

MASSACHUSETTS DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES

CHANGES TO TRAP TAG PROGRAM IN 2007

Over the past decade, the need to improve documentation of fishery participation and performance has resulted in many changes to management and monitoring programs. In the past few years we have seen history-based trap allocation plans approved and mandatory dealer reporting of all landings where fishing performance tracked to an individual permit is critical. Moreover, trap tag allocation and administration is only effective if permit holders can be accurately identified by unique permit numbers. For these reasons, DMF is working to phase out the use of the 4-digit permit number (that in hundreds of cases is not unique among permitted lobstermen) in favor of the already assigned 6-digit DMF ID.

This change has been discussed for over 30 years since computers were introduced in the managing of licensing programs. However, the problems that occurred last year in the administration of the trap tag program through the vendor Stoffel Seals brought this issue to a head like never before, further demonstrating the need to phase out the 4-digit (non-unique) permit number system.

To improve the administration of licensing programs, fishermen/dealer reporting program, and trap tag programs, DMF has become increasingly reliant on the unique 6-digit permit number, known as DMF ID. Behind the scenes, the DMF licensing and statistics staff already rely on your DMF ID to attribute your fishing activity to your license. In the event of a lobster license transfer, prior fishing activity is required to qualify and that is tracked by DMF ID. The DMF ID remains with the license after a transfer. Finally, seafood dealers already are required to report your landings at the trip level and attribute the catch to the unique 6-digit value, not the 4-digit number. The Division of Law Enforcement has suggested that DMF eliminate duplicate permit numbers for nearly 10 years now, and Stoffel Seals staff have informed us that Massachusetts is the only state in which fishermen have duplicate permit numbers.

Last year's trap tag program encountered many problems including the delivery of orders to the wrong fishermen – often those with the same 4-digit number as the intended recipient. DMF has been working to improve each year the administration of the program yet there appeared to be more problems in 2006 than ever before. To improve the program for 2007, we have made some administrative changes that should result in the timely and accurate receipt of your trap tags.

To allow tags to be ordered in advance of the fishing season, holders of federal permits no longer need to wait until receiving a renewed federal permit before ordering your new tags:

- **Fishermen will now use a 6-digit number to order trap tags.** Your DMF ID number will become a 6-digit number that will be featured on your permit, and will also be the number you use to order your trap tags.
- **For those lobstermen with federal permits, you may order tags as soon as your state permit is renewed as long as your federal permit is current.** This means you need not wait until late March or April to commence ordering tags. This change will alleviate bottle-necking at the Stoffel Seals plant and result in more uniform turn-around times.
- **In addition, for the purpose of marking your gear, the 4-digit “permit number” will be phased out in favor of your “DMF ID.”**

In regard to marking your existing buoys, you can add your 6-digit DMF ID along side your old 4-digit permit number.

We met with Stoffel's Marketing Director a few weeks ago to discuss problems in 2006 and ways to improve the program. Stoffel is working on a web-based application that would allow fishermen to order their tags on Stoffel's website, which would mean instant confirmation that an order has been received, (and more importantly) the ability to track your shipment of tags from the plant to your home. *We will provide you with information about this application as soon as it is available.*

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