

MINORITY FLOUT LAW

Illegal Fishing Meets Stern Gov't. Warning

Illegal lobster fishing, accompanied in some cases by incidents of violence by poachers, made newspaper headlines in the Maritimes last year and drew stern warnings from high government levels that such flagrant violations of the law would not be tolerated.

Prince Edward Island's native member of the federal cabinet, Hon. J. Angus MacLean, Minister of Fisheries, didn't pull any punches.

Commenting on the rush of outlaws that broke out on both New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island lobstering fronts, Mr. MacLean had this to say: "Such attempts to obstruct or intimidate law enforcement officers show no regard for life and property and will not be tolerated."

ONLY SMALL NUMBER
The Minister emphasized that the great majority of lobstermen were law-abiding citizens and anxious to co-operate in observing conservation regulations. It was a small minority which constantly flouted regulations. "These endanger not only their own livelihood but also that of the conscientious fishermen", Mr. MacLean said. "Their actions must, and will, be controlled", he declared.

As was the case in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island recorded an upsurge in lobster fishing violations in 1958.

There were 155 prosecutions against Island lobstermen for breaking regulations last year. Convictions totalled 153 and fines levied amounted to \$4,339. Two of the cases involved obstructions of fishery officers. In 1957 there were 119 convictions out of 125 prosecutions against lobster fishermen. Fines levied in those cases exceeded \$2,100.

ROUGH PLAY
Last year's lawlessness resulted in gunplay, knife-wielding and attacks on fishery patrol boats. The more serious incidents occurred on the eastern shore of New Brunswick.

Boats were damaged, at least two fishery officers were hurt and others were fired upon by gunmen in ambush in this guerrilla war between poachers and government authority.

Typical of the incidents of violence was one involving A.A. Robichaud, District Protection Officer, Moncton, whose territory of supervision at the moment covers the entire east coast of New Brunswick. Accompanied by another fishery officer on patrol, Mr. Robichaud spotted lobster fishing in the Tracadie section of the coast. From his

automobile Mr. Robichaud radio-telephoned fisheries patrol boats to converge on the area.

OPENED FIRE
While Mr. Robichaud was directing operations from shore, a hidden gunman opened fire with a rifle. While bullets whizzed close to the vehicle, none of them struck the car. While returning to Tracadie, Mr. Robichaud and his companion were ambushed again.

This time it was a shotgun blast which peppered the rear of the automobile. Mr. Robichaud believed the car's radio aerial was the target.

At Tignish, P.E.I. a patrol boat under charter by the Department of Fisheries was attacked. The boat, the Royal Oak, skippered by P.J. MacDougall, put out of savage Harbor to aid three other patrol craft, dragging for illegal lobster traps in the stretch of water between Tignish Run and North Point.

When the boats tied up at the dock, the craft came under a barrage of rocks thrown from shore. So fast were the rocks falling that the crew had to take shelter in the deckhouses.

The attack lasted more than an hour, during which time all four boats were damaged. That day the boats had confiscated 233 illegally-set lobster traps.

ROB NEIGHBORS
To combat lobster fishing violations the Department of Fisheries is using a two-bladed weapon in its war against poaching—law enforcement and education. By the latter, the department hopes to convince all fishermen that conservation laws are to protect fishermen and the industry. As one veteran fisheries official at Halifax put it: "Fishermen who fish lobsters illegally are robbing their neighbours; the lobsters they take illegally just reduce the legitimate catch by that much."

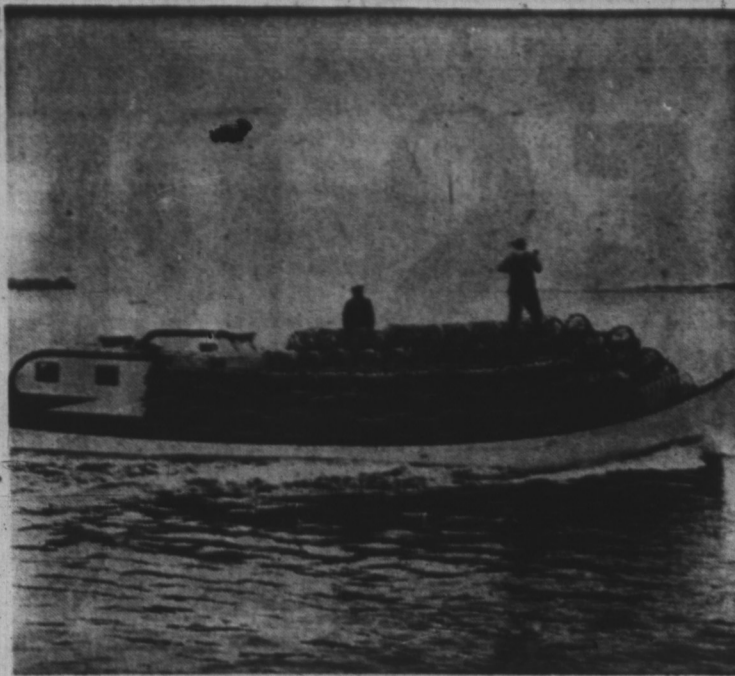
On top of that, the same official emphasized, poachers have to take a lower price for the bootleg product. If the lobsters were left in the sea to be fished during the legal season, the fishermen would make more money.

While the current rash of violence is serious, rough tactics are by no means new in the lobster war. In past years, fisheries officers have been assaulted, thrown overboard and shot at. Fortunately, the marksmen have been poor shots.

ONE FATALITY
However, one fishery officer lost his life through violence. That was in 1926. One night in that year, Agapit LeBlanc, a Buctouche fishery officer, failed to return from a poacher hunt. A few days later his body floated ashore, the skull fractured. The murder remains unsolved to this day.

While officials of the department are not so naive to imagine that poaching can be eliminated completely, they feel that as fishermen became more aware of the need for conservation to protect their future, wholesale poaching will subside.

Poachers comprise only a tiny minority of the mass of fishermen, and most legitimate fishermen are 100 per cent behind the government's effort to ensure the healthy state of the lobstering industry that leaves millions of dollars in these provinces every year.



PRIDE OF ALBERTON FLEET

Research Board

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The gear is a heavy iron drag fitted with blunt teeth to turn over stones and with heavy bars to screen out the larger rocks. The fine-meshed net rides on heavy bars to screen out the heavy rubberized canvas to protect it from the bottom.

A great variety of lobsters ranging from those less than an inch long to those over 12 inches weighing several pounds have been caught in this gear. The small lobsters' habits are much like their parents.

They are most plentiful on broken, rocky bottom, possibly because they are best protected from their enemies. At the end of their first summer they have moulted 5 to 7 times to reach a length of 1 to 1 1/4 inches.

COMMERCIAL LOBSTERS

During the past 25 years over 100,000 commercial-sized lobsters

have been tagged in the Maritime Provinces and several thousand more in Quebec and Newfoundland. In addition, nearly 50,000 lobsters have been marked by punching small holes in the tail fan.

These taggings and markings have provided a great deal of information on the movements and growth of lobsters and give a very good idea as to what fraction of the lobsters are caught each year.

Much of this work has been done in P.E.I. by U.J. Walsh, a native of Stanley Bridge and now a well known figure in the Tignish and Miminegash areas.

HALF RECAPTURED

Of more than 40,000 lobsters tagged in P.E.I. over half have been recaptured by fishermen. Their reports show clearly that lobsters do not move about a great deal. There was some movement along shore and the occasional tagged lobster was found 10 to 20 miles and rarely,

even further from where it was liberated.

In general, however, most tagged lobsters were found very close to their liberation points; the average distance moved was usually less than two miles.

The tag returns gave no indication of on or offshore movements in the spring or fall.

The large numbers of tags returned do show that in general, P.E.I. lobster stocks are fished very hard. Miminegash is probably a fairly typical example of the small-lobster areas.

Each year 1000 legal-sized lobsters are tagged there during the first week of August—a few days before the fall season opens. During the two month season fishermen have on the average recaptured about 80 percent of these tagged lobsters.

There is every reason to believe that the whole stock of legal lobsters in the Miminegash area is fished just as hard. Only a few lobsters escape the commercial fishery and very few indeed are

lucky enough to escape two years wrapped shed with shrunken claws.

Is it any wonder that in such areas, 85 percent of the catch is made up of small, canner-size lobsters and that few escape to grow larger?

MOULTING

Adult lobsters like the larvae must moult or shed their hard inelastic shells in order to grow. This is usually done during the summer. The actual moult process is shown in the accompanying photographs taken at the Fisheries Research Board's Biological Station near Ellerslie.

Shortly before moult, lime salts are absorbed from certain areas of the shell which become softer and more flexible. At the start of the moult the lobster lies on its side and the membrane joining the body and tail splits. The lobster then bends in a V-shape and gradually works itself out of its old shell.

The whole process takes only 5 to 20 minutes. The newly moulted lobster is brightly colored but has an extremely soft,

How often do they moult and how much do they grow at each moult?

Immediately after moult the new-shelled lobster absorbs sea water and gradually swells for 4 to 5 hours to reach its full new size. As a result the meat of a newly moulted lobster is extremely watery.

Gradually, however, as the lobster feeds, its shell hardens and it grows new tissue to replace the water absorbed after moult. For the shell to become fully hardened takes from a few weeks to several months depending on the water temperature, the food supply and the size of the lobster.

MEASURE GROWTH

Although it is fairly easy to find out how fast lobsters grow in captivity the more important question is—How fast do they grow under natural conditions?

To answer these questions nearly 50,000 lobsters have been carefully measured and marked by means of small holes punched in the tail fan. These were then released on the fishing grounds at various places around the Maritime Provinces.

Those recaptured up to two years later were readily recognized by the punch marks which remained quite clear. Each lobster recaptured was remeasured carefully to find out how much it had grown.

The most extensive series of marking experiments has been done in the Tignish area. At this point more than 14,000 six to ten

TIGNISH AREA

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