



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

Revised Circle Hook Requirement for Recreational Striped Bass Fishing

Beginning this 2021 fishing season, all recreational anglers—including those fishing onboard for-hire vessels—who are fishing for striped bass with bait are required to use inline (non-offset) circle hooks. This shall not apply to any artificial lure with bait attached. Bait is defined as any marine or aquatic organism, live or dead, whole or parts thereof. Striped bass caught on an unapproved method of take (while targeting other finfish species)—such as a baited J hook or treble hook—must be returned to the water immediately without unnecessary injury.

This circle hook requirement is mandated coastwide through the interstate fishery management plan to increase the survival of striped bass caught and released in the recreational fishery. Recreational discard mortality has grown to be the greatest source of fishing mortality on the striped bass population given the great popularity of the fishery along the eastern seaboard. When used during bait fishing, inline circle hooks reduce the likelihood of “deep hooking” a fish, which in turn decreases the chance that a released fish will die due to injuries sustained from being caught.

Please note that this requirement applies to all recreational anglers, whether fishing from shore, a private vessel, or a for-hire charter or party boat. The exemption in place in Massachusetts during 2020 for anglers aboard for-hire vessels has been rescinded for compliance with the interstate plan.

The hook of an artificial lure does not need to be an inline circle hook to have bait attached. This allowance provides for the continued use of tackle such as a tube-and-worm rig, a bucktail jig tipped with a pork rind, and an eel skin plug. Conversely, a rigged eel (a whole dead eel with hooks threaded through its body) cannot be used unless the hooks are inline circle hooks, and a menhaden snagged on a treble hook cannot be used as bait until transferred onto an inline circle hook.

An inline circle hook is defined as a fishing hook designed and manufactured so that the point of the hook is not offset from the plane of the shank and bend and is turned perpendicularly back towards the shank to form a circular or oval shape. Inline circle hooks are available at most of the bait and tackle shops where you currently purchase other tackle. While they vary by manufacturer, inline circle hook sizes of 7/0 to 10/0 are generally well-suited to catching striped bass within the recreational slot limit of 28” to less than 35”. Refer to DMF’s [Circle Hook Brochure](#) to make sure you are purchasing true inline circle hooks that are non-offset.

While it’s understandable that striped bass may be inadvertently caught on an unapproved rig when other species are being targeted, such fish must be returned to the water as quickly and gently as possible. If you are targeting other species but keep catching striped bass, consider switching to an

inline circle hook or moving to a different location to avoid unnecessary catch and release mortality on striped bass. It is the responsibility of anglers to use inline circle hooks when fishing in a time, place, or manner where catching a striped bass is possible. Refer to the Division's [Responsible Angling Techniques](#) for additional guidance that will help ensure your released fish live to be caught another day. A little knowledge goes a long way in protecting our resources.

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