



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Marine Fisheries
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Marine Fisheries Advisory

Update on 2026 Commercial Summer Flounder Management

The Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) is enacting several adjustments to the commercial summer flounder management program for 2026 to enhance access to the available commercial summer flounder quota. These changes go into effect on May 8, 2026.

Commercial Summer Flounder Quota for 2026 and 2027

The Commonwealth's commercial summer flounder quota for 2026 and 2027 has been set at just over 1-million pounds. This represents a 75% increase in the quota as compared to 2024 and 2025. This increase is driven by two factors. First, the 2025 stock assessment demonstrates improving stock conditions compared to the 2023 stock assessment resulting in a 45% increase to the coastwide quota. While this is a large increase, it is more conservative than it could have been, as the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission supported reducing potential catch limits by 12% to address uncertainty in the stock assessment and promote fishery stability. Second, to increase equity across state quota allocations the federal fishery management plan increases quota shares for certain states when stock conditions are strong. Whereas Massachusetts' baseline quota share is 6.82%, the state receives a quota share of 12.375% for that portion of the coastwide quota that exceeds 9.55 million pounds.

Annual Quota Allocations

The annual quota is allocated seasonally between Period I (January 1 – April 22) and Period II (April 23 – December 31). Historically, the Period I fishery received 30% of the quota and the Period II fishery received 70% of the quota. For 2025, DMF adjusted these seasonal allocations to set aside 15% of the annual quota for the Period I fishery and 85% of the annual quota for Period II. This ensured ample quota was made available for the inshore summertime fishery. However, moving forward DMF will annually establish these quota allocations based on the magnitude of the state's quota. In years when the quota exceeds 750,000 pounds, the historic 30:70 split will apply, and in years when the quota is 750,000 pounds or less, the 15:85 split will apply.

Trip Limits and Open Fishing Days

During the summertime fishery (April 23 – August 31), the baseline commercial summer flounder trip limit will increase from 500 pounds to 600 pounds for net fishers and from 325 pounds to 400 pounds for hook and line fishers. Additionally, Saturdays will be added as an open fishing day thereby allowing commercial summer flounder fishing and landings seven days per week. This reverts state regulations back to the limits in effect for 2024, prior to last year's adjustments

designed to slow quota consumption to maintain quota availability into the fall. Please note that while the summertime fishery starts on April 23, the new trip limits and open fishing day regulations will not go into effect this year until May 8. During this interim April 23 – May 7 period, the current rules will apply.

On September 1, the quota-conditional commercial trip limit will increase from 800 pounds to 1,000 pounds for all gear types. This change only goes into effect if more than 20% of the annual quota remains on September 1. On October 1, the baseline commercial trip limit will increase from 800 pounds to 1,000 pounds commensurate with the September quota-conditional trip limit. The October quota conditional trip limit will remain at 5,000 pounds if at least 10% of the quota remains available on October 1. Then for the November 1 – December 31 season, the baseline trip limit will be 5,000 pounds commensurate with the October quota-conditional trip limit and the quota-conditional trip limit will be 10,000 pounds if at least 20% of the quota remains available on November 1. Beginning in 2027, the Period I fishery trip limit will be set at 5,000 pounds and will be reduced to 100 pounds once the Period's quota allocation is landed.

Consecutive Daily Trip Limit Program

DMF is renewing the consecutive daily limit program for May 8, 2026. This program allows trawlers participating in the summertime mixed species trawl fishery south of Cape Cod to possess and land two days' trip limits of summer flounder, black sea bass, horseshoe crab, and whelk that were lawfully caught and retained over consecutive open fishing days and each day's catch is segregated and labeled. This program has been in effect since 2019 and is designed to enhance economic efficiency and address on-the-water safety issues.

To be eligible to participate, the permit holder must hold a Coastal Access Permit and relevant species-specific regulated fishery permit endorsements. To apply, please provide the following information to Bradlie Morgan by e-mail (bradlie.morgan@mass.gov): (1) Permit Holder Name; (2) mailing address; (3) DMF Permit ID#; (4) Vessel Name; and (5) Vessel Documentation Number. DMF will begin to review and process these applications immediately.

Other Considerations

There are consistent reports among recreational and commercial fishers that inshore fishing conditions are declining. Some fishers argue this is driven by increasing commercial quotas and fishing effort. However, the reality is more complicated than this simple cause and effect. While commercial quotas have increased and decreased over the past twenty years, there have been steady reports of declining inshore availability. The more recent stock assessment demonstrates this observed decline in availability is not indicative of broader population declines. Rather, DMF believes it is likely the product of environmental factors around Nantucket and Vineyard Sounds and Buzzards Bay, as well as the documented northward and eastward shift in the summer flounder biomass. In fact, inshore commercial fishing effort has also declined over the past twenty years, and commercial fisheries data demonstrates a shift of summertime fishing effort from state to federal waters.

There are also concerns about the perceived lack of management parity across the recreational and commercial fishing sectors. This is driven by complicated differences in commercial and recreational fisheries management at the federal and interstate level. This effectively produces a system where the commercial fishery is hard-capped by an annual quota monitored through mandatory reporting with access governed through effort controls (e.g., limited entry permitting) and catch limits and the recreational fishery is managed through seasons, bag limits, and

minimum sizes to achieve a soft recreational harvest limit. Accordingly, when commercial quotas are adjusted in response to a stock assessment, DMF is able to directly translate this into commercial fishing limit adjustments. The same is not true for the recreational fishery. Under the Percent Change Approach recreational fishing limits may only change if certain conditions are met. This is done to enhance year-to-year stability in setting coastwide recreational fishing limits. Accordingly, whereas DMF can liberalize commercial summer flounder fishing limits this year, it cannot similarly liberalize recreational fishing limits despite a 38% increase in the coastwide recreational harvest limit.

Further, there is a significant discrepancy in the commercial and recreational minimum size limit that enables the commercial fishery to harvest fish at a size the recreational fishery cannot. The current recreational minimum size was established in large part because when facing prior recreational harvest reductions recreational anglers preferred to increase the minimum size rather than alter bag limits or season. However, we have likely reached or exceeded the maximum acceptable recreational minimum size. In future years, if Massachusetts is able to liberalize its recreational summer flounder rules, DMF will prioritize minimum size reductions.

For more information, please visit our website: www.mass.gov/marinefisheries.