October 6, 2022: Do arguments with your spouse last less than 3 minutes and end in creative solutions? I didn’t think so. NMFS held a Public Scoping Session on right whales last week. The meeting was hosted online, but in-person crowds were organized in Ellsworth and Brunswick. I thought I’d take this opportunity to offer my observations on the process by which management bodies gather public comments - and how that process can set itself up for failure to gather important feedback from the fishing industry. It also highlights the importance of community groups to act as a catalyst for public engagement.

The purpose of the meeting was to gather ideas and suggestions on how to reduce risk of entanglement of right whales in fishing gear. Fishermen showed up already upset - and rightfully so - angry, defeated, and targeted by the threat of complete closure of the offshore lobster fishery and the impact that would have on communities. Fishermen and their families were prepared to vent - and vent they did. It was an emotional evening that ended just as sour as it started. But in my opinion, it didn’t give NMFS the information they need to go back into the rulemaking process effectively. Here’s why:

One meeting, 3 minutes. One meeting for every fixed gear fisherman in New England to weigh in in 3 minutes. There were over 500 participants on zoom, and well over 100 in person. Even though it was likely the largest turnout to a NMFS scoping session on record, 600 people is a small fraction of the stakeholders involved in this industry. And not nearly enough time to hear all who want to be heard. Comments are limited to 3 minutes. Talk about pressure. To articulate a set of comments in less time than it takes to brew a cup of coffee while your business hangs in the balance; it’s absurd to expect that any kind of creative ideas and input will come out of that.

The human need to react to something, vent, be heard but also listen, clear your head, and then think creatively about a solution cannot happen in 3 minutes. It can’t happen in 3 days or even 3 months. It’s a process that takes time and careful design. And I hope this process sheds some light on how we can design a better process for public input through the use of community groups that help organize fishermen and their ideas.

Do you have a question about our fisheries? Send it to info@coastalfisheries.org or call 207.367.2708. Learn more about MCCF by visiting us online at www.coastalfisheries.org.

**FISHERIES LOG**

**Prices to Harvesters in Stonington**

Lobsters (shedder): $4/lb.

Bait (pogies): $78/bu.


**Oceanographic Buoy 1-01**

44°6’10”N 68°6’44”W - Frenchboro

Bottom Temperature (50 meters): 54.1°F (avg. for this date: 51.5°F)

*Source: [www.neracoos.org](http://www.neracoos.org)*