



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

## Division of Marine Fisheries

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February 4, 2021

### Notice of Virtual Public Hearing: New Recreational Fishing Regulations Affecting Circle Hooks for Striped Bass, Gulf of Maine Cod and Haddock and Blue Crab Trapping

Under the provisions of M.G.L. c. 30A and pursuant to the authority found at M.G.L. c. 130 §§ 17A and 104, the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) is taking public comment and holding a virtual public hearing on draft regulations to amend 322 CMR 6.00. These draft regulations will implement new recreational fishing limits and gear regulations for 2021 and are described in the bullets below:

1. Circle Hooks and Striped Bass (322 CMR 6.07). Consistent with recent actions by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, DMF is proposing to amend its existing circle hook rule for striped bass. This rule currently requires that recreational anglers use circle hooks when fishing with whole or cut natural baits for striped bass with exemptions for the for-hire fleet and any baits attached to an artificial lure that are to be trolled, cast, or vertically jigged.

The proposed amendments would further specify that if a striped bass is caught on any other type of hook other than a circle hooks, which is baited with natural bait, then the fish must be returned to the water immediately and without unnecessary injury.

Additionally, all but two of the existing exemptions will be rescinded. This includes the exemption for the for-hire fleet. The two remaining exemptions are for tube and worm fishing and the use of pork rinds. The proposed rule allows for pork rinds to be attached to artificial lures that are rigged with hooks other than circle hooks. It also allows tube and worm fishing to continue provided the lure consists of a minimum of 8” latex or rubber tubing with a single hook protruding from the end portion of the tubing where a bait may be attached; tubes may not be rigged with treble hooks.

2. Recreational Gulf of Maine Cod (322 CMR 6.03). Consistent with federal regulations, DMF seeks to adopt the following open seasons, bag limits and minimum sizes for recreational anglers and the for-hire mode:

Mode	Season	Bag Limit	Minimum Size
Private Angler	April 1 – April 14	1-fish	21”
	September 15 – September 30	1-fish	21”
For-Hire	April 1 – April 14	1-fish	21”
	September 8 – October 7	1-fish	21”

3. Recreational Gulf of Maine Haddock (322 CMR 6.03). Consistent with federal regulations, DMF seeks to adopt recreational Gulf of Maine haddock regulations that allow for an open season that

spans from April 1 through the last day of February with a 15-fish bag limit and a 17” minimum size.

4. Blue Crab Trap Prohibition (322 CMR 6.19). DMF is proposing to prohibit the setting of traps for blue crabs and the retention of any blue crabs caught by trap gear. This does not apply to the use of any open or collapsible trap that is actively tended.

**Public Comment Period and Public Hearing Schedule**

Written public comment will be accepted through 5 p.m. on Friday, March 5, 2021. Please address written comments to Director Daniel McKiernan and submit it by e-mail to [marine.fish@mass.gov](mailto:marine.fish@mass.gov) or by post to the attention of Jared Silva at 251 Causeway Street, Suite 400, Boston, MA 02114.

DMF has also scheduled a virtual Zoom public hearing for 6PM Tuesday, March 2, 2021. To attend this public hearing, you must register at in advance. A follow up e-mail will then be sent providing login and call in information. The pre-registration link is:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_NqHYhfhrQDOqCoyUwiAQBw](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_NqHYhfhrQDOqCoyUwiAQBw)

All materials, including the strikethrough regulatory language, may be found on [DMF’s website](#) or may be acquired by contacting Jared Silva by e-mail at [jared.silva@mass.gov](mailto:jared.silva@mass.gov). Recordings of the public hearings will be published to [DMF’s YouTube channel](#).