



David E. Pierce, Ph.D.
Director

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

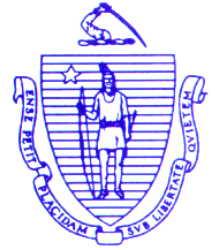
Division of Marine Fisheries

251 Causeway Street, Suite 400

Boston, Massachusetts 02114

(617)626-1520

fax (617)626-1509



Charles D. Baker
Governor

Karyn E. Polito
Lieutenant Governor

Kathleen Theoharides
Secretary

Ronald Amidon
Commissioner

Mary-Lee King
Deputy Commissioner

July 31, 2019

Marine Fisheries Advisory

Public Comment Sought for Proposals to Adjust Commercial Striped Bass and Fluke Limits

The Division of Marine Fisheries is seeking public comment on temporarily adjusting its in-season commercial fluke and striped bass fishing limits; including possession limits, open days, and how soon to put any of these adjustments into effect. These adjustments, as described below, are being proposed to provide additional flexibility to these commercial fisheries to facilitate the harvest and landing of the state's commercial quotas for these species and to account for the potential loss of fishing opportunities due to weather during the fall.

Fluke

The 2019 Period II directed commercial fluke fishery opened on June 10th with five open fishing days per week (Sunday – Thursday), a 300 pound trip limit for vessels fishing with nets and a 200 pound trip limit for fishermen using hooks, and a 14-inch minimum size. Through last week, approximately 248,000 pounds of fluke have been landed and sold, accounting for approximately 33% of the available 741,532 pound quota. It is important to note that the overall commercial fluke quota (among all states) was increased by 74% under the federal and interstate management plans but this increase occurred in the late winter and DMF did not have enough time to adjust the 2019 regulations.

Currently, average daily landings are about 5,300 pounds. This is down slightly from last year at this time. If this trend continues, it is likely that the 2019 quota may not be taken. Accordingly, DMF is proposing to allow commercial fishing up to six-days per week (Sundays – Fridays) beginning as soon as Sunday, August 18, 2019 and to increase the daily trip limits up to 500 pounds for net fishermen and up to 300 pounds for fishermen using hooks. The minimum size will remain status quo. DMF anticipates that this will provide additional opportunities to target fluke to land the quota and to mitigate the potential limiting impacts fall weather may have on access to the available quota.

Striped Bass.

The 2019 commercial striped bass fishery opened on June 24th with just two open fishing days per week (Mondays and Thursdays), a 15-fish trip limit for vessel-based fishermen and a 2-fish trip limit for all other fishermen, and a 34 inch minimum size. Through last week, approximately 215,000 pounds of striped bass have been landed and sold, accounting for approximately 24% of the available 869,813 pound quota.

Currently, average daily landings are about 18,000 pounds. This daily landing rate is lower than at this time last year. If this trend continues, it is likely that landings will only approach 50% of the quota by Labor Day, and historical trends suggest fall landings will be even less based on declining participation and inclement weather that affects this small-boat fishery. Accordingly, DMF is proposing to allow commercial fishing four-days per week (Mondays – Thursdays) beginning Monday, August 19, 2019 or Tuesday, September 3, 2019. Labor Day will remain a closed fishing day and the bag and size limits will remain status quo. By increasing the number of open fishing days per week beginning in September, commercial fishermen will have more flexibility to access the resource on optimal weather days.

Public Process

Written public comment will be accepted until 5PM on Wednesday, August 14, 2019. Please address all written comments to Director Pierce and submit to DMF by e-mail at marine.fish@state.ma.us or by post to 251 Causeway Street, Suite 400, Boston, MA 02114. DMF will review this written public comment and provide the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission with a final recommendation for their review and approval at their August 15, 2019 business meeting. If adjustments to the commercial striped bass and fluke fishing limits are approved by the Commission, they will be announced following that meeting via DMF's e-mail list serve and will be published on DMF's website.

For more information regarding the management of marine fisheries in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, please visit our website at www.mass.gov/marinefisheries