



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Marine Fisheries
(617) 626-1520 | mass.gov/MarineFisheries



Maura T. Healey
Governor

Kimberly Driscoll
Lt. Governor

Rebecca L. Tepper
Secretary

Thomas K. O'Shea
Commissioner

Daniel J. McKiernan
Director

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

DMF Adjusts Recreational Fishing Limits for Bluefish, Black Sea Bass, and Gulf of Maine Haddock and Commercial and Recreational Fishing Limits for Atlantic Mackerel and Schedules Public Hearing

The Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) has filed final regulations to set the recreational bluefish limits for 2026 and emergency regulations to implement recreational limits for black sea bass, Gulf of Maine haddock, and Atlantic mackerel, as well as adjustments to the commercial limits for Atlantic mackerel. DMF will imminently update the recreational fishing table and annual recreational fishing posters on our [website](#) to reflect these adjustments. DMF does not anticipate any other changes to the state's recreational fishing rules for 2026.

Whereas emergency regulations remain in effect for only 90-days, DMF intends to promulgate the limits established by these emergency regulations as final regulations. Accordingly, a virtual public hearing has been scheduled for May 19, 2026 at 6PM via Zoom ([register here](#)). Please review the formal [public hearing notice](#) and visit DMF's [proposed regulations website](#) for more details. Following this public hearing, the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) will review and vote on a final regulatory recommendation from DMF. This is expected to occur at their May 28, 2026 business meeting. Please visit the [MFAC's website](#) for upcoming meeting details and additional information.

Bluefish

Effective May 8, 2026, the recreational bluefish bag limits are increasing by two fish. For anglers fishing from a private vessel or from shore, the bag limit will increase from 3 fish to 5 fish. For anglers fishing from a for-hire vessel on a for-hire trip, the bag limit will increase from 5 fish to 7 fish. This action responds to a 40% increase in the coastwide recreational harvest limit based on the 2025 stock assessment and is consistent with management decisions of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) for all Atlantic coast states and federal waters.

Black Sea Bass

The emergency regulations for recreational black sea bass establish a May 16–October 14 open season with a 16" minimum size and season-specific bag limits—4 fish during May 16–August 31 and 2 fish during September 1–October 14. These limits will be in place for 2026 and 2027 pending the adoption of these limits as final regulations. These changes respond to an increase in the coastwide recreational harvest limit that allowed the Northern Region (Massachusetts–New York) to liberalize

fishing limits to increase harvest by up to 27%. The states worked together to better align measures for enhanced regulatory equity within the region. Based on feedback received from the recreational fishing public during a public scoping period this winter, DMF focused on extending the season and reducing the minimum size to provide more harvest opportunities.

Gulf of Maine (GOM) Haddock

Effective immediately, the recreational GOM haddock minimum size is reduced from 18" to 17". The open fishing season and bag limit remain status quo. This results in an open season of April 1 through February 28 with a 15-fish bag limit and a 17" minimum size. This is consistent with the recent action taken by NOAA Fisheries to adopt final regulations implementing Framework 69 to the federal Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan. With the adoption of these emergency regulations there will be uniform rules in state and federal waters. DMF does not anticipate there will be additional state or federal amendments to recreational groundfish regulations this fishing year, including Western Gulf of Maine cod, Southern New England cod, and winter flounder.

Atlantic Mackerel

For May 1, 2026 the emergency rules will adjust the recreational and commercial fishing limits for Atlantic mackerel in state waters. The daily recreational harvest and possession limit will increase to 25 fish for anglers fishing from a private vessel or from shore and to 50 fish for anglers fishing from a for-hire vessel on a for-hire trip (previously 20 fish for all anglers). On the commercial side, the state-waters trip limit is being liberalized so that it continues to match the federal Open Access trip limit. Accordingly, the trip limit will start at 20,000 pounds and then be reduced to 5,000 pounds and 2,500 pounds once certain landings thresholds have been met. This replaces the existing 5,000-pound trip limit that is reduced to 2,500 pounds at 80% quota utilization. This action is consistent with actions taken by NOAA Fisheries and the MAFMC for the upcoming federal fishing year on May 1. These changes respond to the 2025 stock assessment that demonstrates Atlantic mackerel are no longer overfished and overfishing is not occurring with projections demonstrating the stock should be rebuilt by the end of the 2025 calendar year.

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