

# **LOBSTER INSTITUTE STRATEGIC PLAN 2012-2017**

**Approved by the Board of Advisors – February 2012**

## **BACKGROUND**

The Maine Lobster Institute was established in 1987 as the result of the united efforts of representatives from the Maine Lobstermen's Association, the Maine Lobster Pound Association, the Maine Import/Export Lobster Dealers and the University of Maine. Its initial charge was to "conduct research and provide information to protect, conserve, and enhance the Maine lobster resource and its environment in order to insure the continuance of a viable lobster industry that will benefit Maine people."

Almost from its inception the founders looked to expand the Institute's reach. They realized a unified approach (geographically and between sectors) would be most effective in dealing with the challenges faced by the lobster industry. The Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association became actively involved in the early stages of the Institute's development. With an increasing regional focus, the organization was renamed The Lobster Institute (Institute), and today boasts a Board of Advisors with representatives from major lobster industry associations, businesses and communities ranging from New York through the Canadian Maritime Provinces.

The Institute is headed by a part-time Executive Director appointed by the University of Maine, in consultation with the Institute's Board of Advisors. The Board of Advisors provides counsel to the Executive Director in identifying/establishing priorities for research and other activities; and on administrative matters relating to the Institute. They also provide assistance as necessary to Institute scientists, educators and students in carrying out their research and projects. Further, they are charged with developing, maintaining and seeking to enhance the base funding for the Institute and its initiatives.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Lobster Institute Board of Directors, by consensus, agreed to retain the mission, vision statement and values adopted in 2006.

The Board of Advisors voted to extend the 2006-2010 Strategic Plan for the Lobster Institute through the end of 2011. The Board and staff then worked with a Strategic Planning Consultant Dr. Sue Estler, throughout 2010-2011 to review, and revise as needed, the Institute's mission statement, values and vision statement; and to outline a five-year long-range plan to guide the Institute's activities through 2017.

### Needs Assessment:

Information of the priorities of the lobstermen and others involved in the lobster industry was accounted for in developing this Strategic Plan. This information was culled from:

- input at both the 2010 and 2011 Canadian/U.S. Lobstermen’s Town Meetings hosted by the Lobster Institute.
- needs assessment surveys distributed in 2010 and 2011
- a self-assessment by the Board of Directors
- ongoing dialogue with lobstermen at various formal meetings and informal gatherings

The Committee looked at literature on strategic planning and reviewed the Institute’s 2006-2010 Strategic Plan. Revisions to the 2006-2010 Strategic Plan were drafted to reflect updated programming and research priorities and directions as suggested by the Needs Assessment. The draft was reviewed by the Board in the January of 2012. Following suggested edits, the draft was submitted to the Board of Advisors and put to a full vote by mail.

## CURRENT SITUATION

### Strengths:

- Is the only international organization of its kind – the Institute is only entity that actively crosses the border to encourage communication and joint research
- Depth and breadth of connection to the industry via composition of the Board of Advisors – a grassroots organization, the Institute currently has 25 members volunteering their service on its Board of Advisors, with representation from the entire North Atlantic region. Additionally, most major industry associations are represented and business and community members also serve.
- Strong connection to the University of Maine – the Institute has a commitment of support from the University of Maine for use of facilities and equipment located on campus as well as financial support for a portion of staff salaries. Additionally, the Institute enjoys solid collaborative relationships with and a good reputation among University researchers.
- A positive reputation as an organization that facilitates communication – the Institute brings fishery and industry representatives together from Long Island Sound to the Canadian Maritimes. It regularly brings together many of the lobster industry leaders and provides a voice for lobstermen
- A positive reputation among a core of lobster researchers and industry leaders – the Institute is seen as being very involved in the lobster research community and as an entity that fosters communication among diverse industry sectors.
- Experienced Executive Director & Staff – the Lobster Institute’s current Executive Director has over 30 years of experience in lobster research and 16 years as Executive Director. The Associate Director has 10 years of experience working at the Lobster Institute. They have built an extensive network of contacts within the lobster fishery and the lobster research community. They have established comfort and trust levels with fishermen and others involved with the lobster industry.

## **Challenges:**

- Extensiveness of reputation –The Institute has strong connections with many of the principals involved with the industry and lobster researchers. Strides have been made in the last five years to broaden the awareness of the Institute and its accomplishments among a greater number of harvesters and others in the industry, as well as among members of the general public. However, this is an area still in need of focused attention in long-range planning.
- Limited resources – the amount and extent of the Institute’s research and education projects is severely restricted by the financial resources of the Institute. Operational revenues are insufficient and the growth of the Institute has been limited as a result. Securing financial stability is a key challenge as the Institute plans for the future
- Succession planning – while the Executive Director has no immediate plans to retire he is approaching that milestone, establishing a succession plan is necessary to secure sound leadership for the Institute. Likewise, there is a need to discuss Board structure for the future as many members also near retirement.

## **Issues:**

Relevant issues that surfaced in the assessment process:

- There may soon be a “changing of the guard” as thousands of harvesters also near retirement. How can the Institute assist the industry with this?
- As economic stability becomes more of an issue within the industry how can the Institute provide advice and counsel?
- How can the Institute enhance the involvement of harvesters and industry members in its activities?
- Long-term financial security. How can the Institute ensure its own sustainability?

## **Research Priorities:**

The Needs Assessment revealed the following as the top 5 research priorities (in order of importance):

1. Lobster Health
2. Effects of toxins/environmental pollutants on lobster stocks
3. Population dynamics
4. Development of value-added products
5. Assessing economic factors that influence the lobster industry.

## **General Priorities:**

The Needs Assessment revealed the following as the top 5 general priorities (in the order of importance):

1. Involve fishermen in research projects.
2. Facilitate communication across segments of the lobster industry, research community, and government agencies to increase understanding of each one’s challenges and objectives.

3. Communication to ensure that research information reaches the industry, the public, and policy makers.
4. Have representation from all aspects of the fishery on the Board of Advisors
5. Collaborative work with other lobster researchers.

## **GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

**GOAL 1. CONSERVATION** – To take an active role in ensuring the health and abundance of the lobster resource and preservation of its habitat in order to sustain the lobster fishery.

### **Objectives**

- 1a.** To strengthen the Lobster Health Coalition and continue proactive health monitoring programs and a network of volunteers to implement the programs
- 1b.** To continue research related to lobster health issues, including a focus on anthropogenic environmental factors (toxins/pollutants, ocean acidification)
- 1c.** Continue to provide venues for the industry to discuss sustainability issues (including certification); and continue educational efforts focused on relaying the industries conservation measures and their importance in sustaining the resource.

**GOAL 2. COMMUNICATIONS**– To continue to be recognized as an entity that: 1) builds relationships by bringing all interested parties together to work toward the common goal of helping to ensure a strong and healthy lobster industry; and that 2) serves as a central clearinghouse for lobster information and a major channel for communication among harvesters, dealers, pound owners, processors, scientists, and resource managers in the North Atlantic region and throughout the world.

### **Objectives**

- 2 a.** To seek input from lobstermen and industry members through as many avenues as possible, including but not limited to:
  - regular meetings of the Institute’s Board of Advisors
  - staff and Board attendance at significant industry meetings and forums
  - continuing to host the annual Canadian/U.S. Lobstermen’s Town Meeting
  - engaging in informal dialogue with individual lobstermen, pound owner, dealers, and other industry members as well as industry associations
  - regular needs assessment surveys to provide long range planning guidance to the Institute.

- 2.b. To continue to heighten the awareness among harvesters of the purpose of the Institute and the availability of its services.
- 2 c. To improve existing and pursue new avenues of communicating Institute and industry research findings, news, accomplishments, and challenges to the industry, policy makers and to the general public.
- 2 d. To continue the Canadian/U.S. Lobstermen’s Town Meeting as a forum that encourages dialogue between fishermen from the Canadian Maritimes and Northeastern U.S.
- 2 e. Collaborate on organizing research symposia and participate in existing workshops and conferences designed to communicate research findings and priorities for future research.
- 2 f. To increase the Institute’s participation in federal, regional, state, and other committees that deal with issues surrounding lobster research and/or make recommendations/publish reports that impact the lobster industry.

**GOAL 3. OUTREACH & EDUCATION: SERVICE AND SUPPORT TO THE LOBSTER INDUSTRY** – To identify practical problems of concern to the industry and to conduct and/or provide for guidance and educational outreach linking industry experts with academic resources to seek innovative solutions.

**Objectives**

- 1 a. To coordinate and/or participate in as many educational and service projects each year as financially possible and as time permits, and to ensure that selected projects address the Institute’s priorities as developed by the Program Committee.
- 1 b. To continue to update the list of “Cooperating Researchers” to serve as collaborators with the Lobster Institute in its research/education projects.
- 1 c To continue to improve the Institute’s use of the Internet as an information tool for the lobster industry.

**GOAL 4. COOPERATIVE RESEARCH** – To strengthen and expand our collaboration with lobstermen and all sectors of the lobster industry, including lobster researchers and management agencies, in order to better pursue our mission and as a means to encourage industry unity.

### **Objectives**

- 4 a.** To involve fishermen in setting research priorities and as participants in research projects whenever possible.
- 4 b.** To continue to pursue partnerships with business and scientists, both inside and outside of Maine, on all research and educational projects.
- 4 c.** To build the Lobster Health Coalition to foster the integration of lobster research in the region and work towards developing a regional mechanism for listing active research projects and their subsequent findings.
- 4 d.** To continue to build a research endowment (separate from the operational endowment) to provide a pool of readily available funds to:
  - address immediate research needs of the industry as they arise
  - allow the Institute to offer research and educational project grants to qualified organizations whose proposals match the Institute’s priorities

**GOAL 5. GOVERNANCE** – To maintain an appropriate organizational structure, with a Board of Advisors that is broadly representative and fully engaged; rigorous program assessment to ensure alignment with the Strategic Plan; and management policies that foster participation of Board, staff, and constituents in goal-setting, decision-making and ongoing planning.

### **Objectives**

- 5 a.** To regularly evaluate and ensure Board diversity to guarantee appropriate geographic and sector representation and a commitment to the Institute.
- 5 b.** To introduce a committee structure to the Board of Advisors to concentrate efforts of qualified and interested members on specific aspects of Institute guidance and governance.
- 5 c.** To produce an annual “Plan of Work” that establishes action plans for the Institute to follow in working towards obtaining the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan within available resources.
- 5 d.** To develop a success plan for ensuring continued leadership of the Institute, including the Board of Advisors and the Executive Director.

**GOAL 6. FINANCIAL STABILITY** – To ensure the financial stability of the Institute by generating sources of revenue adequate to support the operations of the Institute and its programming priorities.

## **Objectives**

- 6 a.** Aggressively pursue current income generating programs and seek out new revenue sources.
- 6 b.** Continue to pursue grant funding for priority research and educational outreach.
- 6 c.** Ensure that suggested Institute programs and projects address goals and objective outlined in its Strategic Plan and can be managed within available resources.
- 6 c.** Continue building the operational endowment fund, through Phase II of the C.O.R.E. Campaign, to a level that can support day-to-day activities of the Institute.
- 6 d.** Continue to build the program endowment fund, through Phase II of the C.O.R.E. Campaign, to a level that can support the Institute's research and project priorities.