



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Marine Fisheries
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Marine Fisheries Advisory

2026 Commercial Menhaden Management Program

This advisory serves to remind commercial menhaden fishers about the requirements governing the 2026 commercial fishery.

2026 Quota Outlook

Massachusetts' commercial quota is roughly 8.66 million pounds for 2026, down from the prior three-year stanza (2023–2025) when the state's quota was about 10.82 million pounds. This is because the coastwide commercial menhaden quota—of which Massachusetts receives 2.12%—has been reduced by 20%, primarily due to an improved estimate of menhaden natural mortality in the stock assessment.

DMF manages this commercial quota through a series of catch and effort controls to balance harvest opportunities, season length, and bait availability for different user groups. Should the state's annual quota be taken early in the season, DMF may obtain a quota transfer from another state and/or enter the Episodic Event Set-Aside Fishery. These are both functions of the Interstate Fishery Management Plan that recognize inter-annual variability in menhaden distribution and allow for the coastwide utilization of the quota, which is established using ecosystem-based reference points to leave sufficient forage for menhaden predators.

Catch and Effort Controls in the Directed Fishery

The directed fishery's opening date is set in regulation as May 15. However, the effective opening date for the 2026 purse seine fishery is Monday, May 18. This is due to closed fishing days affecting this gear type. The limited entry trip limit starts at 120,000 pounds and is adjusted based on quota utilization. The effective date of any changes to this trip limit (e.g., to 25,000 pounds or 6,000 pounds) per the prescribed quota-use triggers will be announced through additional advisories. The open-access trip limit is 6,000 pounds.

The purse seine fishery is also subject to various closures. The use of the gear is prohibited state-wide on Saturdays and Sundays and on Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day. Fridays are also closed to commercial seiners when the 120,000 pound trip limit is in effect. Several location-specific purse seine prohibitions also apply, including within Beverly Harbor on Fridays, year-round in Buzzards Bay, as well as certain waters of along Billingsgate Shoal and inside Boston Harbor (see [322 CMR 4.06\(7\)](#) for details). Lastly, there is a night closure which prohibits purse seining from 30 minutes after sunset to 30 minutes before sunrise.

Inshore Restricted Waters

An Inshore Net Permit endorsement is required to use purse seines within the inshore harbors and embayments—commonly referred to as Inshore Net Areas or Inshore Restricted Waters ([see map](#)). This includes commonly fished areas such as Boston Harbor, Gloucester Harbor, Salem Harbor, and Beverly Harbor. While the directed fishery opens earlier, these areas remain closed until June 1 to prevent the incidental catch of river herring species. Commercial fishers with an Inshore Net Permit endorsement will receive their annual Inshore Net Permit Conditions during the second half of May. Please note that while Buzzard Bay is an Inshore Net Area, it is closed to net fishing.

Harvester Partnership Pilot Program

For 2026, DMF is renewing the Harvester Partnership Pilot Program (“HPPP”). The HPPP allows similarly permitted vessels rigged for seining to remove fish from another’s seine should the set exceed the trip limit or the vessel’s capacity. This is designed to reduce discarding and slippage and may also decrease the numbers of seine nets being fished. Vessels working together must be similarly permitted (i.e., both limited access or both open access). Each vessel must be rigged for purse seining and capable of catching what they land. A vessel may be authorized to partner with multiple vessels but may only partner with one vessel each day. Each partnering vessel may only take fish from the net (not from the other vessel) and they must bring the fish ashore themselves. All landings must comply with the trip limit for that permit holder at that time.

All limited entry permit holders with a clean enforcement record over the past calendar year are eligible to participate, as are those open entry permit holders who had documented landings in 2025 and have a clean enforcement record over the past calendar year. To obtain an authorization, please submit a completed [application](#) and return it to Bradlie Morgan (bradlie.morgan@mass.gov).

Purse Seine Certification

Commercial seiners who fish the Inshore Net Areas or at the 6,000-pound trip limit are subject to net size rules and are required to obtain an annual seine certification. For 2026, DMF will honor certifications from states with similar programs and 2025 DMF certifications provided the certifying tag remains affixed to the net and the seine’s size has not been modified. If you have a new net or have modified your existing net, you must have the net inspected and certified. To obtain this inspection and certification, please contact Michele Heller at 973-650-1976 or by e-mail (michele.heller@mass.gov).

Use of Carrier Vessels

The use of carrier vessels is constrained to limited entry permit holders operating during the 120,000-pound and 25,000-pound directed fishery trip limit periods. Additionally, the use of carrier vessels is strictly prohibited within Boston Harbor at any time. Carrier vessels may receive, possess, transport and land menhaden from only a single harvester vessel during any calendar day, provided the calendar day is open to purse seining. A carrier vessel may not receive, possess, or land menhaden in quantities that exceed the applicable trip limit or land more than once per day. A harvester vessel may employ multiple carrier vessels during the same calendar day, provided the trip limit is not exceeded in aggregate. If you intend to use or act as a carrier vessel in 2026, please contact Bradlie Morgan (bradlie.morgan@mass.gov) to obtain the annual authorization.

Storage Requirements

Fishers are reminded that any harvester or carrier vessel holding and landing menhaden in quantities that exceed 6,000 pounds must be assessed by a certified marine surveyor and marked to demonstrate the volumetric capacity of 120,000 pounds and 25,000 pounds of menhaden. Any catch retained under the 6,000-pound trip limit is to be stored in level-filled totes or barrels upon retention.

A level-filled tote is the equivalent of 117 pounds of menhaden and a level-filled barrel is the equivalent of 350 pounds of menhaden.

Reporting Requirements

All limited entry menhaden permit holders are reminded to report their commercial catch electronically to DMF on a daily basis and prior to landing. This applies not just to their menhaden catch, but all other commercial catch they may land under the authority of their commercial fishing permit. (Federal permits may trigger additional reporting requirements, e.g., VTR.) This does not eliminate the requirement for limited entry menhaden permit holders to also obtain a Bait Dealer permit and report their menhaden catch and sales on a daily basis as a dealer.

Open access menhaden fishers remain required to report their commercial catch to DMF via monthly trip level catch reports, and if directly selling or exchanging fish as bait, to obtain a Bait Dealer permit and report these sales on a weekly basis.

User Group Conflicts

The Massachusetts commercial menhaden fishery is annually allocated a quota from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and on a coastwide basis, this quota accounts for the role menhaden play in the ecosystem as forage. However, commercial menhaden fishing creates persistent user group conflicts over the removal of this important forage fish. These conflicts tend to be more severe in years when local availability is lower. This is a shared resource—menhaden are an important forage base for valuable recreational fisheries, an important bait for our commercial lobster industry and bait shops, and purse seining for menhaden is a historic commercial fishing activity in the Commonwealth. Therefore, it is critical that user groups work to co-exist. While DMF has adopted a series of controls to constrain commercial harvest and effort in Massachusetts to ameliorate potential user group conflicts, we strongly encourage the deescalation of on-the-water conflicts through increased communication. Additionally, commercial seiners should avoid setting their gear in concentrations of recreational fishers, just as recreational fishers should avoid interfering with commercial seining operations.

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