



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

(617) 626-1520 | www.mass.gov/marinefisheries



MAURA T. HEALEY
Governor

KIMBERLEY DRISCOLL
Lt. Governor

REBECCA L. TEPPER
Secretary

THOMAS K. O'SHEA
Commissioner

DANIEL J. MCKIERNAN
Director

February 2, 2024

Marine Fisheries Advisory

Striped Bass Management in 2024 Under Addendum II

Expectations for Massachusetts Following New Interstate Management Plan Changes

On January 25, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission approved new coastwide recreational and commercial management measures for Atlantic striped bass under Addendum II to the interstate fishery management plan. These measures are necessary to reduce fishing mortality and maintain a positive trajectory for the population to rebuild by 2029. States have until May 1, 2024—at the latest—to implement the new measures. In summary, this action will require Massachusetts to:

1. Maintain the recreational fishery's one fish at 28" to less than 31" slot limit, year-round.
2. Reduce the state's commercial striped bass quota by 7%, from 735,240 pounds to 683,773 pounds, with no change to the 35" minimum size limit.
3. Revise the state's allowance for captains and crew of for-hire fishing vessels to fillet striped bass for their customers to include a requirement that the racks (i.e., carcasses) be retained.

Only the third item above requires a change to the state's fishery management regulations. The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) expects to undertake emergency rulemaking to meet the May 1 implementation deadline. Prior to this, DMF will hold a virtual meeting for interested for-hire permit holders to provide input on revising the at-sea filleting allowance. The date and time for this meeting will be announced as soon as possible. Additionally, in consideration of the commercial quota reduction as well as recent fishery performance that has resulted in quota closures in early August the past two years, DMF will be proposing changes to the number and sequence of open commercial fishing days in 2024. An announcement of the public hearings dates and public comment period is expected shortly.

Addendum II

For the ocean recreational fishery (including Massachusetts'), Addendum II implements a 28" to 31" slot limit, 1-fish bag limit, and the seasons in place in 2022 (year-round in Massachusetts) for all anglers—whether they fish from shore, a private or rented vessel, or a for-hire vessel. This modifies the 28 to less than 35" slot limit in Amendment 7, but maintains the same ocean recreational measures adopted by the Striped Bass Management Board last year under an emergency action and implemented in Massachusetts in May of 2023. This action is projected to reduce ocean recreational fishery removals (combined harvest and dead discards) by 14% compared to 2022. With this narrow size range for harvestable fish and widespread popularity of catch and release fishing, it is critical that anglers educate themselves on [best handling practices](#) to maximize survival of striped bass that are released. DMF has also been studying the

[post-release mortality](#) of striped bass and is currently seeking participants for the second year of a [citizen science project](#) to improve understanding of post-release mortality and the factors that influence whether a released fish lives or dies.

In the Chesapeake Bay, which is managed separately from the ocean fishery due to how the migratory nature of striped bass affects the size availability of fish there, Addendum II implements a 19" to 24" slot limit, 1-fish bag limit, and the seasons in place in 2022—for all recreational anglers. This action is expected to reduce Chesapeake Bay recreational fishery removals by 16% compared to 2022. Along with Maryland's pending, voluntary [cessation of their spring trophy season](#) (which allowed harvest of larger migratory striped bass for a limited spring season), this action brings standardized size and possession limits to the Chesapeake Bay recreational fishery for the first time in decades, with a considerably lower maximum size limit than previously implemented by any of the four Bay jurisdictions. The Chesapeake Bay is the predominant spawning ground for striped bass along the Atlantic coast. With five poor years of juvenile recruitment, these measures are important steps to reduce fishing mortality on younger year classes of Chesapeake-born fish before they start migrating along the coast and on older migratory year classes when they return annually to the Bay to contribute to the next generation of fish.

The Hudson River and Delaware River are also important spawning grounds for striped bass that contribute significantly to the population. The recreational fisheries in these areas will face new state-designed measures to reduce striped bass removals by 14%, matching the expected reduction of the 28" to 31" slot limit along the coast.

To help promote compliance and enforcement of recreational size and possession limits, Addendum II also adopts minimum standards for states that allow filleting of striped bass during a recreational fishing trip. These new minimum standards include a requirement that the racks (i.e., carcasses) be retained after filleting; and that no more than two fillets per filleted fish can be in possession. Currently in Massachusetts, private recreational and commercial anglers can gut or eviscerate kept striped bass but they may not fillet them at sea. Only the captain and crew of recreational for-hire vessels may fillet striped bass for their customers, but this is subject to two conditions: the skin is left on the fillet (for purposes of species identification), and there be no more than two fillets per filleted fish (for purposes of possession limit enforcement). This means that DMF needs to add a rack retention requirement (for purposes of size limit enforcement) into the state's for-hire filleting allowance for compliance with Addendum II. Additional modifications to the for-hire filleting allowance may also be considered. DMF anticipates having a scoping meeting for interested for-hire permit holders to help craft clear regulatory language and expectations about the filleting allowance, including when and where retained racks may be disposed, before undertaking emergency rulemaking for this requirement.

Unlike the [2023 emergency action](#), Addendum II also reduces the commercial harvest for striped bass. Specifically, a 7% reduction will be applied to the state-by-state ocean commercial quotas and the shared Chesapeake Bay commercial quota in place since 2020. The collective ocean commercial quota will be reduced from roughly 2.41 million pounds to 2.24 million pounds, and the Chesapeake Bay quota from 3.00 million pounds to 2.79 million pounds, with no changes to the commercial size limits in place. Massachusetts' quota will be reduced from 735,240 pounds to 683,773 pounds, at the current 35" minimum size limit. DMF will be proposing changes to the number and sequence of open commercial

fishing days in 2024 given the quota reduction and recent fishery performance that has resulted in quota closures in early August the past two years.

The last element of Addendum II gives the Striped Bass Management Board the ability to react more quickly with new management measures after stock assessments during the rebuilding period if those assessments indicate the stock is not expected to rebuild by the 2029 deadline. This expedited process allows the Management Board to bypass the development and implementation of an addendum, which generally takes a year to get revised measures in place, in favor of taking a vote at a Board meeting to adopt new measures immediately. While ultimately adopting this discretionary tool, the Management Board clearly recognized the downside of there not being public hearings on a draft addendum document and stressed the importance of states gathering public input through their own processes to help inform the management outcome. The Management Board's first opportunity to potentially utilize this tool will follow the presentation of the 2024 Stock Assessment Update later this year. Striped bass management in 2025 will depend on the results of that assessment and the Management Board's response, if any.

For more information about striped bass management in Massachusetts, please visit our website at mass.gov/marinefisheries or e-mail us at marine.fish@mass.gov.