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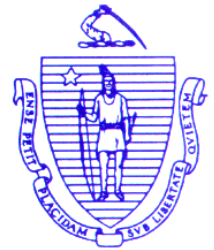
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Marine Fisheries Advisory

MANAGEMENT DECISIONS AFFECTING THE 2018 PERIOD I WINTERTIME FLUKE FISHERY

Massachusetts' commercial fluke fishery is divided into two quota management periods. The Period I fishery is allocated 30% of the state's annual quota and the Period II fishery is allocated the remainder. There are a variety of catch regulations affecting the fisheries that occur during these periods (Table).

Period	Season	Trip Limit	Min Size
Period 1	Jan 1 – Jan 31	Closed	
	Feb 1 – Apr 22	500 lbs. until 25% of quota is taken then reduced to 100 lbs.	14"
Period 2	Apr 23 – Jun 9	100 lbs. for nets and longlines only	14"
	Jun 10 – Quota	300 lbs. for nets 200 lbs. for other gears	

The Division of Marine Fisheries has made two decisions affecting the management of the Period I wintertime fluke fishery. For 2018, DMF will discontinue the weekly limit pilot program. DMF also will not allow vessels to possess multiple state limits while fishing in, transiting or landing in Massachusetts. A brief review of each decision follows.

Discontinuation of the Period I Weekly Limit Pilot Program

DMF implemented the current fluke management system to accommodate the landing of fluke by vessels participating in offshore winter-time fisheries, while setting aside the majority of the quota for the inshore summertime fishery that is highly dependent on this species. In 2010, offshore fishermen requested that DMF consider the adoption of a weekly limit during the Period 1 fishery to increase access to the seasonal quota allocation and potentially reduce regulatory discarding that may occur while trip fishing.

In 2011, DMF implemented this weekly limit via pilot program. Vessels could opt in to the pilot program and land fluke in accordance with the program's established weekly limit, instead of the the 500 pound trip limit set forth in regulation. While the program was initially viewed favorably, recent substantial quota reductions prompted DMF to reconsider this program's utility.

Between 2011 and 2017, fluke quotas decreased by more than 65%. Our state quota was at an all-time low of 385,988 pounds in 2017. Despite a modest increase in 2018, the quota will still be at

its second lowest level. At the current low quota levels, the original reasons for the program are no longer valid.

Accordingly, the Period 1 fishery does not need additional access (beyond the 500-lb trip limit) to achieve its target allocation. In 2017, the pilot program ended on March 3 when 25% of the quota was projected taken, and all Period 1 participants were restricted to the 100-lb trip limit. Additionally, the assumed reduction in discards provided by the weekly limit is offset by the longer imposition of the 100-lb trip limit for the remainder of the period. Further downsizing of the pilot program limits is impractical. Instead of a weekly limit of 1,000 pounds, keeping the trip/possession limit at 500 pounds for as long as possible before reducing it to 100 pounds is the best approach.

Decision Regarding Multiple State Landing Limits

Earlier this year, DMF met with offshore fishermen who requested the agency consider allowing vessels to possess multiple state limits for fluke when transiting and landing in Massachusetts. They argued that this would allow vessels with fluke permits in multiple states to more efficiently target the fluke quota. While DMF supports certain measures, such as the regionalization of the wintertime fishery, to improve access to available quota, DMF does not support this request for the following reasons:

1. Massachusetts likely will be the first state where fish will be landed. Therefore, vessels landing in Massachusetts often will be in possession of more fish than they are allowed to land thereby creating substantial enforcement challenges for the Massachusetts Environmental Police. This activity could have serious negative impacts on quota availability if multiple states' limits are reported towards MA's quota.
2. This requested approach likely will result in greater landings in Massachusetts during the Winter 1 fishery. A decrease in the Mass limit to 100 pounds will occur earlier in the season thereby providing just a few weeks of the dual-possession-limit landing opportunity.
3. While a precedent for allowing the possession of multiple state landing limits occurs between Virginia and North Carolina, it was navigation challenges with the shoaling of Oregon Inlet that prompted NC to seek opportunities for NC vessels to land fluke in VA, else the quota may have gone uncaught. The fluke quota in these two states combined is more than twice that of RI & MA combined
4. With recent quota decreases DMF will re-evaluate how our quota is allocated between Period 1 and Period 2. Therefore, providing incentive for more Period 1 fishing is premature.