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LOBSTER DIE-OFF CONTINUES DESPITE LOBSTER FISHING BAN

Fishing Community and Environmental Groups Blame Poor Water Quality; Urge State and Federal Governments to Take Action

Hamden, CT – Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE) has received reports from Fairfield County lobstermen indicating that despite the overly burdensome moratorium on lobster fishing in Long Island Sound (LIS), the die-off of LIS lobsters continues. To address the cause of the lobster die-off; environmental groups, lobstermen, and elected officials are calling for upgrades to sewage treatment infrastructure, support for Long Island Sound restoration programs, and the elimination of the use of unnecessary pesticides.

“The lobstermen are sensitive to the conditions of our marine waters, just as our farmers know what is happening on land,” said Adrienne Esposito, CCE Executive Director. “Our lobstermen are telling us that the Long Island Sound is in trouble, and that water pollution is the root of the problem. Now we need New York, Connecticut, and our federal government to step up and be part of the solution.”

The American Lobster was once a cornerstone species for the commercial fishing industry in LIS. Today, there are less than two dozen professional lobstermen working on the Sound. In 2011, lobstermen fishing in LIS yielded less than 145,000 lbs of lobsters; a 95% reduction from the 3.5 million lbs harvested in 1998 before the die-off began in the summer of 1999. As a result, the lobster fishery and related industries in and around LIS have been devastated, putting lobstermen out of work and forcing local businesses to look to other states to import their lobsters.

“The lobsters are trying to repopulate, but they can’t get a foothold,” said Mike Kalaman, professional lobsterman from Norwalk, CT. “The egg bearing females are being killed off, and we depend on those. The only way it will get any better is if New York and Connecticut both agree through reciprocity to stop using Methoprene and Resmethrin. If they do that, the lobsters will come back within three or four years.”

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) has responded to the die-off by putting strict limitations on commercial lobstering in LIS, the most recent being a three month moratorium on all lobster fishing activities, set to expire on November 28, 2013.

“A lobster moratorium is like putting a band-aid on a broken leg. It does nothing to solve the water quality problems that are killing the lobsters in the first place. The solution lies with upgrading our sewage infrastructure and reducing the use of harmful pesticides, not punishing the lobstermen,” continued Esposito.

To date, researchers have not conclusively identified a single factor as the immediate cause of the lobster decline. Recent studies from UCONN have identified rising water temperatures, low dissolved oxygen levels, a number of diseases, and the overuse of chemical pesticides as likely contributors to the lobster die-off in LIS. One study indicated that the use of anti-larval agents used to control mosquito populations could have a potentially adverse impact on lobster populations. As a result, legislation was passed in Connecticut this year prohibiting the use of the anti-larval agents Methoprene and Resmethrin within the coastal boundaries, except in response to an extreme public health emergency.

“Regardless of other factors which may make lobsters more susceptible to disease, we know that overuse of pesticides which end up in Long Island Sound plays a large role in the die-off we’ve seen. We simply can no longer ignore their effect on all sea life” said Rep. Jonathan Steinberg (D-Westport). “Connecticut has acted to limit such pesticide use. Now we need New York State to do so. And we must encourage our federal representatives to continue their efforts to protect Long Island Sound.”

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