



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

## Division of Marine Fisheries

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May 1, 2025

### Marine Fisheries Advisory

#### UPDATE ON 2025 COMMERCIAL MENHADEN FISHERY MANAGEMENT

The Division of Marine Fisheries is enacting two changes to the commercial menhaden fishery's management in 2025. First, the limited entry fishery's quota use trigger that reduces the trip limit to 6,000 pounds has been revised to facilitate access to the state's menhaden quota and the Episodic Event Set-Aside should resource conditions warrant, while also safeguarding some access to small-scale fishing opportunities later in the season. Second, DMF is initiating a new pilot program to allow eligible menhaden seiners to share catch from their net with similarly permitted and rigged vessels to reduce discarding and the number of seine nets being set. This advisory explains these changes and serves to remind fishery participants of the full suite of management measures.

#### Directed Trip Limits and Fishing Days

The directed fishery for menhaden will open this year on May 15, 2025. The limited entry fishery will start with a trip limit of 120,000 pounds. This trip limit will be reduced to 25,000 pounds if 50% of the annual quota is taken before September 1 and to 6,000 pounds if 98% of the annual quota is taken on or after September 1. If at least 10% of the annual quota remains on October 15, the trip limit will be increased to 360,000 pounds allowing for fish to be carried in from other jurisdictions. The open access trip limit remains at 6,000 pounds during the directed fishery. To start the season, purse seining in state waters may only occur Monday–Thursday. Friday will be added as an open fishing day concurrent with a decrease in the limited entry trip limit below 120,000 pounds. Purse seines are prohibited prior to the start of the directed fishery. Only small-scale and non-directed gears (e.g. weirs) may retain fish at the 6,000-pound trip limit prior to May 15.

#### Inshore Net Areas

Please note that while the directed fishery opens on May 15, our inshore harbors and embayments (so-called “inshore net areas”) remain closed until June 1. This is due to the seasonal presence of river herring in these waters and concerns about potential incidental catch. Access to the inshore net areas is limited and existing permit holders will receive their annual Inshore Net Permit Conditions by the end of May.

#### Purse Seine Net Certification

Commercial seiners who fish the inshore net areas or at the 6,000-pound trip limit, and are consequently subject to net size rules, are reminded that they must have their nets inspected and certified. Please contact Michele Heller at 978-491-6258 or [michele.heller@mass.gov](mailto:michele.heller@mass.gov) to arrange

an inspection time and location. Inspections and certifications from states with similar programs are also valid in Massachusetts.

#### Vessel Fish Storage Certification and Volumetric Equivalencies

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 volumetric capacity of 120,000 pounds and 25,000 pounds of menhaden prior to commencing activity. When a harvester is operating at the 6,000-pound trip limit (whether limited entry or open access), the fish must be stored in barrels or totes upon retention. A level-filled fish tote equates to 117 pounds of menhaden and a level-filled barrel equates to 350 pounds of menhaden.

#### Use of Carrier Vessels

The use of carrier vessels is constrained to limited entry fishery participants during the directed fishery. The use of carrier vessels is prohibited year-round within Boston Harbor, and throughout Massachusetts when a 6,000-pound trip limit applies to the limited entry fishery. 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 2025, please contact Bradlie Morgan ([bradlie.morgan@mass.gov](mailto:bradlie.morgan@mass.gov)) to obtain an authorization.

#### Harvester Partnership Pilot Program

New this year, DMF is authorizing a pilot program that will allow a similarly permitted vessel rigged for seining to remove fish from another vessel's seine should a set exceed the trip limit or the vessel's capacity. This will reduce the potential for discarding and may decrease the number of seine nets being set, with a benefit to user-group relations. 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—they may not receive fish directly 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. Only those open entry permit holders who had documented landings in 2024 and have a clean enforcement record over the past calendar year are similarly eligible. To obtain an authorization, please submit a completed [application](#) and return it to Bradlie Morgan ([bradlie.morgan@mass.gov](mailto:bradlie.morgan@mass.gov)).

#### Daily Electronic Catch Reporting for Limited Entry Harvesters

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

There are persistent user group conflicts over the extraction of menhaden for commercial purposes. These conflicts tend to be exacerbated in years when there is reduced availability in our waters. This is a shared resource—menhaden are an important local forage base for valuable recreational fisheries, an important bait for our local lobster industry and bait shops, and purse seining for menhaden is a historic commercial fishing activity. The 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. While DMF has also adopted a series of controls to constrain commercial harvest and effort in Massachusetts to ameliorate potential user group conflicts, we strongly encourage the de-escalation of on-the-water conflicts through increased communication on the water. 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](http://www.mass.gov/marinefisheries).