

Members of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission who come from other states have argued that more catch data is needed from Maine, which produces more than 80 percent of the American lobster harvest, in order to better manage the lobster population. Maine's data is insufficient and its policy of not requiring 100 percent reporting is unfair to other states, those members have said.

The data help regulators estimate how many lobster are off the East Coast, how much gear is involved in the fishery, how it is configured, where and how often it is used, and how lobster fishing might overlap with other marine activities or otherwise impact the marine environment.

"That's kind of foolish," Dave Cousens, president of Maine Lobstermen's Association, said of the commission's stance. He said the 10 percent of Maine lobstermen who file daily summaries each year generate enough accurate data to make informed management decisions, and that having to come up with another half million dollars to pay for the program would be a waste.

"Until [the commission] can come up with the money, or can come up with a reason why we have to do it statistically, I think we're good," Cousens said.

Maine's Department of Marine Resources also has opposed requiring all lobstermen to file reports. The burden would be time-consuming on Maine's 7,000 or so licensed Maine lobstermen, and it would require the department to hire at least five full-time staffers and raise an additional \$500,000 in industry fees to cover the expense of processing thousands of daily reports, DMR officials have said.

"We [now process] about 30,000 records a year," Kathleen Reardon, DMR's chief lobster scientist, said last month at a hearing on the subject at Ellsworth High School.

Patrick Keliher, head of DMR, has argued that the state could fine-tune its current reporting program, which requires several hundred randomly selected lobstermen to file daily catch reports, to better reflect trends and estimates among the entire statewide fleet. The

catch data sought by the commission could be improved without dramatically increasing the reporting and processing burden on Maine fishermen and state regulators, he has said.

Attempts Thursday to contact Keliher for comment were not successful.

The Maine Lobstermen's Association has argued against requiring all fishermen to file catch reports, Patrice McCarron, the group's executive director said. The catch data generated by the 10 percent of Maine lobstermen who are randomly selected each year has been shown to be statistically valid to reflect broader trends within Maine's statewide lobster fishery, she argued.

The interstate fisheries commission has asked Maine in the past to implement 100 percent reporting, but that the state hasn't done it because it has lacked the money and technology to be able to process hundreds of thousands of reports each year, McCarron said.

"Who's paying for it?" McCarron said. "We don't have the money to do this. We don't have the technology to do this. It seems like a pretty tall order."

Under current rules, each year Maine randomly selects 10 percent of all licensed lobstermen — roughly between 700 and 800 — to file daily summaries of how much lobster they catch, how their fishing gear was configured, and where it was set, among other details.

Maine's existing catch reporting program was implemented in 2008 at the behest of the commission after other states, all of which have much smaller lobster fisheries than Maine's. At the time, Maine convinced the commission that requiring 100 percent compliance would be burdensome and costly.

All states should prioritize development of electronic reporting systems — similar to the way baby eel fishermen in Maine use electronic swipe cards to register their harvest data with DMR — and that all states will have to require fishermen to file more precise spatial data about where they set their gear, the commission said.