISLATIVE LOBSTER
STUDY COMMITTEE CREATED BY THE
102ND LEGISLATURE SP 494 TO "STUDY
AND INVESTIGATE THE MANAGEMENT AND
PROTECTION OF THE LOBSTER INDUSTRY
IN THE STATE OF MAINE", AND REPORT
ITS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

Chairman - Senator Philip L. Jutras
Senator Richard C. Moore
Senator Richard W. Glass

Vice Chairman - Rep. Charles R. Lowery
Rep. Kenneth A. Mills
Rep. Camille L. V. Bedard
Rep. Charles A. Mitchell
Rep. Byron P. Young
Rep. Sanford J. Prince, Jr.
Rep. Robert L. Watts, Sr.
Ronald W. Green, Commissioner
Department Sea & Shore Fisheries

REPORT TO THE 103RD LEGISLATURE BY THE INTERIM
LEGISLATIVE LOBSTER STUDY COMMITTEE

Introduction

In accordance with a directive of the 102nd Legislature, all members of the Joint Legislative Committee of Sea and Shore Fisheries, together with the Commissioner of Sea and Shore Fisheries, have served as an Interim Legislative Lobster Study Committee to "study and investigate the management and protection of the lobster industry in the State of Maine."

To discharge this responsibility, the Committee has conducted a series of informal meetings with members of the Maine lobster industry. Meetings were held as follows: Boothbay Harbor, August, 1965; Machias, November, 1965; Ellsworth, January, 1966; Rockland, March, 1966; Brunswick, March, 1966; Wells, April, 1966; Boothbay Harbor, July, 1966 (executive session); and two final meetings in Augusta in October and November of 1966 in order to draft this report.

During the course of its study and investigation, the Committee was made aware of the vast potential of the sea which is at Maine's doorstep, the tremendous importance of the entire commercial fishing industry to the economy of the state, and the vital significance of the lobster industry to the over-all prosperity of the commercial fisheries. The Committee believes that no state has a sea coast which can match Maine's in beauty, variety and length, and it further believes that no effort should be spared by State Government to protect and to develop this great resource.

Finally, the Committee would like to point out the unusual, if not unique, composition of this investigative body, made up as it is of members of both the legislative and the executive branches of government. This has been an especially valuable and effective arrangement -- one which, it is believed, should be used to good advantage in the future.

Findings and Recommendations

After a thorough and detailed study of the problems of the Maine lobster industry, the Committee believes that the general economic health of the industry is good and that the product -- the Maine lobster -- thanks to a long-range program of publicity and promotion, now enjoys a world-wide reputation as the most delicious of all seafoods.

The industry recognizes the increase in fishing effort and feels, with present knowledge of the present resource, that any increase in fishing effort could not be economically justified. The industry, in fact, recommended limiting fishing efforts and that consideration be given to (a) a limit on fishing time; (b) a limit on the number of fishermen; or (c) some combination of the two. The Committee, however, feels that this cannot be accomplished by simply trying to limit the number of traps each fisherman is allowed to fish.

The Committee recommends that future legislation consider, first, the full time lobster fisherman, with his investment. Lobsters, being the livelihood of hundreds of Maine citizens, should not be legislated into the hands of the non-commercial and/or sports fishermen until such quantities are in the excess of commercial demands.

The Committee also believes that many worthwhile proposals as to the design of gear and methods of fishing may better be handled through educational and informational programs carried on by the Department of Sea and Shore Fisheries, rather than by the passage of restrictive laws.

It is further recommended:

1. That the Legislature make every effort to support the Department of Sea and Shore Fisheries expanded research, development, promotional, and enforcement programs.
2. That the Legislature and the entire State make every effort to participate fully in future oceanographic developments, and that the Department of Sea and Shore Fisheries, because of its proven research competence, be given a vital role to play in this development, since the state's marine fisheries and related plant and animal species are an important segment of the total undersea resource.
3. That the Legislature provide support at the State level for the new Federal Anadromous Fish Act, since development of the alewife fishery in particular could mean a valuable source of bait for the lobster industry.

Finally, the Committee would like to go on record as recognizing the importance of the lobster research programs currently being carried on by the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. It also recognizes that the new State-Federal matching fund programs for research and resource development and promotion and marketing under Public Law 88-309 are of great value to the State and to the commercial fishing industry. It is believed that these State and Federal projects will

eventually provide many of the answers which are not presently available regarding sound conservation practices for the future.

Conclusion

The sea is a vast and for the most part an unknown world. Until more knowledge is available, it is difficult indeed for men to come up with meaningful solutions to the problems posed by creatures who inhabit these mysterious depths. This Committee does not pretend that it has, or that it ever could, solve all of the problems of the Maine lobster industry. This pilot report, affecting the management and protection of the lobster industry, must be of necessity broad and general in its scope and objective. Future reports could be specific as State and Federal research and sub-studies from and by local organizations engaged in the fishing industry are made available to a fact-finding body of this type. It does believe, however, that this study is at least a sound and worthwhile beginning and that, through continued cooperation between government and industry, genuine and substantial progress will be made in the years ahead.

MINORITY REPORT
filed by
RICHARD W. GLASS
BELFAST

JANUARY 1967

MINORITY REPORT TO THE 103RD LEGISLATURE BY
THE INTERIM LEGISLATIVE LOBSTER STUDY COMMITTEE

Statement

The Joint Legislative Committee on Sea and Shore Fisheries with the Commissioner of Sea and Shore Fisheries was established by the 102nd Legislature as an Interim Study Committee "To Study and investigate the management and protection of the lobster industry in the State of Maine".

This Committee was presumably created as the aftermath of the debate provoked by the introduction of H.P. 160, L.D. 334 - "An Act limiting the number of lobster traps per person". A divided report of the Committee on Sea and Shore Fisheries resulted in the indefinite postponement of the Bill. The legislation was originally introduced as a conservation measure, with the proponents relying to a great degree on certain statistics released by the Sea and Shore Fisheries Commission which purported to reflect an over-all annual decrease in the harvest of lobsters despite a continuing annual increase in the number of lobster licenses issued.

Findings

The Interim Committee conducted a series of public hearings which were geographically arranged along the Maine coast so as to reflect regional opinions of those engaged in commercial lobstering. As a result of these hearings, it became very apparent that there was a complete lack of consensus as regards any given recommendations. Certain proposed regulations receiving

favorable response in the more easterly coastal areas were not so favorably received in the southern coastal counties. As a result of this complete lack of unanimity, it became obvious to the minority that any proposed regulations must be enacted on a regional basis.

The minority of the Committee were impressed with the efforts of marine biologists in their search for scientific information regarding the lobster industry, specifically including the seed lobster program. Nevertheless, until such time as more scientific information is available, it is felt that no artificial methods of conservation such as closed seasons, limited licenses, or limitation of traps should be imposed.

The minority of the Committee also became aware that those statistics relied upon by the proponents of L.D. 334 introduced in the 102nd Legislature were not reliable in the sense that they reflected any alarming decrease in the over all catch. The only statistics available to the Sea and Shore Fisheries Department were obtained from the sole source open to them, which was commercial lobster pounds. Innumerable lobstermen conduct their own retail sales of lobsters and other shell fish and either keep no records or furnish none to the Department. It would be impossible to estimate the additional thousands of pounds annually harvested and sold in this manner, but it is believed that the sum total would create a far more favorable ratio between licenses issued and the poundage now reported as harvested by statistics used by the Commission.

Conclusion

The minority of the Committee recommend continued support of existing State and Federal projects designed to supplement scientific

study of the lobster industry, but also recommend that until such time as more scientific information is available, no attempt at artificial controls of the lobster industry that might endanger this segment of Maine's economy should be encouraged, and that no drastic legislation is either needed or desired by the Maine lobster industry at this time.

/s/ Richard W. Glass, Waldo
Senate Member
Interim Study Committee
102nd Legislature

Belfast, Maine
December 31, 1966