

RIGHT WHALE ENTANGLEMENT MAINE LOBSTER FISHERY OVERVIEW

The Maine Lobster industry is fully committed to protecting right whales. It has over 20 years of gear and fishery changes to limit the potential harm to the species, and the state has introduced recent initiatives focused on monitoring and on-demand gear testing. The death of the juvenile right whale is a tragedy no one in the industry wants to see.

SINCE 1997,

the industry has made substantial changes to reduce the risk to whales from lobster gear, including the removal of all float rope, marking all gear with a Maine-specific color, seasonal closures, and weakening all endlines. In 2023, the state launched a comprehensive program to collect robust data on the movement of right whales in the Gulf of Maine using acoustics and visual surveying. Regulations are also in place to track where and when lobstermen are fishing. The state has developed an on-demand gear library available for fishermen to test new types of fishing gear.

The industry has always been guided by its commitment to operate in the most sustainable, responsible way possible, protecting not only the lobster population but also the marine environment. While incidents remain rare, the industry continues to be committed to collaboration with regulators, scientists, and all stakeholders to protect right whales.



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FAQS



IS MAINE LOBSTER SUSTAINABLE?

Yes. For 150 years the Maine Lobster industry has worked tirelessly to protect the lobster population and larger marine environment. Maine lobstermen have a vested interest in sustainability, not only because they recognize that the future of their fishery depends on it, but because conservation is a core value of the fishery. Lobstering has sustained coastal communities for generations, and lobstermen know that being responsible stewards of the ecosystem is critical to success.

On top of historical sustainability measures like returning undersized and oversized lobsters to the water and notching the tails of egg-bearing females to protect them from harvest, lobstermen have worked for decades to make changes to equipment to make it safer for whales. This includes the removal of float rope, adding more traps to a trawl to reduce the amount of vertical rope in the water, adding weak links to gear to make it easier for a whale to break free should it become entangled, marking gear with Maine-specific colors, and complying with seasonal closures to fishing.



HOW CAN I ENSURE THE MAINE LOBSTER I'M BUYING IS HARVESTED WITH WHALE SAFE PRACTICES?

The lobster industry has developed whale safe practices over the last 25 years. They follow strict regulations to protect right whales, including using weakened ropes, adhering to seasonal closures, trawling up to reduce the amount of vertical rope in the water, and marking gear for accountability. Furthermore, the industry is fully compliant with the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act.



WHAT ACTION IS BEING TAKEN BY THE FISHERY AND STATE TO PREVENT ANY FUTURE ENTANGLEMENTS OR FATALITIES?

In 2023, the state increased monitoring of right whales, advanced testing of alternative gear, and improved the collection of fisheries data to ensure future regulations are as effective as possible in protecting whales.

Maine lobstermen are committed to protecting whales – it's why they invested significant time and money in adapting their gear and fishing practices over the years to reduce the risk of entanglement. Industry members have been engaged in the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team and collaborative research to develop measures to protect right whales for over 25 years.

The Maine lobster industry continues to work closely with regulators and scientists to ensure that any protective measures are as effective as possible and based on sound scientific data.



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