



November & December 2025

## Delano's Washington Transition Marks a New Era for U.S. Fishermen

*By Dustin Colson, Director of Development*

This past year marked a period of significant transition and growth for New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association, accompanied by an important evolution in the role of longtime leader Dustin Delano. Over the summer, Delano was promoted from Chief Operating Officer to Chief Strategist of Policy & Operations, reflecting NEFSA's increasing focus on national-level advocacy. By fall, he was elected Chairman of the Board of Directors, where he serves on the Executive Committee alongside President Aaron Williams, Vice President John Drouin, Secretary Alison Hawkes, and Treasurer Ronnie Musetti. Delano's transition coincided with NEFSA's decision to establish a full-time presence in Washington, D.C.—a strategic move aimed at giving fishermen a stronger voice in federal policy conversations. In late summer, Delano relocated to the capital, and in recent weeks he began a part-time detail with the political team at NOAA Headquarters within the Department of Commerce. He joins NOAA as the agency's first-ever "Fisherman in Residence," a newly created role in the Trump Administration designed to help rebuild trust and strengthen communication between the fishing industry and the federal government. When asked what this position means for fishermen across the country, Delano explained: "The Fisherman in Residence role creates a direct line for genuine, real-world input from someone who lived the challenges of this industry

every day. It's an opportunity to help ground NOAA leadership in the practical impacts of their decisions—impacts that, at times, have been lost in translation. I look forward to working with NOAA's leadership team and helping to close the widening gap between the agency and the fishing community." Delano's expanded responsibilities reflect NEFSA's commitment to ensuring that fishermen remain represented, respected, and heard at the highest levels of government. His leadership will continue to shape the organization's mission as NEFSA strengthens its national footprint and advocates for a more balanced, transparent, and collaborative fisheries management system.



# Menhaden Vote Shows the Power of Fishermen Standing Together — and the Need for Fair, Science-Based Management

*By Dustin Delano, Chairman & Chief Strategist, NEFSA*

The 2025 Atlantic menhaden quota debate will be remembered as one that underscored the absolute importance of fishermen standing united, informed, and ready to push back when decisions drift away from scientific reality. This fall, some members of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) considered an extreme proposal: a staggering 55% cut to the coastwide menhaden Total Allowable Catch (TAC). Such a reduction would have deeply harmed menhaden harvesters, bait-dependent lobster and crab fisheries, and coastal working waterfronts throughout the Atlantic seaboard. It was unnecessary, unsupported by science, and poised to ignite an economic crisis in an already strained marine economy. NEFSA fought relentlessly to prevent that outcome. Thanks to the strength and engagement of our fishermen, the support of our coastal communities, key state votes, and the fact-driven decisions of NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the ASMFC ultimately rejected the most extreme option. The Board instead adopted only minimal reductions — a victory grounded in fact, not fear, and one that affirmed the power of organized fishermen insisting on science-based policy. The science throughout this debate was unequivocal: Atlantic menhaden are not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring. The most recent stock assessment affirmed the health of the resource, and the fishery's independent Marine Stewardship Council certification further reflects its sustainability and rigorous scientific review. Under the existing TAC of 233,550 metric tons, the probability of overfishing in the coming years was no more than 4%. Even a modest 10% cut— to 210,195 mt — would have reduced the modeled risk to zero in 2026 and as low as 1% in the years following. Nothing in the assessment suggested that a drastic cut was required to protect the resources or the ecosystem. Yet some commissioners insisted on using an overly conservative “target” well below the true overfishing threshold. This approach was inconsistent with federal fisheries standards and the long-standing principles of the Magnuson–Stevens Act, which bases catch limits on the actual probability of crossing an overfishing limit — not on an excessively cautious buffer. NEFSA highlighted these inconsistencies in our formal comment to the Board, advocating for a measured, science-based reduction of no more than 10%. The data supported this approach fully. The proposed 55% cut, by contrast, was never about science. It would have slashed the TAC to just over 106,000 mt — a level that would have achieved no additional conservation benefit while inflicting enormous economic hardship on fishermen, processors, bait dealers, and the coastal towns that rely on this fishery. For context, before quotas were introduced, the Chesapeake Bay alone averaged more than 111,000 mt in annual landings — higher than the entire coastwide TAC that would have resulted from the proposed cut. This extreme proposal was driven instead by politics, pressure, and misuse of a new “ecosystem model” intended not to evaluate menhaden on their own sustainability, but to influence striped bass outcomes — a fundamental imbalance in management that must be corrected. Perhaps most troubling in the 2025 menhaden debate was the stark inequity in how fishermen were treated compared to other stakeholders. Earlier in the year, ASMFC held 17 public hearings

for an addendum for the striped bass fishery. But for menhaden — a fishery facing one of the largest potential quota cuts in decades — there were zero hearings. Fishermen who traveled long distances to participate were given just 60 seconds each to speak, and many never got the chance before public comment was cut off entirely. NEFSA outlined these procedural failures in a formal letter to ASMFC leadership, noting that the lack of fairness and consistency in the engagement process undermines confidence in the Commission and sidelines the very people whose livelihoods depend on these decisions. The final vote — rejecting the 55% cut and opting for minimal reductions — was a hard-fought victory for science, common sense, and the coastal communities that depend on this fishery. NEFSA is deeply grateful to the states and federal agencies that recognized the importance of basing decisions on evidence, not emotion, and refused to endorse extremist measures that would have caused unnecessary harm. But this fight also served as a warning: fishermen remain vulnerable when political agendas outweigh scientific assessments. It showed just how easily a healthy fishery can be pushed toward crisis by inconsistent management frameworks, activist pressure, and inequitable public engagement. Looking ahead, NEFSA remains committed to pushing for a management system that is fair, transparent, and grounded in science. We will continue advocating for reforms to the public participation process, insisting on equitable treatment for commercial fishermen, and ensuring that biological sustainability and economic survival remain central to every major fisheries decision. The 2025 menhaden vote proved that when fishermen show up, speak up, and stand united, we can influence outcomes even against significant political and organizational pressure. NEFSA will stay on the front lines of these battles — ensuring that truth, science, and fairness guide the future of our fisheries and the coastal families who depend on them.



## Lobster Stock Assessment Shows Environmental Shifts — Not Fishery Management

By Dustin Delano, Chairman & Chief Strategist, NEFSA

New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association (NEFSA) The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) recently released the 2025 American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment, providing the first comprehensive look at the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank lobster resource since the record-high years of the late 2010s. The assessment confirms what many fishermen have long observed: environmental conditions — not fishing practices — are driving changes in lobster abundance throughout the region. While the report documents a 34% decline in overall population since the 2018 peak, it clearly states that the stock is not depleted, and that harvest pressure has remained stable over time. This decline was not surprising. Fishermen and industry leaders have understood that the unprecedented level of abundance seen in the Gulf of Maine over the past decade was unlikely to persist indefinitely. Shifting environmental patterns continue to influence where lobsters settle, migrate, and thrive. In fact, the assessment identifies water temperature as the "primary influence" on current stock trends. It is also important to recognize the differences between the Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Georges Bank (GBK) fisheries. The GOM fleet — made up largely of small, nearshore Maine vessels — accounts for over 80% of total annual landings, forming the core of our coastal economy. The GBK fishery, much smaller by comparison, accounts for about 5% of landings and is primarily operated by offshore boats making multi-day trips. Landings trends align with these environmental patterns. After topping 100 million pounds for a decade and reaching a record value of \$742.9 million in 2021, landings have gradually decreased. In 2024, Maine fishermen alone landed approximately 86 million pounds — a 15-year low in volume — yet the fishery still delivered one of the highest-value years in history, reflecting strong demand and consistent stewardship on the water. Critically, the stock assessment determined that the GOM/GBK lobster population remains above the level needed to sustain itself, meaning the resource is not depleted. Harvest rates have been remarkably steady for decades, and although these rates are now approaching the exploitation threshold due to the recent environmental decline in abundance, this does not indicate a failure of management or irresponsible fishing activity. Some have attempted to interpret parts of the assessment as evidence that overfishing is occurring, but the model outputs do not support that conclusion. The assessment notes that only about half of the model runs suggested overfishing, while the other half did not — essentially a 50:50 level of uncertainty. This lack of clarity, combined with decades of stable harvest pressure,

demonstrates that the recent decline is driven by environmental change, not by fishermen. ASMFC took no regulatory action in response to the assessment, recognizing that the findings do not warrant new restrictions at this time. The next step will involve deeper discussion with fishermen, where the real-world experience and knowledge of those on the water will help guide any future considerations. For NEFSA, this stock assessment reaffirms what we have been saying consistently: Fishermen are not the problem. Naturally fluctuating environmental conditions are. The Maine lobster fishery remains one of the most sustainable, responsibly managed, and culturally important fisheries in the world. As policymakers digest this new assessment, NEFSA will continue working to ensure that the industry's perspective, experience, and expertise remain central to every decision. We will keep pushing back against misinformation, defending the fishery from unwarranted regulatory threats, and advocating for management grounded in science — not speculation. The lobster industry has weathered change before, and with strong representation from NEFSA and unified fishermen, it will continue to do so for generations to come.



## NEFSA Chairman & Chief Strategist Dustin Delano receives National Fisherman's 2025 Highliner Award

NEFSA Chairman & Chief Strategist Dustin Delano was honored as a recipient of National Fisherman's 2025 Highliner Award at the Pacific Marine Expo in Seattle, Washington. Delano, a multigenerational commercial fisherman from Friendship, ME is one of

By Shelley Wigglesworth, Administrative Assistant

four yearly recipients of the prestigious award of distinction which has been presented to the top leaders, advocates, and innovators shaping the future of the U.S. commercial fishing industry for the past 50 years.

## NEFSA Outreach in the Classroom and Community

*By Shelley Wigglesworth, Administrative Assistant*

NEFSA Director of Development Dustin Colson recently met with first graders in York County, Maine for an up close and personal educational experience with lobsters and other marine life, including bait fish, crabs and even a horseshoe crab! NEFSA Administrative Assistant Shelley Wigglesworth was at Saint George MSU, talking with students in pre-k through 8th grade about the age-old practice of sustainable lobstering in Maine and the working waterfront! All students received a free NEFSA T-shirt before enjoying a lobster lunch cooked by local fishermen! By teaching the next generation about commercial fishing, we hope to preserve our way of life for generations to come. If you would like to schedule a NEFSA presentation at your school or organization, reach out to Shelley for more information: [administrator@fishermenstewardship.org](mailto:administrator@fishermenstewardship.org)



## NEFSA at The Lobster of Gloucester

*By Shelley Wigglesworth, Administrative Assistant*

The 2nd Annual NEFSA at the Lobster of Gloucester was a well-attended and wonderful night of fundraising, fellowship, and Fishermen United! Thank you, Tessa Browne, for once again graciously and generously hosting this fabulous annual event where the food, drinks, and atmosphere were top notch! NEFSA members from throughout New England attended, supporting

our shared vision and collective impact we are making in the American commercial fishing industry by banding together. A special thank you to all the donors of silent auction items and for the hard work of the Lobster of Gloucester staff! We appreciate you!



## A Year of Hard-Fought Progress — and the Work Ahead

*By Dustin Delano, Chairman & Chief Strategist, NEFSA*

As we close out 2025, I want to extend my deep appreciation to every fisherman, family, shore-side business, and supporter who has stood with the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association this year. Your support and engagement are the reason we have been able to accomplish so much. What follows is only a small sample of the work NEFSA has done in 2025. Many of our most important victories happened behind the scenes — preventing harmful proposals from advancing, stopping regulatory threats before fishermen ever heard about them, and resolving issues long before they reached the docks. The full list is extensive, but these examples highlight the impact we achieved together. This year, NEFSA played a leading role in several major policy battles across New England and Washington, D.C. We successfully stopped the proposed lobster gauge increase, a change that would have caused serious harm to the Maine lobster fishery and coastal communities. We made sure fishermen's voices reached the highest levels of government by testifying before Congress, challenging misinformation, and advocating for management grounded in sound science. We championed necessary amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act to address flawed assumptions and unrealistic risk models that have been unfairly used against commercial fisheries. Our collaboration with fishermen across the Mid-Atlantic helped prevent massive, unjustified cuts to the menhaden quota, and we moved quickly to help defeat a dangerous executive order that would have banned the harvest of so called "forage fish" — including menhaden, herring, mackerel, and squid — a ban that would have crippled fleets from Maine to the Carolinas. We also pushed back hard against false media narratives suggesting the lobster fishery is overfished, ensuring the truth about our industry's sustainability was heard clearly and publicly. Additionally, we brought the longstanding Gray Zone conflict front and center, elevating it all the way to the attention of the White House as an issue that must finally be resolved. Bringing this cross-border dispute into the national spotlight was a critical step toward long-term stability for fishermen who rely on that area. One of the most important steps forward this year was expanding NEFSA's presence in Washington, D.C., giving New England fishermen a consistent, credible voice where federal decisions are actually made. Throughout 2025, we also stood firmly against the reckless expansion of offshore wind projects, urging the Trump Administration to cancel leases and projects rushed through without proper review. In 2026, we will continue encouraging the Administration to rescind all existing leases in the Gulf of Maine to protect fishing grounds, marine ecosystems, and coastal communities. Despite these accomplishments, the challenges ahead are significant. Heavily funded environmental organizations continue targeting commercial fishing with vast budgets, coordinated campaigns, and aggressive

lobbying efforts. Their work is constant and well-organized, and fishermen cannot face this level of influence alone. NEFSA exists to stand between the industry and efforts that threaten access, opportunity, and the truth — and to do so effectively, we must remain strong, engaged, and well-supported. Every fisherman benefits when their rights, heritage, and livelihoods are defended. But defending them requires resources and a unified organization capable of responding quickly, strategically, and professionally. Many of this year's biggest victories were the ones fishermen never saw — not because they were small, but because we stopped them before they could grow. The reality is simple: if fishermen want a future, we must invest in it. No one else is going to do it for us. Looking ahead to 2026, NEFSA is preparing for our most active and productive year yet. To strengthen our impact, we will be bringing on additional staff dedicated to both policy and advocacy work. These new team members will ensure NEFSA remains fully engaged at every meeting, every council process, and every decision-making table — from New England to Washington, D.C. This expansion is an investment in the future of commercial fishing and a reflection of our commitment to remain deeply involved on every front. To everyone who stood with us in 2025: thank you for your support, your trust, and your belief in our mission. To those considering joining NEFSA or renewing their commitment, now is the time. Together, we will continue defending America's oldest industry and protecting the coastal heritage that defines New England. Stay safe on the water — and stay engaged.

From all of us at NEFSA, we wish you a joyful, safe holiday season and a prosperous new year.



## NEFSA Representation at the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEFSA Chairman & Chief Strategist Dustin Delano, NEFSA Vice President John Drouin, and NEFSA Board Member Jason Joyce represented NEFSA at the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission meeting in Dewey Beach, DE in October, standing up

*By Shelley Wigglesworth, Administrative Assistant*  
for fishermen's rights and urging regulators to vote NO on a new aggressive menhaden harvest limit. NEFSA remains committed to working for, with, and alongside you, on the water and off.



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## **Renew your NEFSA membership or join as a new NEFSA Harvester member in December 2025 to be entered in a Gift Certificate Drawing from Coastal Maine Reporting**

*By Shelley Wigglesworth, Administrative Assistant*

Renew your NEFSA membership or join as a new NEFSA Harvester member in December and you will be automatically entered in a drawing to win a \$350- gift certificate from NEFSA Business Member Coastal Maine Reporting! Coastal Maine Reporting (CMR) is a liaison between commercial fishermen and the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR), providing an alternative for mandatory electronic landings and catch reporting. Founded by Sue Kelley and Alice Mayberry, who both worked for the DMR, CMR aims to reduce the anxiety associated with the state's online reporting requirements by allowing fishermen to submit information via text, email, or phone call. CMR Services Offered: State reporting using LEEDS, Federal reporting using VESL app, Commercial Harvester Reporting for the following species: Lobster, Halibut, Scallop, Sea Urchin, Elvers, Seaweed, Eel Pot, Sea Cucumbers, Aquaculture, Pelagic, Pelagic, Herring, Menhaden, Dealer reports, License renewal, & Updating Vessel information with DMR. Renew or join NEFSA here: <https://nefishermen.org/membership/>

