

## **Sea Urchin Zone Council Meeting Summary April 28, 2022 in Brewer, ME**

**DMR staff:** Melissa Smith, Maggie Hunter, Robert Russell, Sgt Colin MacDonald

**SUZY members present:** Tracey Sawtelle (Chair), Tim Peterson, Tim Robbins, Teresa Johnson, Stephen Bechard, Brian Preney, Joe Leask, Clint Richardson, Mark Nickerson, Larry Harris

**SUZY members absent:** Alan Knowlton, Chuon Muth (resigned), Randy Ramsdell, Sinuon Chau

Meeting commenced at 4:08 pm.

### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

Chair T. Sawtelle welcomed the group and asked everyone to introduce themselves around the room, both council members and audience.

### **II. Election of Officers**

Motion made to retain current officers, T Sawtelle (chair) and B Preney (vice chair). T. Peterson moved; J. Leask seconded the motion.

**UNANIMOUS. Election positions approved.**

### **III. Approval of last meeting summary (4/28/2022)**

Motion made to approve meeting summary. C. Richardson moved to accept; T. Sawtelle seconded the motion.

**UNANIMOUS. Approval of summary passed.**

### **IV. SUZY Remote Meeting Policy**

M. Smith described elements of the DMR remote meeting policy that was being shared with all of the DMR councils to allow for future remotized meetings when necessary.

Motion made to accept the DMR Remote Meeting policy as presented. C. Richardson moved to accept; B. Preney seconded the motion.

**UNANIMOUS. Approval of DMR Remote Meeting Policy passed.**

### **V. Industry Summary of past season**

One harvester did not go in lieu of the high prices of scallops.

A few harvesters that dove in both Zone 1 and Zone 2 did notice a clustering of boats, but not many positive resource signs – quality seemed ok, but abundance is down. It was also mentioned that quality of urchins seemed to improve greatly for the latter half of February into March.

Zone 1 only has 15 days which is now causing some troubles with sustaining a viable operation and relationships with the buyers. There needs to be a steady amount of product for the buyers to also be sustainable.

Zone 2 diving group noticed the absence of product in down east areas. Cuts may not make any difference, as the bottom has greatly changed. Very localized spots where small urchins have been found.

Need to increase funding for research to determine what the environmental factors are that are impeding recruitment and growth of the remaining population.

General consensus that tried and true areas are becoming less productive. Urchins are dying from unknown causes; bottom habitat is changing to less optimal habitat including less productive food sources.

Scale of the fishery is working, with the healthy pockets of urchins that are available. But it makes it difficult to change the scale of the fishery – either by increasing effort or participation.

## **VI. DMR Season Summary**

M. Hunter presented the annual landings summary comparing the current season with the previous season. R. Russel presented an update on the annual DMR Dive Survey.

A general decline has been observed in reported landings, active harvesters and also within the fishery independent survey. See appendix for slide presentation.

## **VII. Discussion on 2022-2023 Season Specifications**

Related to the earlier discussion on the how the season went, and with concern regarding the inability to sometimes get the full tote limit, there were comments suggesting a reduction in harvest days for Zone 2 from the current 30/40 down to 20/30, however, the number of totes would remain the same.

There were comments regarding less effort than the previous year due to the greater interest in the scallop fishery. Yet, there is still concern of the environmental changes, observations of die-offs. Both council members and members of the audience comments on observations of seed urchins in several locations. There were a mix of positive and negative signs of the resource, dependent on where harvesting was occurring and how the urchins were being harvested.

Motion to reduce harvest days from 30 days to 20 days. S. Bechard presented the motion, J. Leask seconded.

**Motion failed: 2 yes; 5 no.**

M. Smith distributed draft calendars based on the previous season for review and editing for all the individual harvest scenarios.

After group discussion focusing on calendars and before final recommendations were made for the calendars, days and totes for each season, Sgt MacDonald reiterated the tote limits and the requirement for stacking of totes. Sgt MacDonald noted there were several complaints during the season.

Zone 1 calendars were produced using the same framework as the previous season. There were no changes to the calendars and the number of totes would remain the same. M. Nickerson motioned to accept; C. Richardson seconded.

**UNANIMOUS. Approval of Zone 1 calendars passed.**

Zone 2 calendars were drafted using similar structure as the previous season. A slight modification for this season was to allow a week off on the late dive calendars to coincide with school vacation week. This was also translated to the LAA calendar as well. Additionally, LAA drag day was switched to Thursdays for both early and late calendars.

B. Preney motioned to accept; T. Sawtelle seconded.

**UNANIMOUS. Approval of Zone 2 calendars passed with amendments.**

### **VIII. Other Business**

#### License issues for future fishery potential

There was a brief discussion on the topic of how new licenses could be re-issued. Ideas suggested included:

- Apprentice style system; logging of hours
- Lottery style system; restrictions to ensure activity and not additional latency
- Transfer to crew or tenders; individuals already “involved” in the industry


But, there was still general concern about allowing new entry/new effort into the already depressed fishery. Mixed opinions on how to preserve knowledge and stewardship of the fishery, without increasing effort.

**Meeting adjourned at 5:40pm.**


## Appendix:

**Preliminary Maine Sea Urchin Data  
2021–2022 Fishing Season**

Maggie Hunter  
Lessie White  
Maine Dept. of Marine Resources, April 28, 2022



*Photo by Rachel Feeney, NEC, Sept. 2009*



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**Maine Sea Urchin Landings In Pounds  
by Zone and Month**

	2021 – 2022			2020 – 2021
	Zone 1	Zone 2	State	State
	Total	Total	Total	Total
Sep	*		*	*
Oct	*	148,156	*	*
Nov	0	112,071	112,071	150,316
Dec	90,538	127,721	218,259	*
Jan	*	95,589	*	*
Feb	*	114,902	*	*
Mar	0	93,283	93,283	42,634
<b>Total</b>	<b>150,391</b>	<b>691,722</b>	<b>842,113</b>	<b>1,030,897</b>

The ratio of diver: dragger landings was roughly 63:37, higher for divers than usual (60:40).

*\* Data were combined to preserve buyer confidentiality.*

About 189,000 fewer lbs were caught in 2021–22 than in 2020–21, or 18% fewer.

All data are preliminary.

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**Maine Sea Urchin Price per Pound to Harvesters  
by Zone and Month**

	2021 – 2022			2020 – 2021
	Zone 1	Zone 2	State	State
	Average	Average	Average	Average
Sep	*	\$2.99	*	*
Oct	*		*	*
Nov	-	\$3.06	\$3.06	\$3.12
Dec	\$4.79	\$3.86	\$4.25	*
Jan	*	\$3.61	*	*
Feb	*	\$3.40	*	*
Mar	-	\$3.51	\$3.51	\$2.90
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4.15</b>	<b>\$3.39</b>	<b>\$3.52</b>	<b>\$3.01</b>

Prices in 2021–22 increased by about \$0.51/lb, or 17%, compared with 2020–21.

All data are preliminary.

**Maine Sea Urchin Landed Value  
by Zone and Month**

	2021 – 2022			2020 – 2021
	Zone 1	Zone 2	State	State
	Total	Total	Total	Total
Sep	*		*	*
Oct	*	\$443,469	*	*
Nov	0	\$342,729	\$342,729	\$469,447
Dec	\$434,092	\$493,529	\$927,621	*
Jan	*	\$344,612	*	*
Feb	*	\$390,569	*	*
Mar	0	\$327,140	\$327,140	\$123,742
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$624,374</b>	<b>\$2,342,048</b>	<b>\$2,966,423</b>	<b>\$3,105,500</b>

Value in 2021–22 decreased by about \$139,000 or 4 %, compared with 2020–21.

All data are preliminary.

### Maine Sea Urchin Roe Index (%) by Zone and Month

	2021 – 2022			2020 – 2021
	Zone 1 Average	Zone 2 Average	State Average	State Average
Sep	*	11.1	*	*
Oct	*		*	*
Nov	-	10.8	10.8	12.6
Dec	11.0	12.1	11.7	*
Jan	*	12.2	*	*
Feb	*	12.3	*	*
Mar	-	12.4	12.4	13.8
Total	11.0	11.7	11.6	12.6

Roe indices in 2021–22 decreased by about 1 point, compared with 2020–21.

All data are preliminary.

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### Number of Active Urchin Harvesters (fished at least twice)

2021–2022 Active Harvesters fished at least twice				2020–2021 Active Harvesters fished at least twice			
	Zone 1	Zone 2	Total		Zone 1	Zone 2	Total
Dive	17	40	*	Dive	19	43	*
Drag		34	*	Drag		47	*
Total	17	74	91	Total	19	90	109

40% of licenses were active in 2021–22.

2021 Sea Urchin Licenses		
	Zone 1	Zone 2
Dive	33	81
Drag	12	100
Rake	1	1
Unk	1	1
Total	46	182

There were 17 (16%) fewer active harvesters in 2021–2022 compared with 2020–21.

All data are preliminary.

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### Active Urchin Harvesters — How Many Days were Fished?

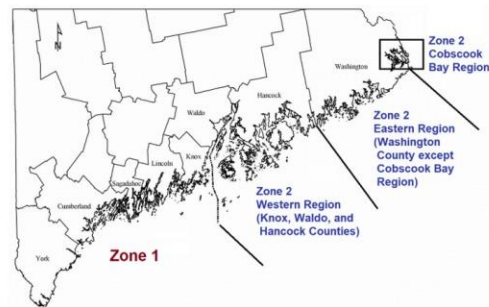
2021–2022 Mean Number of Days Fished per Harvester		
	Zone 1	Zone 2
Dive	10.6	17.6
Drag	10.6	15.7
	10.6	16.7

2021–2022 Percent of Harvesters Fishing All Days		
	Zone 1	Zone 2
Dive	33%	5%
Drag		11%

All data are preliminary.

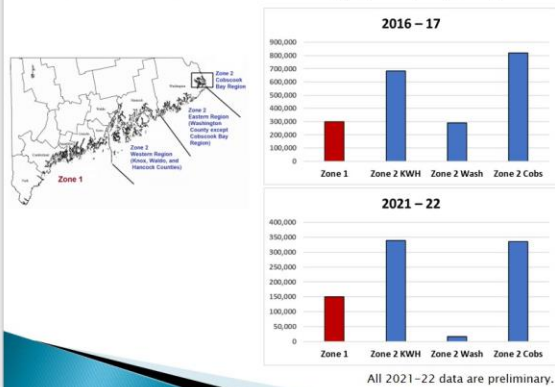
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### Maine Sea Urchin Landings (Lbs) by Region



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## Maine Sea Urchin Landings (Lbs) by Region



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## Maine Sea Urchin Spring Survey Data

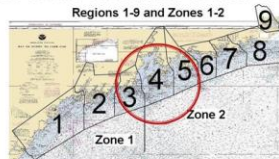
Robert Russell, Marcus Jones  
Maggie Hunter  
Maine Dept. of Marine Resources. May 17 to June 8, 2021



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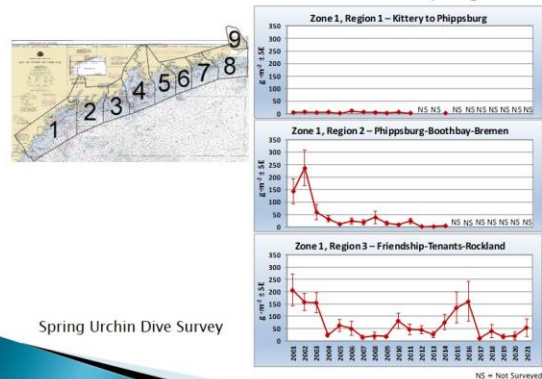
## Maine Sea Urchin Dive Survey



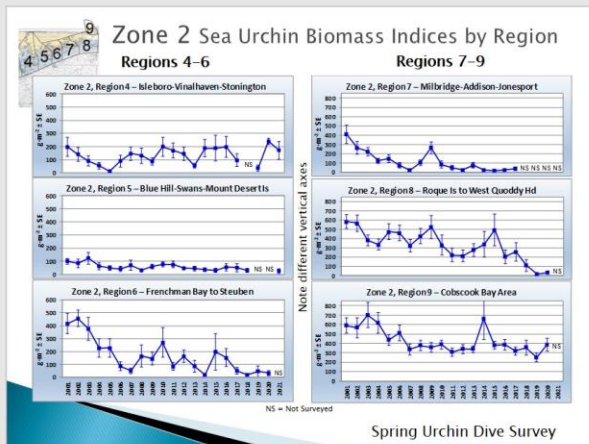
- Conducted annually since 2001 in nine regions: 1-3 in Zone 1, 4-9 in Zone 2
- In each region, 16 sites with hard bottom: 5 fixed locations and 11 picked at random
- At a site, 20 m<sup>2</sup> quadrats are evaluated in each of 3 depths: 0-5m, 5-10m, and 10-15m.

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## Zone 1 Sea Urchin Biomass Indices by Region



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## Blue Hill Bay Sea Urchin Project



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### Next Steps

- We have identified about 9 areas that have been fished consistently.
- Robert will be surveying extensively this spring.
- With a time-series of survey indices, and knowing roughly how many urchins have been harvested, we may be able to estimate optimal removal rates for areas that are decreasing, and also for those that are increasing.

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### Maine Sea Urchin "Port Sampling" Interviews

Maggie Hunter  
Maine Dept. of Marine Resources, October 29, 2021 to March 18, 2022

Interview sessions were conducted by phone about every two weeks, with 54 interviews: 31 with divers and 23 with dragners.

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#### Maine Sea Urchin "Port Sampling" Interviews

##### Concerns from fishermen (all Zone 2):

- Urchins are scarce and good quality is scarcer
- Lots of green crabs, Jonah Crabs, sea squirts.
- Seeing die-off, Penobscot Bay to Winter Hbr.
- I'm not going to get in all 30 days
- Only one buyer, so no price.
- It's just been a hard year with poor quality and bad prices.
- Got to do something or there won't be more seasons.
  - It's not fun anymore.

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#### Maine Sea Urchin "Port Sampling" Interviews

##### Suggestions from fishermen:

- Move low quality urchins to better feed.
- Rotate areas.
- A small closure at Goose Is would help.
- Flye Point should be closed. It would seed the rest of the bay.
- Getting old, need to train youngsters
- More suggestions about the season...

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#### Maine Sea Urchin "Port Sampling" Interviews

##### Suggestions about the season:

- I don't like short weeks, esp. 2-days.
- The season needs to be shorter, so they have more time to recover.
- We need more open days, like Zone 1.
- There should be just one season.
- Cut the season (fewer days).
- Start later, no quality earlier.
- End sooner, urchins spawning in March.

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