



Florida's Spiny Lobster Fishery

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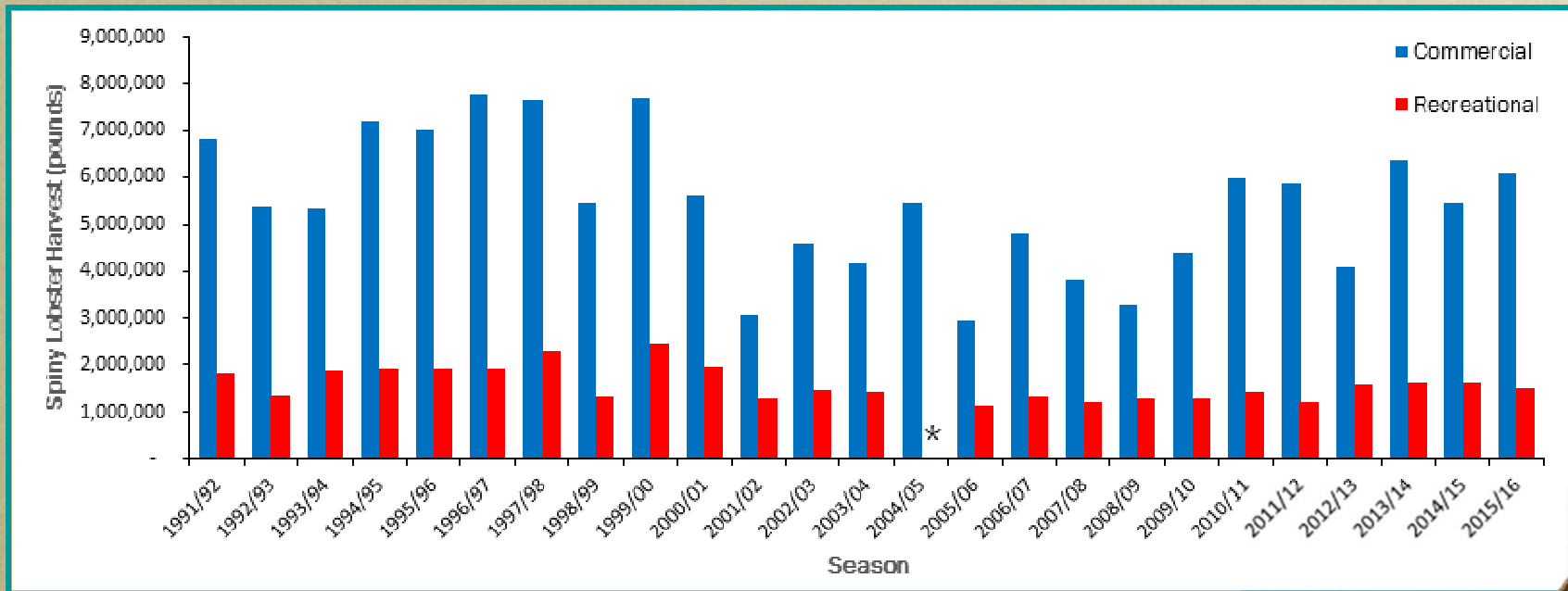
Overview - Spiny Lobster Fishery

- One of Florida's most valuable commercial fisheries
 - Dockside value averages \$20-24 million annually
 - 2013: dockside value reached approximately \$50 million
- Culturally important to south Florida
 - Commercial harvest dates back to the early 1800s
- Recreational fishery important for tourism and south Florida economy
- Primary methods of harvest include traps, diving, and bully netting
- Majority of Florida's lobsters are spawned in the Caribbean
 - Harvest rates have a limited impact on fishery productivity in subsequent years



Lobster Landings by Sector

- Commercial harvest varies year to year, but dominates total catch
- Recreational harvest relatively stable over time

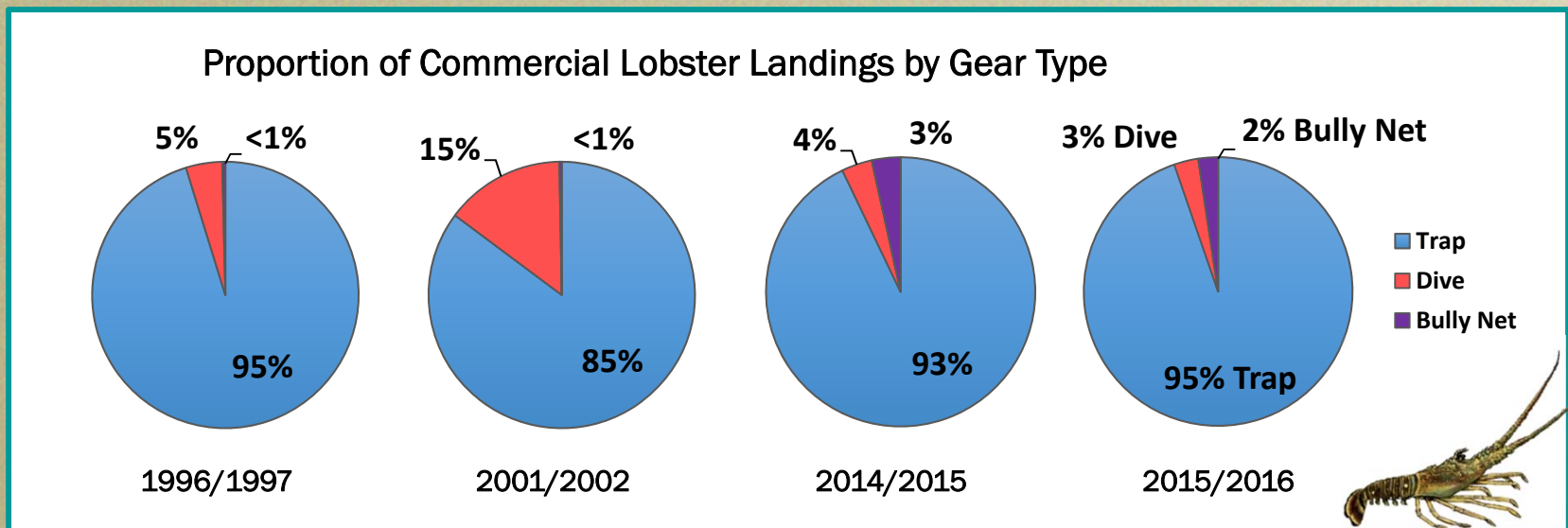


* Recreational landings are not available for 2004/2005



Commercial Fishery

- Three primary harvest methods: traps, diving, bully netting
 - Traps have dominated commercial catch since the 1940s
 - Dive fishery expanded in the late 1990s and early 2000s
 - Bully net fishery has experienced a resurgence in recent years
- These shifts have resulted in user conflicts within the fishery
 - Addressed through management changes



Commercial Regulations – All Gear Types

- License requirements: SPL, RS, and C#
 - Additional license requirements for some gear types
- Open season Aug. 6 – March 31
- Minimum size limit: 3 inch carapace length
- Must be landed in whole condition
 - Federal permit required to possess “wrung” tails
- No harvest of egg-bearing lobsters allowed
- Allowable gears: trap, diving, bully net, or hoop net
 - Small incidental bycatch allowed from net or trawl
- Harvest prohibited from:
 - Biscayne Bay-Card Sound Spiny Lobster Sanctuary
 - Portions of John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park
 - Certain zoned areas of FKNMS



Trap Fishery

- Largest component of commercial fishery
 - More than 90% of commercial catch annually

Fishery description:

- Traps can be made from wood or plastic slats
- Traps can be no larger than 3 x 2 x 2 feet, or 12 cubic feet total
- A state-issued trap tag must be affixed to each trap
- Undersized lobsters, or “shorts,” are commonly used as an attractant
 - No more than 50 shorts per boat plus one per trap are allowed
- Traps can be placed in the water 5 days before start of the commercial season
- Working traps at night is prohibited
- Certain areas are closed to trapping
- No harvest or possession limits for lobster harvested with traps



Trap Reduction Program

- 1970s - 1990s: uncontrolled growth led to overabundance of traps
 - Declining yield per trap
 - Concerns for mortality of undersized lobsters used as attractants
 - Marine debris and navigational concerns
- 1990 - 1992: development of the [Lobster Trap Certificate Program](#)
 - Cooperation between industry, FL Legislature, and MFC
 - Fishermen were allocated an initial suite of “certificates” based on previous landings
 - Each certificate allows use of one trap (identified by a tag)
 - Each time trap certificates are transferred outside the owner’s immediate family, 10% are reduced
 - Since implementation, has resulted in roughly 50% reduction
 - 1991: 939,000 traps
 - 2016: 475,000 traps



Commercial Dive Fishery

- Commercial Dive endorsement (CD) required to commercially harvest lobsters while diving
 - Limited-access: implemented in 2004 to limit effort in the dive fishery
 - No new CDs issued
 - Effective Jul. 1, 2015, existing CDs may be transferred between harvesters
 - 35% of CDs originally issued have been eliminated due to non-renewal
- Additional regulations
 - Vessel limit of 250 lobsters in south Florida
 - Commercial diving at night limited to the recreational bag limit
 - Harvest from artificial habitat prohibited
 - Trap certificates cannot be held by CD holders



Commercial Bully Net Fishery

- Oldest method of lobster harvest still active in the fishery
- Nighttime operation that requires clear skies and clear, calm, shallow water
- Primarily occurs in the early months of the season
 - Conditions in winter months generally unfavorable
- Relatively minor but viable component of the commercial fishery
 - Financially feasible means of entering the commercial lobster fishery
 - Provides lobsters in best condition for the live market
- Additional regulations
 - Vessel limit of 250 lobsters
 - Bully nets cannot be larger than 3 in diameter
 - FWC considering an open-access commercial endorsement



Photo courtesy of Ben Gutzler



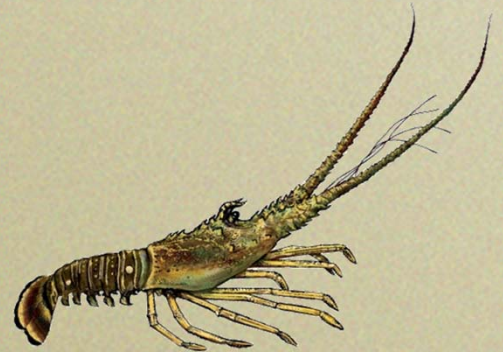
Recreational Lobster Fishery

- Popular among residents and visitors and important to coastal economies, particularly in south Florida
- Requires a recreational saltwater fishing license and an annual spiny lobster permit
- In 2015/2016 season:
 - Approximately 155,000 recreational lobster permits issued
 - Approximately 1.5 million pounds harvested
- Recreational harvest primarily conducted by diving
- Two recreational seasons
 - Two-day sport season: last consecutive Wednesday and Thursday in July each year
 - Regular season: Aug. 6 – Mar. 31



Recreational Lobster Regulations

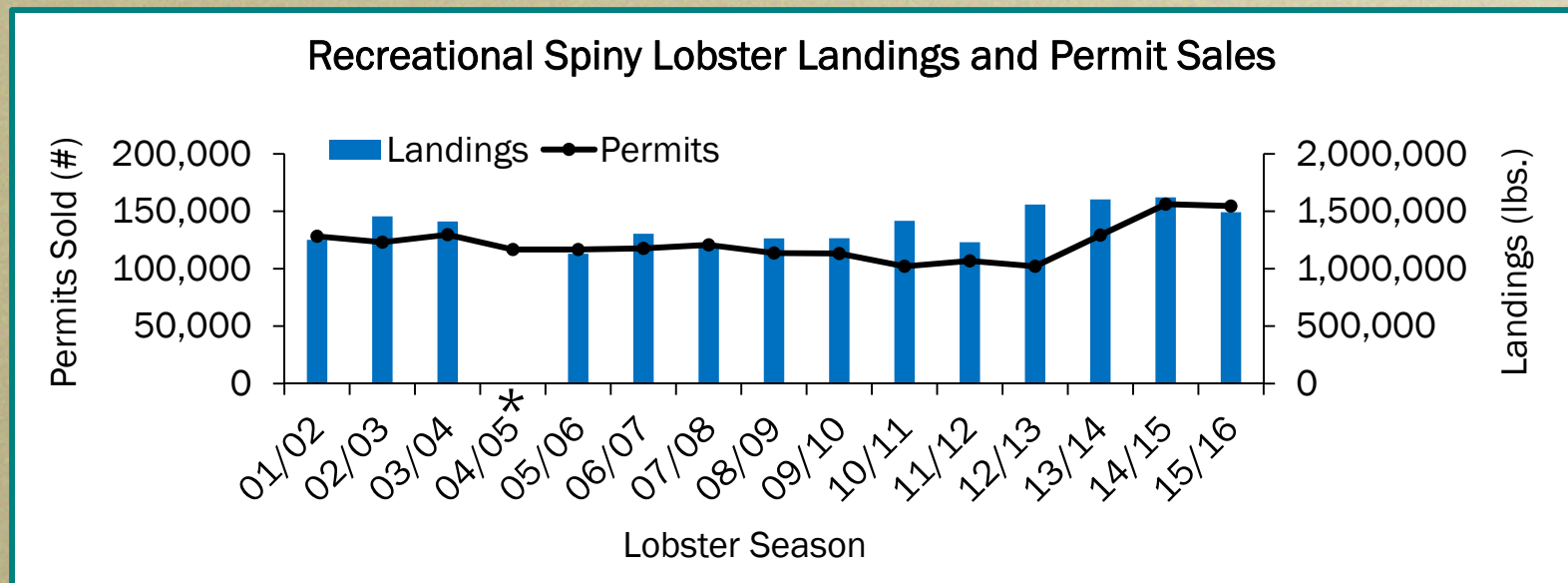
- Harvest by spearing or with the aid of chemicals prohibited
- Lobster traps not allowed for recreational harvesters
- Minimum size limit: 3 inches carapace length
- All lobster must be landed in whole condition
- Harvest or possession of egg-bearing lobster is prohibited
- Bag limits
 - Two-day sport season: 6 or 12 lobster per person, depending on location
 - Regular season: 6 lobster per person



Monitoring Recreational Harvest

Recreational Spiny Lobster Survey

- Since 1991, the recreational fishery has been monitored through mail and email surveys of lobster permit-holders
 - Allows FWC to estimate landings and effort
- Stable landings and permit sales, with slight increase in recent years



* 04/05 not surveyed for landings due to hurricanes

