



Marine Resource Education Program

Overview of the MREP Program

The complex system of fisheries science and management is difficult for many fishermen and others to navigate. Fishermen attending fishery management council meetings, serving as advisors to the management processes, or partnering in collaborative research require baseline information to be effective in their roles. In 1996 the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) convened a Professional Standards Committee to develop recommendations for responsible fishing practices to be incorporated in management planning. One of these recommendations was for training for career fishermen leading to professional certification.

Simultaneously, ongoing conversations ensued among fishing community leaders active in the fisheries management process who recognized fishermen struggling to navigate the complex regulations and management processes. At the end of the turbulent 30-year period post-passage of the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Management Act, the fishing industry was struggling with the imposition of regulations where there had been few before. It was a shock to the culture. By the mid-2000s that culture was experiencing rapid evolution, and those fishermen responsible for launching MREP were trying to encourage a more effective narrative. It was imperative that the program belong to the fishing community and be sensitive to cultural nuance.

The Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) was developed in the Northeast region in 2001 by two Maine fishing community leaders, Council member John Williamson, future Council member, Mary Beth Tooley, with input from fishermen around the region. Their goal was to elevate the regional dialog concerning fishery management at the NEFMC. Since then, MREP has become a nationally recognized training program for fishermen, managers, scientists, and environmentalists, offering a two-part 3-day workshop series in fisheries science and fisheries management for commercial and recreational fishermen.

In 2005, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute was brought on as the new administrative and convening partner for the MREP program, under John and Mary Beth's principal guidance and in collaboration with expert industry partners.

A 2006 Government Accountability Office report specifically cited MREP as a model for other fisheries management councils to consider for improving stakeholder participation in the fisheries management process. The program is pleased to have successfully implemented sister

MREPs serving fisheries of the Southeast, Caribbean, and West Coast regions in 2012, 2014, and 2016, respectively. The MREP program is expanding into the North Pacific, where the first MREP will be delivered in April 2023.

MREP Guiding Principles

Education First. The Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) is a 2-part workshop series that provides fishermen with the knowledge, tools, and connections to empower them to effectively play a role in the complex federal-water fisheries science and management processes:

- 3-day Fisheries Science Workshop
- 3-day Fisheries Management Workshop

From the beginning, MREP has embraced the “**by fishermen, for fishermen**” approach and addresses the questions: “What information and tools do fishermen need to engage effectively in fishery management and collaborative science? What valuable knowledge do fishermen bring to the table? How do fishermen, scientists and managers learn to work together to address fisheries issues? How are relationships important in the fisheries science and management processes, and who should fishermen build relationships with so they can most effectively get their voices heard?”

Who is MREP for? Any and all federal water fishermen and associated industry interested in effectively playing a role in the sustainability and management of the resource. We welcome and strategically aim to attract a diversity of gear type, vessel size, sector, fishery, region, etc. to each workshop, remaining steadfast to our foundational principles of neutral education for all, and thereby empowering the entire fishery.

Collaborative development. The workshop curricula are collaboratively developed by a diverse and comprehensive group of regional fishermen and industry members that represent the region to ensure the agendas are objective, comprehensive, and relevant to regional industry members. Fisheries scientists and managers contribute to this comprehensive collaborative development, but the program is foundationally led by industry.

Neutral. Workshops strategically happen outside of the regulatory process and are facilitated by the Gulf of Maine Research Institute to ensure neutrality and cohesiveness among all program leaders among the Steering Committee in the curriculum development, applicant selection process, and workshop delivery. Importantly, this neutrality fosters an effective environment for information exchange and uptake, and relationship building among fishermen and between fishermen and scientists and managers.