



## Maine fishermen landing catch in Massachusetts at Maine's expense

**By Douglas A. Moser , Staff writer**  
Gloucester Daily Times

Maine fishermen are landing more of their fish in Massachusetts to take advantage of more lenient lobster rules here at the expense of Maine's seafood auction.

Massachusetts law allows fishermen to sell lobsters accidentally caught in their nets; Maine law does not.

In the recent past, many Maine fishermen would just bring their lobsters to Gloucester and Boston and take the fish back to the Portland Fish Exchange. Now, after the prodding of local fishing advocates, they sell their fish here as well.

"I always thought it was too restrictive for them," said Vito Calomo, executive director of the Massachusetts Fishery Recovery Commission. "I used to tell them to come to Gloucester."

Calomo said Maine fishermen would stop to sell their lobsters, then steam back to Maine to sell their fish. Within the last year, they have been landing their entire catch here.

"We pay a higher price in Gloucester for quality fish," he said. "When they're fishing off our area or in the Georges Bank, it's quicker for them to come to Gloucester to drop the lobsters and get a higher price for the fish. They buy fuel here, they buy groceries, they get some repairs done. It's better for our economy."

Maine fishing regulations prohibit fishermen from selling the accidental lobsters, called bycatch, when they are not the fishermen's permitted catch. Massachusetts allows fishermen from any state to sell a bycatch of 100 lobsters per day and up to 500 lobsters per trip.

At about \$4 per pound, which is currently the average price, fishermen can reap an extra \$8,000 from 500 lobsters averaging about four pounds apiece. Calomo said the price rises to between \$6 and \$8 a pound during the summer.

Maine lobstermen also insist that operators of boats that catch fish in nets come to Massachusetts not only because they can sell their lobsters here. They say fishermen also get higher prices for their catches here, while paying out less in fuel costs.

From 2004 to 2005, the number of trips by Maine-based trawlers to Massachusetts to sell fish and lobsters grew from 76 to 160, and the amount of seafood sold grew from \$1.6 million to \$3.8 million, according to a new analysis.

In 2005, Maine fishermen sold 20,000 pounds of lobster in Massachusetts, a tiny fraction of Maine's total harvest of 67.3 million pounds.

"For the sake of these few lobsters, we're losing whole boatloads of fish," said Tom Valteau, president of the Portland Fish Exchange.

Maine's lobster industry opposes changing the rules, fearing too much effort is already being put on the lobster population.

Fishermen know the odds are long that Maine, the nation's leading lobster state, will change its landing law for lobsters. After all, there are more than 6,000 licensed lobstermen in Maine, the industry has a politically powerful voice, and lobstering by far is the state's No. 1 fishery, worth more than \$300 million in 2005.

The new numbers came from fishermen's log books and seafood dealer records that are collected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the federal agency that regulates commercial fishing. The numbers were crunched by an economist at NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center at Woods Hole.

According to the analysis, Maine lost \$9.6 million in seafood revenues to Massachusetts from 2000 to 2005 because of the law outlawing lobster landings.

The Portland Fish Exchange last year handled 9.5 million pounds of product, down from 17.1 million pounds in 2005. In the early 1990s, the auction handled more than 30 million pounds a year.

One of those Maine boats going to Massachusetts, the 70-foot Olympia, is owned by Maggie Raymond, who's the executive director of the Associated Fisheries of Maine.

Last year, her boat stopped going to Portland. Instead, it brought about 400,000 pounds of fish to Gloucester and to Boston, she said.

By going to Massachusetts, her boat also brought in about \$50,000 from lobster that were caught in her fishing nets, Raymond said. She also saved nearly \$9,000 in sales taxes that Maine charges on diesel fuel which Massachusetts does not.

Raymond said she would bring her catch to Portland if Maine law allowed her to bring the lobsters there.

"These lobsters are being landed anyway. They're just being landed in other states," Raymond said. "If there is any hope of preserving what's left of the groundfishing infrastructure in Maine, which is the Portland Fish Exchange, something has to be done."

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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