Sea Urchin Zone Council Final Meeting Summary April 16, 2025, in Brewer, ME

DMR staff: Jen Harris, Lulu Bates, Robert Russell, Melissa Smith, MPO Winchester **SUZC members present:** Tracey Sawtelle (Chair), Justin Gebo, Clint Richardson, Tim Peterson, Brian Preney, Alan Knowlton, Mark Nickerson, Sinuon Chau, Frank Peasley, Lucas Meyers, Teresa Johnson, Steve Eddy

SUZC members absent: Joe Leask and Larry Harris

Audience: Stephen Bechard, Paul Gray, Michael Eaton, Ian Emery, Chandler Sendek, Paul Cox, Aaron Gilpatrick.

Meeting commenced at 4:00 pm.

Quorum achieved.

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Sawtelle called the meeting to order at 4pm and requested a round of introductions from both the sitting council and the audience. The are 3 new members on the SUZC: Justin Gebo, Frank Peasley and Lucas Meyers. Jen Harris was introduced as the new resource management coordinator for the sea urchin fishery.

Chair Appointment and old business

J. Harris noted that the Council would need to nominate and vote on a chair for 2025.

Motion: B. Preney/T. Peterson

That Tracey Sawtelle remains as chair of the SUZC.

Discussion: Tracey accepted the nomination.

Voting: Unanimous; motion passed.

As was noted by a council member, it is customary to also have a vice chair designated. It was noted that currently Brian Preney has been serving as vice chair for the past several years. Preney indicated that he would relinquish that role. After discussion by council members, a nomination was made.

Motion: J. Gebo/M. Nickerson

That Clint Richardson assumes the role of vice chair.

Discussion: Clint accepted the nomination Voting: Unanimous.

Chair Sawtelle asked for any questions or comments regarding the meeting minutes from 2024 or a motion to approve.

Motion: C. Richardson/T. Sawtelle

To approve meeting minutes as drafted for April 11, 2024 and May 23, 2024. Voting: 11 approved with 1 abstention.

Discussion on 8th Appointed Seat Vacancy

An 8th seat remains vacant through appointment process. J. Harris indicated that there was no stipulation on the category (industry, scientist, etc) that could hold that position. Council member made the comment that his preference would be to have an additional 8th seat be an elected position rather than an appointed position with the preference to have the seat remain vacant at this time until further discussion could occur. Council asked J. Harris to discuss this item with the new Commissioner, Carl Wilson.

J. Harris suggested that Colleen Suckling, research professor from URI, take the seat as a urchin scientist. However, sentiment at the council was a preference another industry person.

Discussion on Flex Harvest Pilot

J. Harris shared comments received by industry regarding the flex harvesting option that was available for the 2024-2025 season to provide an additional option to deal with a mismatch between harvest potential and the ability to sell urchins on the same day. The Department was asking whether it made it easier to operate if a dealer wasn't available on the same day.

There were general comments regarding storage guidelines; that urchins need to be maintained at a temperature range of 35 to 40F to maintain quality. But ultimately, it was the dealer or buyer's decision to accept the urchins based on the quality they desire. One comment spoke on the ability to store on bottom in crates, however it was determined that would require additional rules, tags and enforcement. It was noted that harvesters used this provision mostly in October (by divers) and in November (by either divers or draggers). A member of the audience said it was not a practical solution. In October, it seemed the buyers/processors were only buying all Canadian product.

S. Chau shared information that Grand Manan has been shut down for 3 years for recovery. But that the St Lawrence area is still open. He still recommends harvest to start in mid-October.

Audience comment that opening day for Zone 2 late drag did not have a buyer available and chose not to harvest.

The council did not have any recommendations for changes to the flex program at this time.

Election Process

J. Harris provided an update regarding the election process. Indicated that per statue, there were no specific guidelines on how to initiate or inform industry regarding the request for nominations and the list of available license holders per nomination category. She performed the request for nominations via email utilizing Gov Delivery to Sea Urchin license holders. There were only single nominations and thus, the election process was not needed utilizing mail-in votes because no run-offs were held for any of the categories due to single nominations per category.

One audience member said that himself and 5 industry members were not aware of the election until tonight. Some members of the audience and council members indicated a preference for paper notifications and ballots. However, Council members did comment that they felt well informed on the election process and general communications from DMR.

It was noted that elected seats are specifically for harvesters, processors or buyers.

Sea Urchin Website Updates

J. Harris shared with the Council that the website has been updated to reflect new council members; updated management information and current and ongoing research.

- SUZC Council webpage: Sea Urchin Zone Council | Department of Marine Resources
- Meeting Archive: <u>Sea Urchin Zone Council Meeting Archive | Department of Marine Resources</u>
- Fisheries Management Webpage: <u>Sea Urchins | Department of Marine</u> <u>Resources</u>
- New Reference Articles webpage: <u>Sea Urchin Reference Articles</u>]
 <u>Department of Marine Resources</u>
- Science Webpage: Green Sea Urchins in Maine | Department of Marine Resources

Annual Fishery Report and Survey Results

Lulu Bates provided her annual fishery update. Items to highlight this season include pounds landed per month per zone, money paid to harvesters per month per zone, Price per Pound paid to harvesters per month per zone, Roe Quality per month per zone, with total pounds landed, total price paid to harvesters, average Price Per Pound and average Roe Quality for the 2024-25 season compared with the previous 4 seasons. Price per pound was high this year, and harvesters seemed content. Statistics about how many active harvesters (59) compare with previous years, how many fishing days were utilized in each Zone and comments and concerns heard throughout the season from interviews.

Robert Russell shared the recent update from the survey, and this past season the full survey was completed; regions 1 through 9. 16 sites, 5 fixed and 11 random:

- Penobscot and Cobscook Bays are the highest in biomass
- Cobscook observed a wide range of sizes

J. Gebo discussed the notion of transplanting or re-seeding. R Russell spoke to several failed attempts at transplanting previously, such as Cat Ledges.

L Bates shared updated on current research. DMR is currently involved in a grant funded research with URI investigating spawning timelines for 2 years (until May 2026).

DMR is also working with University of Maine's Staudinger Lab to investigate climate effects on green sea urchins. Graduate student Chandler Sendek was there, Lulu briefly introduced him to industry members present.

L Bates also shared that DMR has recently added a fisheries pathologist on staff, and that if harvesters see signs of urchin disease, to please keep a sample and contact her with the information. If urchin disease is seen, DMR wants to be able to identify it and track it.

2025-2026 Calendar Discussions

J. Harris shared a draft calendar for Zone 1, which is reflective of the previous season (status quo). Based on comments that October days have been un-utilized; in 2024, only Zone 2 early divers were active in the month of October. There is a proposal to move 2 days from October into the last week of December. A second comment received was to take a pause mid-February. It was observed that there was a decline in sales during the third week of February, and spring break for most schools in Maine, and move those days into December.

Audience comment for Zone 2 early (dive) season indicated there isn't enough urchin resource available so there's no point in having many days on the (dive) calendar. Was given Fridays – which are wasted days. This harvester was not part of the calendar process last season but stated the calendar was not as expected.

Audience comment related to the combination swipe cards with landing reports for 30 harvest days, why can't Zone 2 have "open months" and to allow for harvesters to take their 180 totes in any manner. So, for example, mid-October through end of December for early months. This is similar to how Zone 1 operates. An additional comment from the audience was to allow for a weekly limit of 18 totes.

M. Smith responded to these comments in that the Council did discuss in 2024 the idea of how to utilize swipe cards and landing reports to harvest beyond a 6-tote daily limit. The calendars present an issue as some weeks have only two days per week, some have three days per week and a few have four days per week. This would make it difficult to standardize a weekly limit. Also, the swipe card works effectively now to "count" 30 harvest days as single swipes. A single swipe equals 6 totes or less. Using the swipe card to count harvest days becomes more difficult to monitor when more than 6 totes are landed per day. Audience and Council members nodded heads that moving towards open calendars and swipe cards would create issues and would require additional conversations.

J. Harris suggested a 30 minute break to have groups discuss their respective calendar plans.

Motion: B. Preney/T. Sawtelle To accept the drafted Zone 1 calendar for 2025-2026 as presented. Voting: Unanimous.

Motion: T. Peterson / F. Peasley To accept the Zone 2 early and late dive calendars plus LAA days as amended for 2025-2026.

Voting: Unanimous.

Motion: T. Sawtelle / C. Richardson To accept the Zone 2 early drag calendar plus LAA days as amended for 2025-2026. Voting: Unanimous.

Motion: B. Preney/ T. Peterson

To accept the Zone 2 late drag calendar plus LAA days as amended for 2025-2026. Voting: Unanimous.

J. Harris discussed the potential to have a follow-up meeting in May should there be a need to amend the calendars or have further discussions on topics tabled today. It's suggested that the meeting will happen in the last week of May, located in Augusta with a remote option.

Motion to adjourn:

B. Preney/T. Sawtelle – Adjourn 6:10pm.

Slideshow presented by DMR:













Flex Harvest Option - Discussion (Harris)

▶ What can be improved?

- ▶ Guideline for Quality: Temp's below 35 degrees °F
- Other ideas from group





Month	Zone 1	Zone 2	State
October	N/A	*	*
November	*	95,272	•
December	14,797	84,639	99,436
January	*	117,868	*
February	•	91,624	*
March	N/A	51,020	51,020
TOTAL:	42,427	468,109	510,536
TOTAL:	42,427		o preserve confiden

Month	Zone 1	Zone 2	Average
October	N/A	•	*
November	•	2.9	•
December	4.1	3.8	3.95
January	•	3.7	•
February	*	3.3	•
March	N/A	3.3	3.3
AVERAGE:	3.6	3.3	3.3



Month	Zone 1	Zone 2	State
October	N/A	*	*
November	•	\$274,375	*
December	\$58,644	\$323,603	\$382,247
January	*	\$434,529	•
February	•	\$300,185	•
March	N/A	\$167,625	\$167,625
TOTAL:	\$154,882	\$1,580,296	\$1,734,883

Month	Zone 1	Zone 2	Average
October	N/A	*	*
November	•	11.6	*
December	12.6	12.6	12.6
January	•	13.4	
February	•	13.3	*
March	N/A	13.8	13.8
AVERAGE:	11.9	12.6	12.6

Season	Pounds landed	Value	PPP	Roe Index %
2020-21	1,030,897	\$3,105,500	\$3.01	12.6
2021-22	842,113	\$2,966,423	\$3.50	11.6
2022-23	777,167	\$2,418,863	\$3.10	11.2
2023-24	595,641	\$1,784,574	\$3.07	11.7
2024-25	510,536	\$1,734,883	\$3.32	12.6



Number of Active Harvesters Harvesters (fished at least TWICE) 2024-2025 59 2023-2024 72 2022-2023 92 22% of licenses were 2021-2022 94 active this season. 2022-2021 110 2019-2020 153 # Of Active Average # of Days Zone 9 7 Zone 1 Zone 2 50 16

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Follow up in May to confirm Calendars















Amended Calendars:

2025 - 2026 DRAFT Sea Urchin Season for Maine Zone 1

A Zone 1 harvester may choose to fish 15 of the open days

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One Season for Divers, Rakers, Trappers and Draggers

2025 - 2026 DRAFT Sea Urchin Season for Maine Zone 2 For Whiting & Dennys Bays Limited Access Area

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Early Season for Divers, Rakers, and Trappers

Late Season for Divers, Rakers, and Trappers

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2025 - 2026 DRAFT Sea Urchin Season for Maine Zone 2

A Zone 2 harvester may choose to fish 30 of the 40 open days



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Early Season for Divers, Rakers, and Trappers

Late Season for Divers, Rakers, and Trappers

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