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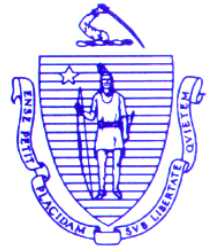
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April 25, 2019

Marine Fisheries Advisory

NEW STRIPED BASS CONSERVATION REGULATIONS

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries has implemented two new striped bass conservation regulations aimed at reducing release mortality:

- Effective immediately, it is unlawful for any fisherman to gaff or attempt to gaff striped bass measuring less than 28 inches total length, and for a commercial fisherman fishing on an open commercial striped bass fishing day to gaff striped bass measuring less than 34 inches total length.
- Effective next year (2020), recreational anglers not fishing aboard for-hire vessels will be required to use inline circle hooks when fishing for striped bass with whole or cut natural baits. This will include fishing with whole or cut natural baits while in possession of striped bass as well. This circle hook mandate will not apply to natural baits attached to an artificial lure to be trolled, jigged, or casted and retrieved (e.g., tube and worm). Nor will the mandate apply to any natural bait affixed to a treble hook and fished using the snag and drop technique. A hook is considered to be an in-line circle hook only if it is manufactured so the barb of the hook is in-line with the shank and bend of the hook and is turned perpendicularly back to the shank to form a circular or oval shape (see image below).

The most recent striped bass stock assessment found the species was overfished with overfishing occurring. In addition, it demonstrated that release mortality from the recreational fishery is the single largest source of fishing mortality (48%). Accordingly, these actions have been taken to reduce release mortality in our fisheries. The prohibition on gaffing undersized striped bass (as opposed to all striped bass) takes into consideration safety concerns associated with expediently removing large striped bass from the water. In-line circle hooks are proven to substantially reduce striped bass release mortality compared to other hooks (e.g., j-hooks or offset circle hooks) by being far more likely to hook the fish in the lip or the mouth and not the gut or the gills. The circle hook mandate is targeted at private recreational anglers because this segment of the fishery is primarily hook-and-release and accounts for the vast majority of striped bass catch in Massachusetts. We expect the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission will also take action this year to implement coastwide conservation measures for 2020 aimed at reducing overall fishing mortality.

For more information regarding the management of striped bass in Massachusetts, please visit our website (www.mass.gov/marinefisheries) or call DMF at 617-626-1520.

Using Circle Hooks to Fish for Striped Bass



J-hook



Circle hook

Unlike j-hooks, circle hooks have the point turned back towards the shank at a 90° angle. This causes the hook to catch on the lip or mouth instead of the gut or gills.



Offset



In-line

Offset hooks are not true circle hooks! The offset shape makes it easy to foul-hook a fish.