**Consent Form**

**Changing Economic Efficiency in the U.S. American Lobster Fishery**
**and Implications for Management**

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Maine *(Tracy MacKeracher, PhD Candidate; Kate Behrens, PhD Student,  Dr. Joshua Stoll, Faculty)*, the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries *(Dr. Alexa Dayton, Executive Director; Dr. Carla Guenther, Chief Scientist, Dr. Molly Miller, Researcher),* and Sunrise County Economic Council *(Dr. Tora Johnson, Co-Director)*. The purpose of the research is to understand the economic health and profitability of the lobster industry. Lobster permit holders who are over 18, who fished and caught over 1,000 lbs of lobster in 2024 are eligible to participate in this study. All data collected is confidential.

**What Will You Be Asked to Do?** If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in a 30-minute online survey or phone survey on a day, and at a time and place that is convenient for you. The online survey can be accessed via [www.MELobstersurvey.com](https://www.melobstersurvey.com/), while a telephone interview can be done by calling Market Decisions Research at
**800-293-1538 ext. 1735**. During the interview, you will be asked questions to understand your perspectives on the economic health and profitability of the lobster industry.
With your consent, we will use software to record your responses to the questions.
All data collected is confidential and reported in an aggregated manner.

**Risks**: The primary risks are the loss of time and convenience that participating may cause, as well as the remote possibility of a breach of confidentiality. Before beginning the interview, you will be reminded that, at any time, you can (i) end your participation; (ii) take a break; and/or (iii) skip any question(s) that you are not comfortable answering.

**Benefits:** There are no anticipated direct benefits for participating in this study, however we will provide feedback to you and your community about what we discover in our research. This research has the potential to offer important insights to help support the long-term sustainability of lobster fishing for communities in Maine.

**Confidentiality:**

All data collection will be confidential. During the data collection process, all data collected from the online and telephone surveys will be stored on within a secure, encrypted and password protected portal, Voxco. When responding to the survey, access is limited to those with a valid lobster permit, which ensures only eligible respondents can complete the survey. Survey responses are not linked back to each individual participant for anonymity purposes.

Lobster permit numbers are coded internally and utilized soley to remove respondents from future outreach. This data is only accessible by senior researchers who have an administrative account and password used to manage the survey. Voxco offers the highest levels of data security, including Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption (also known as HTTPS) for all transmitted data.

Market Decisions Research abides by:

* A comprehensive set of HIPAA compliant data security policies, including appropriate handling of personally identifiable information (PII) and protected health information (PHI).
* Adherence to America Association of Public Opinion Research best practices for the ethics of survey research.
* Use of industry-approved software, such as Microsoft SharePoint, to securely transfer, store, and host all our files, including those that contain confidential data.
* Limiting access to confidential information to senior research staff who require it to complete their work.
* Providing statements of confidentiality and consent to respondents prior to conducting a survey or interview.
* We will under no circumstances release respondent information unless explicit permission is obtained from the respondent

**Data Security:**

Market Decisions Research relies on Systems Engineering provider and is a part of their Adaptive Cybersecurity Framework (aCSF) program. Market Decisions Research IT systems are continually monitored and updated to keep them safe from the latest cybersecurity threats.

Specific methods for file and data storage include:

* All files are stored within Market Decisions Research’s Microsoft Azure data tenant enterprise level physical security, backup, and redundancy. All data are stored within the U.S.
* All access to Market Decisions Research electronic systems is controlled via company issued accounts with access tailored by job need with user identity verified through multi-factor authentication at least every 72 hours.
* Each project has a secure folder in a dedicated SharePoint library where sensitive files can be transferred between Market Decisions Research and the client. Access is limited to the minimum needed staff and any external transfers must be through an authenticated Market Decisions Research SharePoint sharing link.

**Recording:** All telephone calls are recorded and stored on the Market Decisions Research secure drive.

**Voluntary:** Participation is voluntary, and you can skip any questions you prefer not to answer. You have the option to withdraw during the interview at any point during the conversation.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact us:

Dr. Alexa Dayton: adayton@coastalfisheries.org

Ms. Patrice McCarron: patrice@mainelobstermen.org

Dr. Joshua Stoll: jstoll@umaine.edu

Dr. Kanae Tokunaga: ktokunaga@gmri.org

Dr. Brian Robertson: brainr@marketdecisions.com

Ms. Ali Cyr: acyr@marketdecisions.com

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, University of Maine, 207-581-2657 (or e-mail umric@maine.edu).