



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

USE OF FULLY FORMED WEAK ROPE WITH “MASS LOBSTER” TRACER TO MEET BUOY LINE MARKING AND BREAKING STRENGTH REQUIREMENTS IN STATE WATERS TRAP FISHERIES

On April 23, 2024, the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission unanimously approved a recommendation by the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) to modify the state's protected species regulations at 322 CMR 12.00 to allow the use of a newly developed buoy line in Massachusetts Mixed Species Pot/Trap Fishery beginning in 2024. This new buoy line is either red or red and white (“candy cane”) and has a diameter of $\frac{3}{8}$ ” or less, a breaking strength of 1,700 pounds, and a “MASS LOBSTER” tracer visible throughout the buoy line (see image). Accordingly, it sufficiently meets the state's existing buoy line diameter and breaking strength rules and is also uniquely identifiable to the Massachusetts Mixed Species Pot/Trap Fishery; the Massachusetts Mixed Species Pot/Trap Fishery is comprised of the Massachusetts' state waters commercial lobster trap, fish pot, and whelk pot fisheries.

As part of Massachusetts' North Atlantic right whale conservation program, trap fishers are required to use buoy lines with a diameter of $\frac{3}{8}$ ” or less and a breaking strength that does not exceed 1,700 pounds (“weak rope”). A buoy line with this tensile strength is designed to break should a whale become entangled in it, thus reducing the risk of serious injury or mortality. This reduced breaking strength rule can be complied with by fishing fully formed weak rope or by placing certain inserts designed to break at 1,700 pounds into the buoy line at certain intervals to achieve the requisite breaking strength. Additionally, DMF has required the buoy lines have one red mark measuring at least three-feet in length in surface system of the buoy line and then at least four red marks measuring at least two-feet in length each in the body of the buoy line at certain intervals. This marking scheme is designed to help easily identify fishing gear belonging to the Massachusetts Mixed Species Pot/Trap Fishery when entanglements are observed. See DMF's [Gear Modification webpage](#) for more details.

Over the course of the past several years the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association and rope manufacturers have worked to develop a fishable fully formed weak rope that is uniquely identifiable to the Massachusetts. This was achieved with the development of a new buoy line with the “MASS LOBSTER” tracer embedded throughout the whole length of the line. DMF applauds this industry-driven initiative as it is now possible for our state waters trap commercial trap fishers to more easily comply with the state's buoy line marking rules. To assist industry in complying the state's right whale conservation regulations, DMF is working to get this gear into the hands of our commercial trap fishers. If you have not already obtained this gear from DMF, you may do so by contacting DMF's Conservation Engineering Project (David Chosid — david.chosid@mass.gov; 508-742-9724). Additional rope is also available for purchase at most local gear retailers.

Permit holders who are permitted to fish lobster/crab trap gear in federal waters may use the fully formed red or candy cane weak rope with the “MASS LOBSTER” provided they also comply with the fishery specific federal marking and color code requirements [50 CFR 229.32(b)(2) and (3)]. Specifically, this requires buoy lines affixed to lobster/crab trap gear fished in the federal zone to contain a solid 12-inch

green mark within two fathoms of the buoy or highflyer at the surface and a 12" green mark in the top, middle, and bottom section of the buoy line.

For more information, please visit our website: www.mass.gov/marinefisheries.