



Researching Lobster Health in Long Island Sound

New York Sea Grant hosted the second meeting in a series of Long Island Sound Lobster Health Symposia as part of Sea Grant's continued effort to support research into the causes of the mass lobster die-off that occurred in 1999. **Gordon Colvin** (pictured above), NYSDEC Marine Fisheries Bureau Director and member of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Lobster Management Board led the opening ceremony, and **Patricia Kurkul**, NMFS NE Regional Administrator, delivered the keynote address. This gathering was a textbook illustration of inter-agency cooperation through the *ad hoc* Steering Committee for Lobster Disease and Research that was appointed by the ASMFC, and is presently chaired by **Dr. Anthony Calabrese**, NMFS Milford Fisheries Laboratory.

An important goal of this meeting was to inform the participants about the general status of lobster health and the fishery in Long Island Sound, and report on planned research to investigate the causes of the lobster die-offs. This was also an opportunity for lobster fishers to voice concerns and comment on continued changes in the fishery.

Seventeen scientific research projects are being funded to determine possible adverse effects resulting from changes in lobster endocrine and immune systems, pesticide application, long term changes in environmental parameters including rising sea temperatures, reduced dissolved oxygen, and changes in the levels of ammonia and sulfide. Funds are also being used to continue research on the *Paramoeba* that was found in dead and dying lobsters in 1999. The incidence of shell disease in eastern LIS is of major concern to lobster fishers in those areas, and funds are also being directed to learn about the bacterial colonies associated with the disease.

The symposium participants were a virtual kaleidoscope of stakeholder groups in LIS, including lobster fishers, agency staff, researchers, lobster dealers, students and environmental advocates. The participants were asked to complete an evaluation sheet to help Sea Grant staff improve the meetings that are held in the future. Respondents were interested in the presentations dealing with anthropogenic and environmental impacts such as possible effects resulting from reductions in the water quality from sewage outfalls.



John Makowsky, formerly a lobsterman from Connecticut, raises a question.

Respondents were generally supportive of using a regional approach to study the 1999 lobster die-off, and suggested the coordinators incorporate national and international research supplemented with input from the industry. A regional approach will require participation from scientists and industry representatives based in Maine, Massachusetts, and Canada, since New York is the southern limit for American lobsters. Such an undertaking was initiated on the second day when the researchers met to discuss their work with the hope of applying techniques used in other geographic regions that experience similar problems.

Another suggestion was to include more discussions from lobster fishers at future meetings. This will be achieved by working with the lobster fisher associations to organize short forums as part of their regularly scheduled association events, with participation from the researchers. Visit www.nyseagrant.org for additional information or contact NYSG Extension at 631.727.3910.



Anthony Calabrese (foreground), chair of the lobster steering committee, Jack Mattice (hand raised), Director of NYSG and committee member, and Carl LoBue (far left with tie), NYSDEC Marine Resources' lobster specialist participated in the Lobster Health Symposium.

Photos by Jason Powers

— **Antoinette Clemetson**
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