

## Sea Grant's Long Island Sound Lobster Initiative

### Sea Grant Program Response to Long Island Sound Lobster Mortality and Shell Disease *A Status Report*

The lobster resources in Long Island Sound represent a bi-state fishery that supports a multi-million dollar industry. Mass mortality events and increase in the incidence of shell disease since 1998 have resulted in tremendous losses to fishers and all but curtailed fishing operations in western LI Sound in 1999. The Sea Grant Programs in Connecticut and New York are working with state regulatory agencies, universities, industry representatives and environmentalists to develop a strategic program of research to determine the causes of the abnormalities. Below are highlights of the actions undertaken since Fall 1998.

<b>Fall 1998</b>	1.	State agencies unable to substantiate reports of lobster mass mortalities in Long Island Sound.
<b>Summer 99</b>	2.	Normal season observed during the lobster fishing season.
<b>Fall 1999</b>	3.	State agencies receive numerous reports of dead and dying lobsters in late summer through to early fall. Noticeable decline in lobster landings from Western Long Island Sound; fishers operating in Central Long Island Sound report fewer lobsters; fishers in Eastern Long Island Sound report significant increase in the incidence of shell disease for the third consecutive year.
	4.	Anecdotal information is documented through a Mail Survey administered by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection in October (and again in January 2000).
	5.	Steady increase in lethargic, moribund and dead lobsters observed, accompanied by anecdotal reports of mortality of other marine life including blue crabs, rock crabs and sea urchins. University of Connecticut Pathology Department conducts analyses of tissue samples from dead lobsters. Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection conducts water sample analyses. Western Long Island Sound fall landings estimated to have declined by 90-100%; Central and Eastern Long Island Sound reported as much as 30% reduction in landings.
<b>Spring 2000</b>	6.	States of Connecticut and New York, through the Governors' Offices, submit documentation to Department of Commerce, requesting fishery disaster declaration.
	7.	Secretary of Commerce declares Long Island Sound lobster fishery a marine resource disaster, January 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2000.
	8.	Ad-hoc Planning Committee comprised of Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, New York State Department of Environmental Protection, NOAA, Environmental Protection Agency, State Sea Grant Programs, University of Connecticut, and State University of New York, is convened to develop a response strategy.

**For additional information, contact:**

**Antoinette Clemetson**, Lobster Extension Specialist, **New York Sea Grant Extension**  
Cornell U. Research/Ext. Center / 3059 Sound Avenue/ Riverhead, NY 11901-1098  
**Tel:** (631) 727-3910/ **Fax:** (631) 369-5944/ **E-Mail:** [sgriverh@cornell.edu](mailto:sgriverh@cornell.edu)



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<b>Spring 2000</b>	9.	Two-day Lobster Health Symposium is convened in Stamford in April; meeting served to synthesize status of knowledge on mass mortality, identified research priorities, and develop Plan of Action.
	10.	New York Sea Grant hosts Long Island Sound Lobster Symposium at SUNY Stony Brook in late April, in order to update fishers who were not in attendance at the Stamford meeting.
<b>Summer 2000</b>	11.	Ad-hoc Planning Committee prepared work plans to fulfill research priorities, and made request for federal disaster relief funds.
	12.	Sea Grant Programs/EPA/CTDEP provide funds to support small-scale investigations.
	13.	Trawl Survey for Spring/Summer Season was conducted by Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection; report issued in September 2000.
	14.	Congress approves \$13.9 million in economic assistance and research funds to address the lobster disaster as part of Emergency Military Spending Bill. Governor of Connecticut made additional \$1 million in bond commission funds available through Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Long Island Sound Research Fund, to support research initiatives.
<b>Fall 2000</b>	15.	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission moves to formally establish a Committee for Lobster Disease Research (i.e. Lobster Steering Committee) under the American Lobster Management Board. Members of the Committee were appointed by the Chair of the Lobster Management Board (Mr. Gordon Colvin).
	16.	Draft Spending Plan for \$6.6 million in research funds submitted to NOAA/NMFS for approval by federal agencies and Congressional Committees.
	17.	In late September, 2000, Sea Grant Programs and Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection issues a joint Request for Proposals (RFP) to encourage scientists to develop research proposals to investigate the mass mortalities and shell disease in Long Island Sound lobsters.
	18.	Sea Grant programs receive 50 Preliminary Research Proposals from the scientific community, by the due deadline (October 27 <sup>th</sup> , 2000).
	19.	Sea Grant programs invite 30 scientists to submit Full Proposals for consideration in the final phase of the RFP process; December 22, 2000 deadline issued.
<b>Spring 2001</b>	20.	Full Proposals subject to review process in January 2001. Peer review of each Full Proposal is being sought to facilitate next meeting of International Scientific Advisory Committee in mid-February, 2001, where Full Proposals will be ranked.
	21.	Lobster Disease Research Committee (Lobster Steering Committee) will meet during the third week in February 2001 to finalize funding decisions and projects to be funded. Contracts will be awarded to successful candidates in Spring 2001.
	22.	Second Lobster Health Symposium is slated for Spring 2001, to present an update on the trawl surveys, on-going investigations, and discuss the research projects that will be implemented in Summer 2001.

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