

LOBSTER AND JONAH CRAB – Vessel Monitoring Systems

What is being considered?

The Department would like to implement the provisions of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Addendum XXIX to Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Lobster and Addendum IV to the Jonah Crab Fishery Management Plan. The Addenda establish electronic tracking requirements for federally permitted vessels in the American lobster and Jonah crab fisheries, with the goal of collecting high-resolution spatial and temporal effort data to support several ongoing efforts. More information is available at the following website: https://asmfc.org/uploads/file/62473fb1pr10_LobsterAddXXIX_JonahCrabAddIV_TrackingApproval.pdf

Why is this change necessary?

The Board initiated the Addenda in August 2021 to address several challenges facing the fishery, including stock assessment limitations, protected species interactions, marine spatial planning efforts, and enforcement in federal waters. Given the critical need for enhanced spatial and temporal data in the offshore fishery to address these issues, the Addenda require federally permitted American lobster and Jonah crab vessels with commercial trap gear area permits to collect location data via an approved electronic tracking device. Specifically, electronic tracking devices for vessels with commercial trap gear area permits for Lobster Conservation Management Areas (LCMAs) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and Outer Cape Cod will be required. LCMA 6 (Long Island Sound). The Area 5 waiver permit, which allows Area 5 permit holders to target black sea bass with un-baited traps, is excluded from the tracking requirements.

The data collected through electronic tracking under the Addenda will significantly improve the stock assessment's ability to estimate exploitation and abundance for American lobster by providing size composition data at a finer resolution than what is currently available. Additionally, the models used to assess the location of vertical lines in the fishery and their associated risk to endangered right whales will be substantially improved, which could impact federal risk reduction requirements for the fishery. With a better understanding of the spatial footprint of the U.S. lobster and Jonah crab fisheries, managers will be better positioned to minimize and mitigate the impacts of other ocean uses, such as aquaculture, marine protected areas, and offshore energy development on the fisheries. Furthermore, vessel tracking data will enhance the efficiency and efficacy of offshore law enforcement efforts.

Who will this affect?

Commercial lobster and Jonah crab harvesters. The Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office will provide the states with American lobster-trap gear area permit ownership information, enabling states to contact permit holders and complete the installation certification process. If a vessel tracker is transferred between permit holders, states will instruct harvesters to contact tracking device vendors to complete the transfer of a vessel tracker.

When would this be effective?

The Department projects that this change could be effective in the winter of 2023-2024. However, the exact date cannot be determined. The Department will follow our normal proposal procedures if this concept moves forward.

Has this change been discussed with stakeholders?

These changes were discussed with stakeholders attending the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission meetings.