

V-notching: A Tradition of Stewardship and Sustainability

Maine lobstermen have a well-earned reputation for conscious stewardship of the lobster population. The long-term sustainability of the lobster fishery is a testament to members of the Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA) and the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association (NEFSA), who are dedicated to passing the trade on to the next generation and preserving New England's maritime identity.

No practice better speaks to our industry's ethic of conservation than v-notching.

What is V-notching?

It is the careful practice of marking and releasing egg-bearing female lobsters. This allows egg-bearing females to reproduce multiple times, supporting a healthy spawning stock.

Maine lobstermen first began v-notching lobster in 1917 and the practice has been mandatory since 2002. Enforcing v-notching is somewhat of an art to enforce and relies heavily on the honesty of each individual lobsterman.

V-notching Matters.

Marking and releasing egg-bearing females is an investment in the future of the lobster fishery. It's like putting money in the bank. V-notching is an essential practice for preserving the lobster resource.

- A 2019 study found that v-notching with a high compliance rate and a strict definition of the "notch" increased spawning stock biomass by **up to 632%**.
- Other academic studies have found that v-notching increases the reproductive potential of lobster fisheries. See [Daniel PC, Bayer RC, Waltz C](#) (1989) and [Tully O](#) (2001).

V-notching is Important, Even with High Abundance of Egg-bearing Females.

- With regulators concerned about the overall health of the resource, lobstermen should remain conscientious about proven conservation measures like v-notching, which help our resource flourish and underline our legacy of sustainability.

- Given that less than 1% of lobster eggs survive to maturity, maintaining a robust number of reproductive females is vital for the long-term health of the fishery.

V-notching is Not Harmful to Lobsters.

- Some lobstermen and regulators have expressed concern that v-notching leaves eggers susceptible to infection. A [1987 study](#) did not find a relationship between v-notching and infections, and we are not aware of studies establishing such a connection.

V-notching is Signature Conservation Critical to our Legacy and Future.

- Lobstermen began v-notching egg-bearing females in 1917 to encourage fellow lobstermen not to land reproductive females. In 1943, it became illegal to land v-notched lobsters in Maine, however v-notching remained voluntary. V-notching remained voluntary until 2002.
- In 2002, through the advocacy of lobstermen, v-notching became mandatory and core conservation measure in the lobster management plan. The lobster resource then experienced 15 years of increasing abundance.
- An unnamed lobstermen described his grandfather's attitude toward v-notching this way in a 2018 study: "I can remember in the '90s again, you did a female loaded down with eggs and it was almost a reverent moment. You took the time. My grandfather would practically stop the boat and put a huge notch in it and cradle it back into the water."
- Surveys of lobstermen reflect high confidence in the practice. A [2009 survey](#) of lobstermen found 90 percent of respondents rating v-notching and the prohibition on taking eggers to be "very effective."

A strong v-notching ethic sends a powerful message to regulators and to the public: Maine lobstermen take responsibility for the long-term health of the resource. **By continuing this legacy and encouraging every harvester to do their part, we strengthen the future of the fishery and uphold the proud reputation of Maine lobstermen as stewards of the fishery.**