



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

Update on Newly Required Gear Modifications for Trap Fishermen and Industry Outreach on Gear Distribution

On February 19, 2021 DMF issued an [advisory](#) regarding new protected species regulations affecting fixed gear fishermen to protect the North Atlantic right whale. These new regulations included seasonal fixed gear closures and trap gear modifications. Among these new regulations was a requirement that all commercial trap gear fishermen fish buoy lines that break when exposed to 1,700 pounds of tension, effective May 1, 2021. This new weak rope rule applies to any buoyed commercial trap gear and is to be adopted by all commercial lobster trap fishermen, as well as all black sea bass, scup and conch pot fishermen.

To assist commercial trap fishermen in complying with the new 1,700 pound weak rope rules, the DMF is developing a list of NOAA Fisheries approved ropes or contrivances. At present, only three options are available:

1. Rocky Mount Cordage Company's fully formed 1,700 pound weak rope – Red – 3/8" diameter (runs slightly smaller than true diameter).
2. Rocky Mount Cordage Company's fully formed 1,700 lb weak rope – "Candy Cane" – 3/8" diameter.
3. Novabraid break-away "South Shore" sleeve.

Based on fishermen's input, DMF has also submitted samples of eight additional contrivances for testing on a rope breaking machine. The results will be sent to NOAA Fisheries for review, and if the contrivances demonstrate a tensile strength of 1,700 pounds or less, they will be approved for use this year. DMF anticipates that NOAA Fisheries will render its decision on these contrivances by the middle of March 2021.

The contrivances being tested include:

1. a butt splice of red weak rope into 3/8" buoy line;
2. a butt splice of candy cane weak rope into 3/8" buoy line;
3. a three tuck splice of red weak rope into 3/8" buoy line;
4. a four tuck splice of red weak rope in 3/8" buoy line;
5. a four tuck splice of candy cane weak rope into a 3/8" buoy line;

6. an eye-to-loop splice of red weak rope into a 3/8" buoy line;
7. an eye-to-loop splice of candy cane weak rope into a 3/8" buoy line; and
8. the South Shore Sleeve with a heat shrink cover.

DMF is supplying samples of the weak rope and Novabraid sleeves at no cost to industry. At present, we can provide every Coastal Lobster Permit holder with 2 coils of weak rope and up to 20 of the Novabraid sleeves. DMF will be holding gear distribution events throughout the state where fishermen can meet with DMF staff, pick up the free coils and sleeves, and receive a demonstration on how to install the sleeves. A list of gear distribution events will be announced shortly. If commercial lobster permit holders are interested in finding out more about these events and obtaining rope or sleeves from DMF, they should contact us at conservationsolutions@mass.gov and provide name, contact information, and homeport.

All current information regarding these gear modifications, approved weak contrivances, and gear distribution events will be posted on DMF's [Trap Gear Modification webpage](#). If you have any questions, please e-mail us at conservationsolutions@mass.gov.