



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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January 28, 2021

Marine Fisheries Advisory

MARINE FISHERIES ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETS AND APPROVES NEW REGULATIONS

The Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) met virtually today from 9AM – 1PM. During this meeting, they reviewed the agency’s recommended final protected species regulations. This will result in new and expanded fixed gear closures and new gear modifications. The changes are described below and unless otherwise stated these new rules will become effective when filed and published with the Massachusetts Register. The earliest the new rules may be implemented in effect is March 5, 2021; DMF will provide a subsequent announcement with this information.

Please note that DMF and the MFAC did not move forward a proposal that would have prohibited lobster trap fishermen from fishing single traps if fishing from a vessel with an overall length of 29’ or larger beginning in 2022. Instead the Commission will convene a subcommittee to address options to reduce buoy lines in state waters.

Commercial Fixed Gear Closures. The MFAC voted to:

- Expand the existing seasonal state waters commercial trap gear closure in both space and time. The existing closure occurs from February 1 – April 30 within Cape Cod Bay, Stellwagen Bank, and the Outer Cape Cod Lobster Management Area. The closure area will extend north in state waters from Scituate Harbor to the New Hampshire maritime border and the closure duration will extend through May 15. However, during the May 1 – May 15 period, the closure will occur on a dynamic basis allowing DMF to lift the closure (or parts thereof) if whales no longer remain in state waters. The closure will not extend into those southern state waters in Lobster Conservation Management Area 2.
- Geographically expand the existing January 1 – May 15 gillnet closure in Cape Cod Bay to include a discrete area along the South Shore between Plymouth and Scituate.

Commercial Trap Gear Modifications. The MFAC voted to:

- Require commercial trap fishermen to fish buoy lines that break when exposed to 1,700 pounds of tension beginning on May 1, 2021. This may be achieved by fishing specially manufactured buoy lines with a custom 1,700 pound breaking strength or by inserting NOAA Fisheries approved contrivances into the top 75% of the buoy line every 60’. At this time, the only approved contrivance is the so-called “South Shore Sleeve.”
- Require commercial trap fishermen fish buoy lines with a maximum diameter of 3/8”.

Recreational Lobster and Crab Trap Measures. The MFAC voted to:

- Establish a recreational lobster and crab trap haul-out period of November 1 – May 15 (beginning on November 1, 2021) throughout all of state waters. This haul-out period will not apply to unbuoyed recreational lobster trap gear fished in the Cape Cod Canal.
- Require recreational trap fishermen fish buoy lines with a maximum diameter of 5/16”.

A full [summary](#) of the January MFAC business meeting, as well as all relevant business meeting materials may be found on the [MFAC’s website](#).