

Building market access for early adopters of innovative fishing gear

Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions

Halifax, Canada

September 2026



New England
Aquarium

Protecting the blue planet

North Atlantic right whales (NARW)



Photo: New England Aquarium

- Primarily range along coastal waters of the eastern United States and Canada, from Florida to the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.
- Scientists have classified the North Atlantic right whale as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, putting them just one step away from extinction. Less than 400 individuals remain.
- Human interaction, specifically by entanglement in fishing gear or vessel strike, is the leading cause of death for right whales.
- 23 mother and calf pairs were sighted during the most recent calving season, the highest number since 2009.
 - With right whale births becoming less frequent, about fifty calves per year are needed to sustain the population.



ENDANGERED NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALE POPULATION STATUS

Primary threats

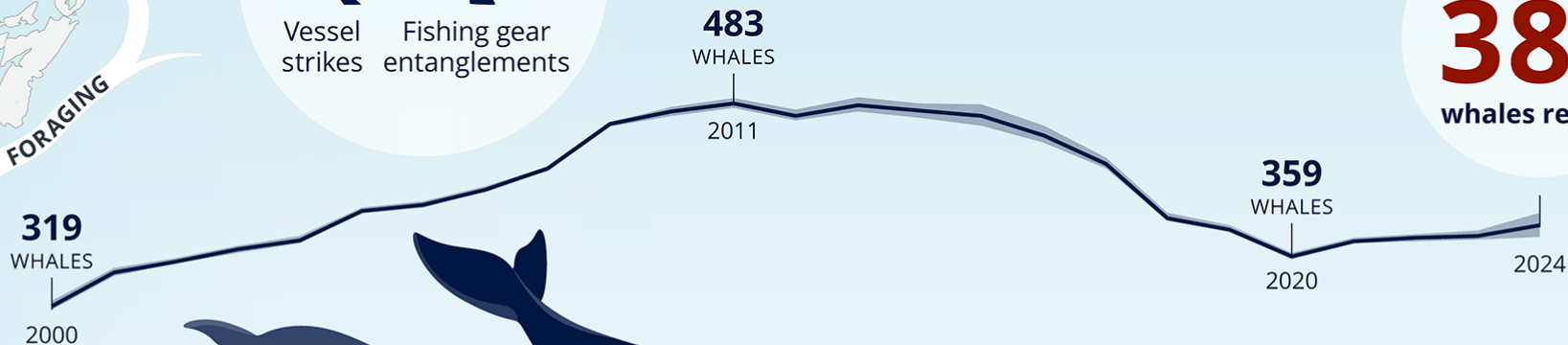
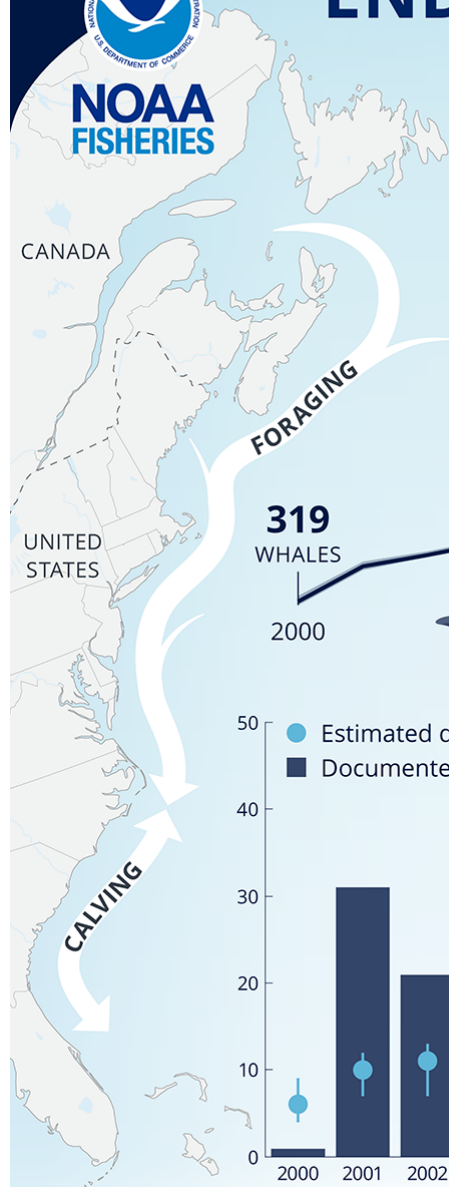


Vessel strikes



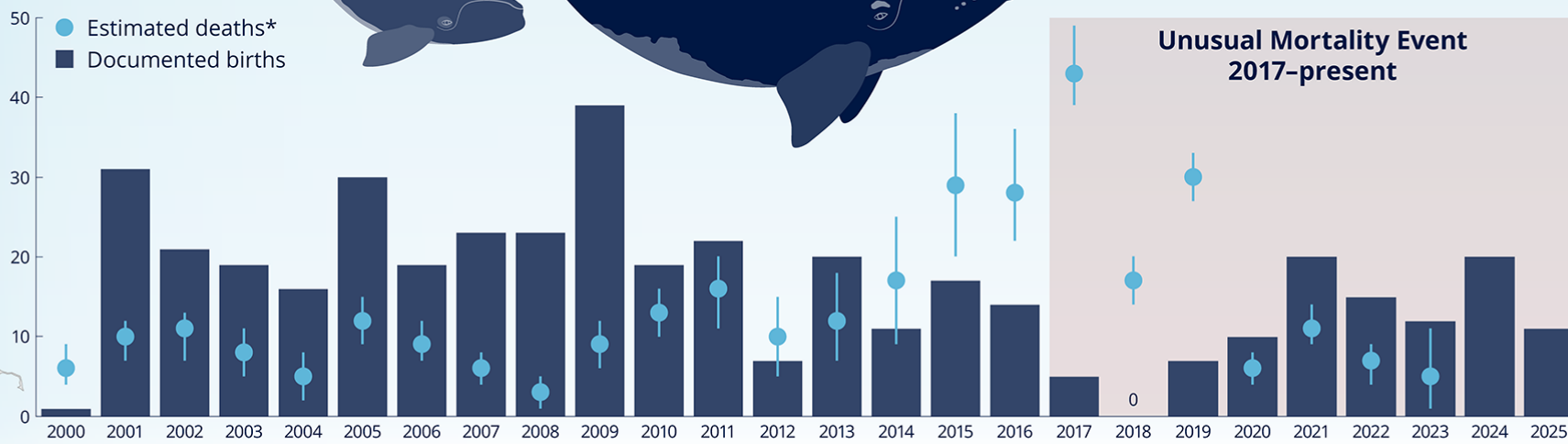
Fishing gear entanglements

Approximately
380
whales remain



● Estimated deaths*

■ Documented births



Updated December 2025

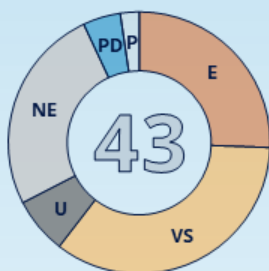
*Total deaths not estimated for the last 2 years due to lag in data processing and analysis.



ENDANGERED NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALE UNUSUAL MORTALITY EVENT (2017-2026*)

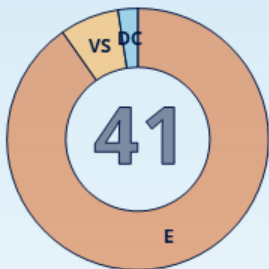


Endangered North Atlantic right whales are approaching extinction. **Approximately 380 remain.** Human impacts threaten the survival of this species. The leading cause of this Unusual Mortality Event is human interaction, specifically from **entanglements** or **vessel strikes**.



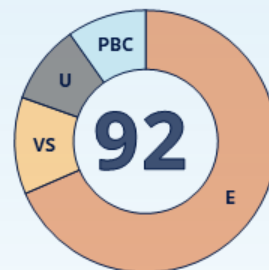
DEAD (CONFIRMED)

- 11 Entanglements (E)
- 15 Vessel Strikes (VS)
- 3 Unknown (U)
- 11 Not Examined (NE)
- 2 Perinatal Deaths (PD)
- 1 Pending (P)



SERIOUSLY INJURED

- 37 Entanglements (E)
- 3 Vessel Strikes (VS)
- 1 Dependent Calf (DC)



INJURED OR IN POOR HEALTH

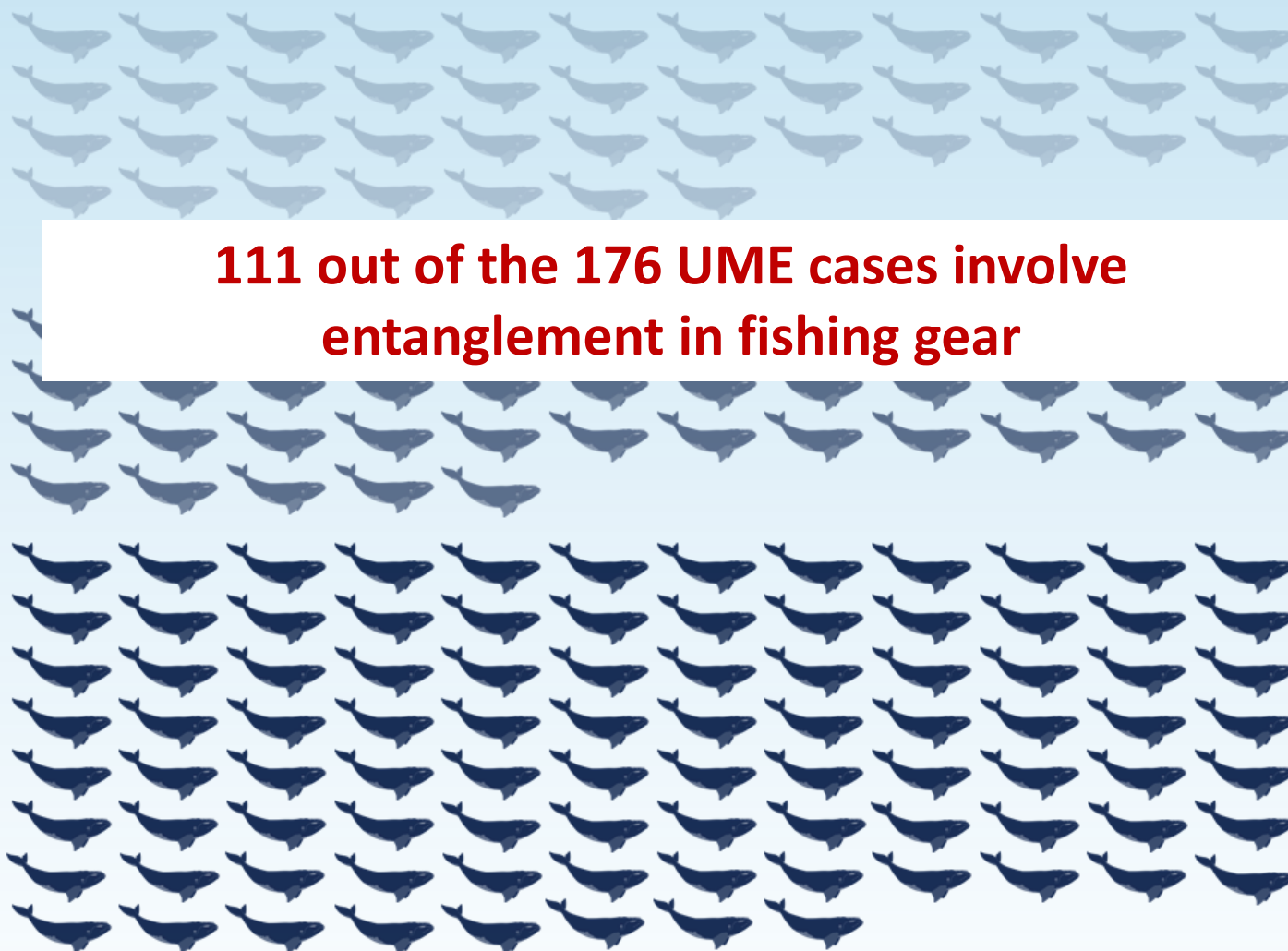
- 63 Entanglements (E)
- 11 Vessel Strikes (VS)
- 9 Unknown (U)
- 9 Poor Body Condition (PBC)

**176 WHALES
IN THE UME**

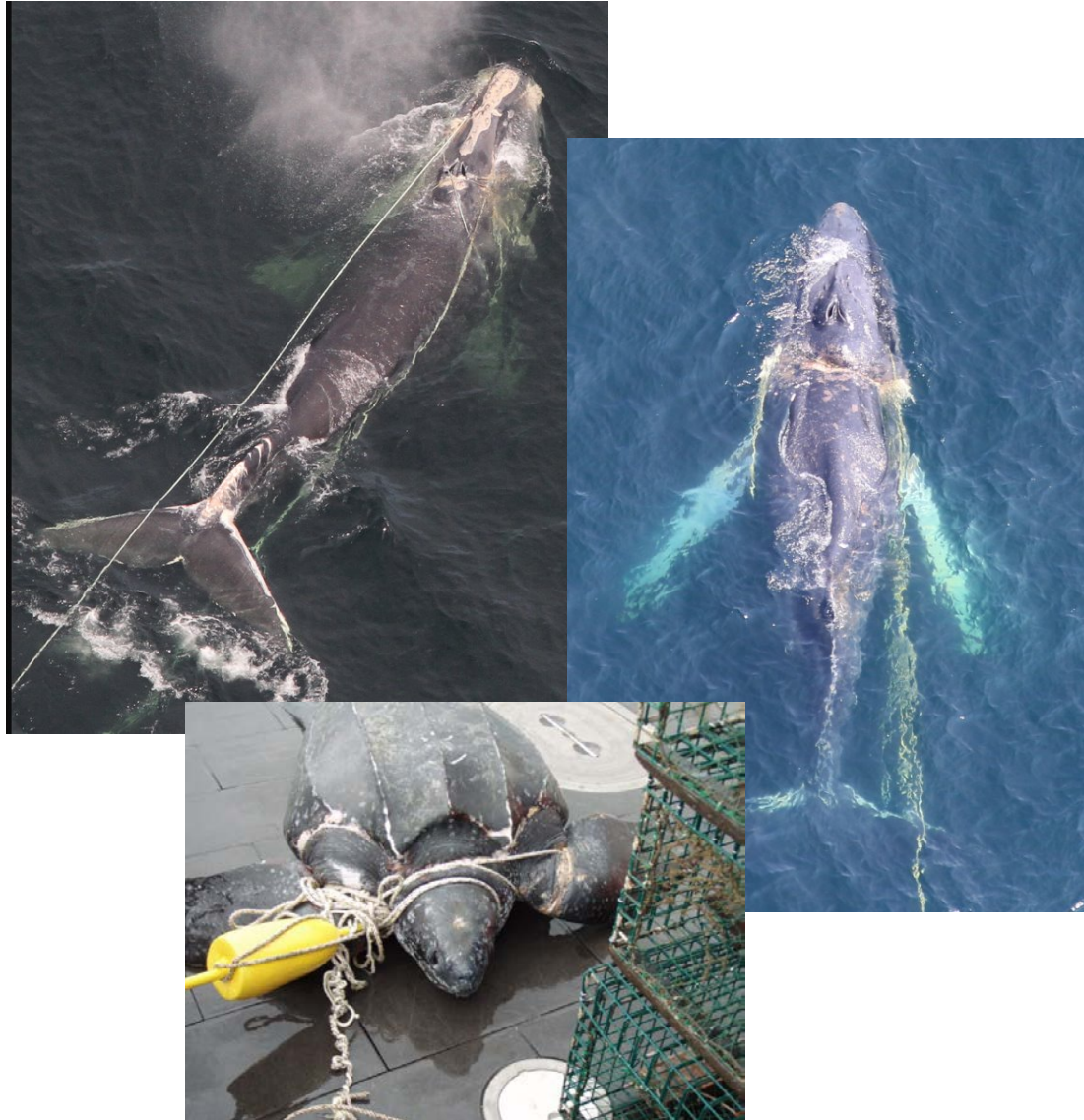


*Updated July 10, 2026

**111 out of the 176 UME cases involve
entanglement in fishing gear**



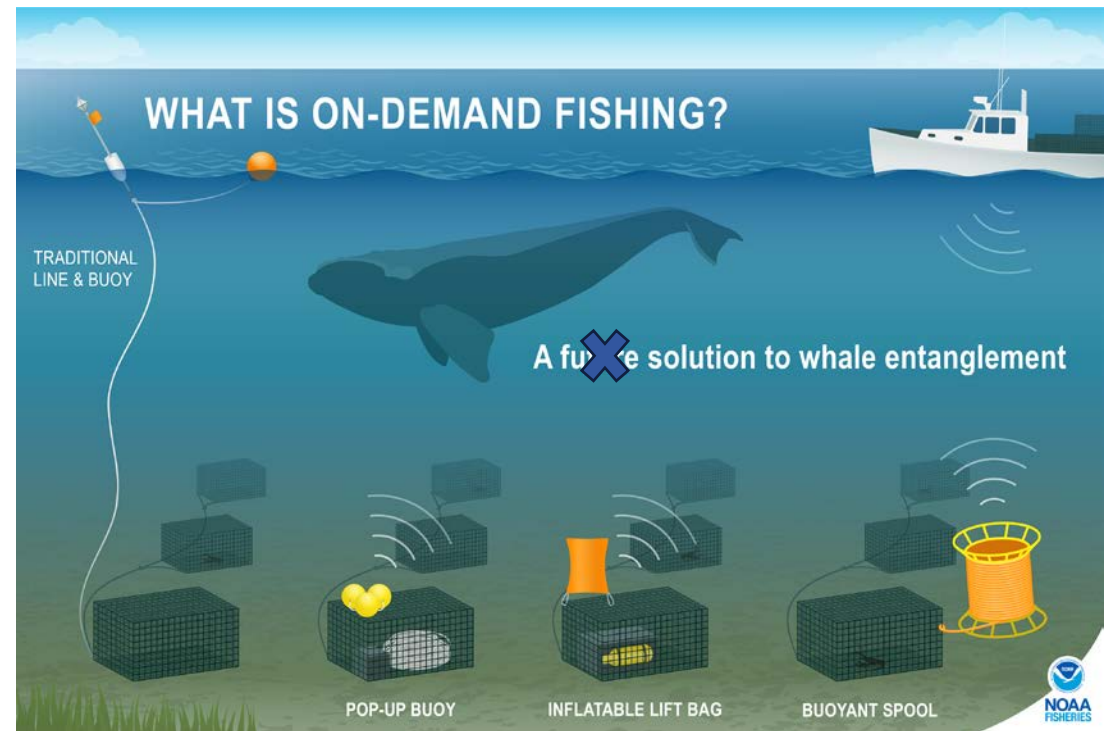
Why should we care?



- Entanglement is not only an issue for right whales – it is a significant threat for many endangered, threatened, and protected species around the world.
- Negatively impacts the seafood supply chain:
 - Additional regulations
 - Fisheries closures
 - Reputational risk
 - ESG policies/goals related to endangered species impact

On-demand (ropeless) fishing gear

- Used in trap and pot fisheries (like those used for lobster, crab, and black sea bass)
- Removes the vertical persistent buoy lines from the water column
- Fishers use an acoustic signal to release a float and line only when retrieving catch, decreasing the risk of entanglement
- Can allow for fishing opportunities in areas otherwise closed to fishing due to presence of endangered, threatened, and protected species *(in the U.S., via an experimental fishing permit)*



No longer a future solution - A present solution to whale entanglement!

Provisional figures. Do not share or reproduce this slide or the information therein.

ODG Gear Library Use Spring 2026

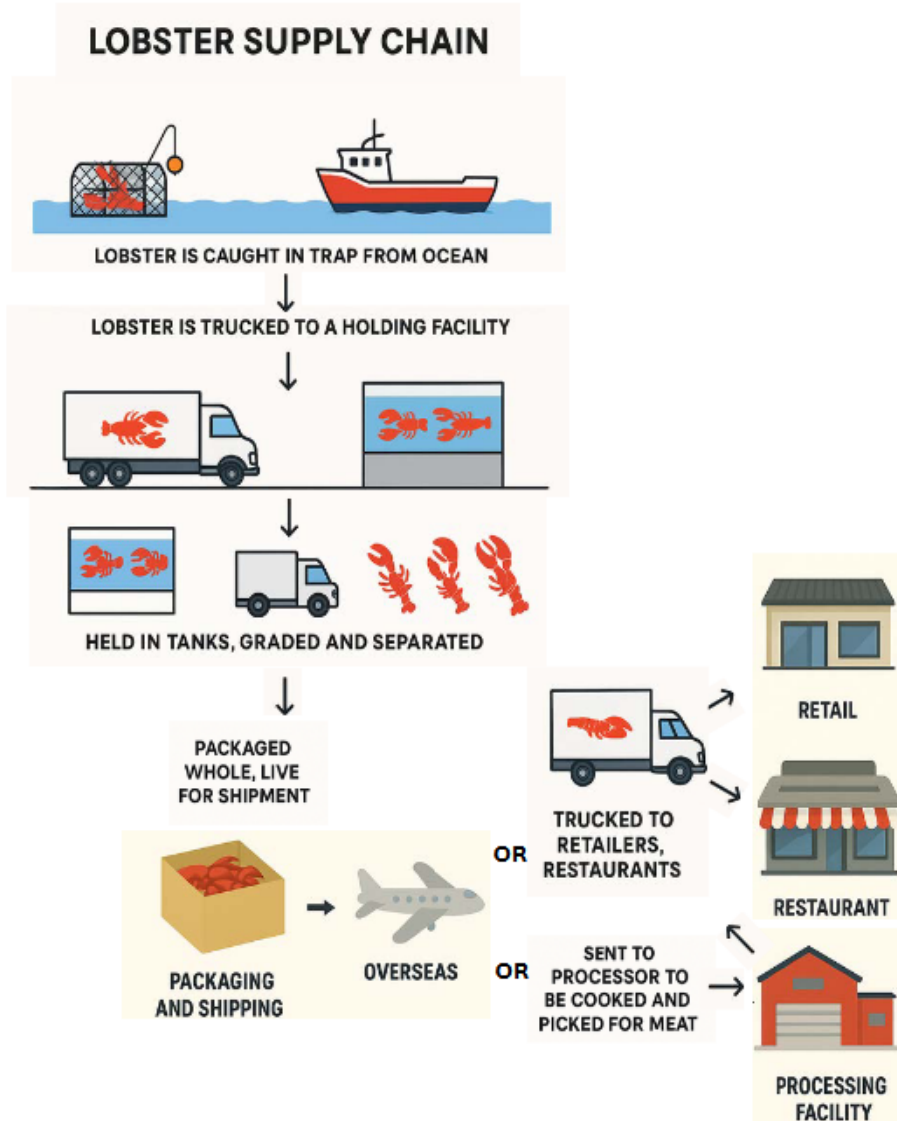
- # vessels trialing on-demand gear
- # hauls using on-demand units
- % success rate of gear popping up



Provisional figures. Do not share or reproduce this slide or the information therein.

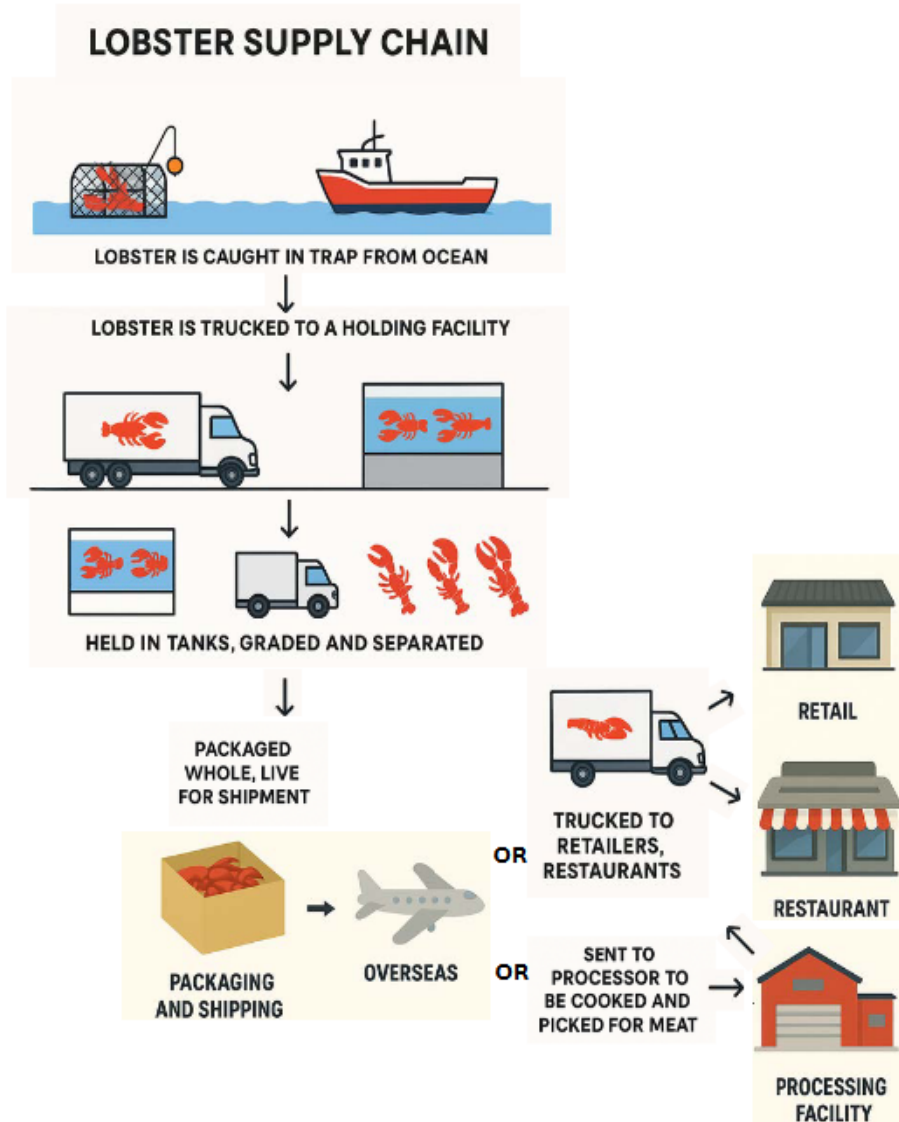
Lending Facility	# participating vessels	# hauls	% success rate
CanFISH	6 Captains/approx.45 crew members Total: over 80 harvesters. Loaned: 170 units.	>1,300 >500 buoy lines removed	96% in 2022 77% in 2023 (snow crab fishery ended early in 2024)
Maine DMR	25 active (+10) 5 onboarding (-5) (lost 6)	850+ (as of May 2025)	
NEFSC, Pocasset, MA	71 vessels, 5 states (-3) -54 fixed gear -17 (-3) mobile gear testing digital gear marking visualization 890 active on-demand retrieval devices in library	22,232 from 2020 to June 2026, of which: -18,993 in open areas/ seasons w hybrid trawls -3,239 in closed areas, fully on-demand	89% success rate from Feb 2023 – May 2025 90% fully on-demand trawl success rate 2026
National Marine Sanctuary Fdn, CA	7 new participants in EFP. 12 signed lease agreements	875 (2023-2025) Lower participation: due to reopening of salmon season/poor crab catches (2026)	93% in closed area

Challenges and Opportunities



- A critical and often overlooked barrier for early adopters of innovative fishing gear is the lack of recognition in the marketplace.
- Industry participants are not always aware of specific conservation issues within fisheries or the types of solutions that have been developed to overcome these challenges.
- While market incentives can help recognize early adopters and drive additional fishers to test innovative gear, supply chain complexity makes it difficult to separate these products.

Challenges and Opportunities



- Supply chain structure can differ port to port
- Full traceability of products caught in the same location as traditional gear can be difficult
- Complicated messaging
- Need ways to incentivize harvesters outside of ability to fish closures
 - Layering technology to collect more information fishers may want (e.g., water temps)



Come to our table so we can solve all these challenges!

Resources

- [North Atlantic Right Whale Anthropogenic Injury Visualization Site](#)
 - *Provides access to and visualization of, information and data associated with human-caused injuries to right whales*
- [Information on the North Atlantic right whale Unusual Mortality Event \(NOAA\)](#)
- [North Atlantic right whale Consortium](#)
 - *Over 200 individuals from research and conservation organizations, fishing and shipping industries, technical experts, and government authorities from the United States and Canada dedicated to the conservation and recovery of the North Atlantic right whale*
- [Ropeless Consortium](#)
 - *Engages researchers, industry, managers, and conservationists in implementing on demand gear to reduce entanglements*
- [On-demand gear training videos and tutorials hosted by commercial fishermen](#)
- [On-demand gear-caught lobster pop-up at the New England Aquarium](#)
- [Consumers willing to pay more for lobster harvested with ropeless technology, UMaine study finds](#) (U Maine News, 5/12/2026)
- There are many other wonderful resources provided by others in the Alliance community!



Protecting the blue planet

The Global Bycatch Exchange



- Includes a database with over 700 case studies compiling information on bycatch reduction techniques, including synthesized findings and descriptions of mitigation measures.
- Join [our community of practice](#) to engage with a global network dedicated to advancing bycatch mitigation.

As we look to the future of the Global Bycatch Exchange, we're seeking input from experts and practitioners to help strengthen our resources, partnerships, and impact. Complete our [community survey](#) today!

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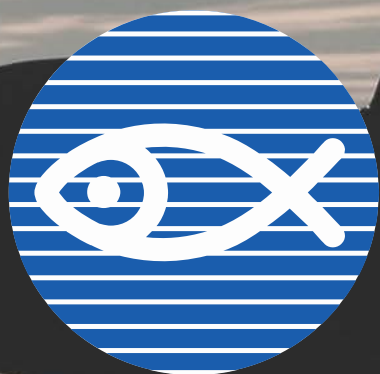
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