

Getting “On Deck” with Jonah Crab Data Collection

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Fishermen know that the key to successful fishery management is reliable and complete data on their target stock. Concerned that researchers weren't collecting data from important areas, lobstermen from the New England region engaged with the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF) to develop a fishery dependent data collection program that would inform stock structure assessments. What started as a lobster-focused effort has now grown to include Jonah crab, for which little stock structure data exist.

Fishermen participating in this program for Jonah crab use an application on a tablet to enter data on the carapace width (CW), the sex, whether the individual is egg-bearing, and whether the individual was kept or discarded. Once the fishermen return to port, the data are uploaded via Wi-Fi to CFRF, who then makes the data available to ASMFC every six months. For their efforts, fishermen receive a small stipend.

“To get this effort off the ground, we had a lot of meetings with fishermen and worked with scientists to develop a statistically sound sampling protocol,” said Anna Malek, Program Administrator with CFRF.

According to Malek, the fishermen really value the quarterly reports they receive that summarize the data. To keep fishermen engaged, she observes that communication is very important. Fishermen appreciate having access to the data that often validates the observations they have been making.

“The fishermen who are involved are really committed,” said Malek. “We’re very fortunate to have a fleet that is excited about the project and making it effective.”

In the first month of implementation with 12 vessels, CFRF received over 2,400 crab records from five different statistical areas, inshore to offshore. Malek notes that data collection by fishermen is more cost effective and covers a larger spatial area than data collection by other means. And it’s more effective because of the spatial area that can be sampled. And, because they worked actively with the fishermen and the research scientists from the beginning to establish a standardized data collection protocol, the data are trusted and used by the ASMFC.

For more information on this project, please visit the CFRF web site at: cfrfoundation.org/lobster-research-fleet

Photo, courtesy of CFRF: *Commercial fisherman Brian Thibeault collects Jonah crab data for the CFRF Lobster Research Fleet on board the F/V Ashley Ann.*

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