



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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May 8, 2025

Marine Fisheries Advisory

MANAGEMENT OF THE STATE CONCH POTS IN THE FEDERAL ZONE

The Division of Marine Fisheries is extending state permitting and effort control rules to Massachusetts commercial permit holders fishing conch pots for knobbed and channeled whelk ("whelk") in the federal zone. Absent a federal fishery management plan for whelk, there are no federal controls currently in place governing the use of conch pots in these waters, and in recent years, DMF has observed an expansion of the traditional state waters conch pot fishery into the federal zone off Nantucket. DMF is concerned that this will result in a proliferation of conch pot gear in federal waters south and east of Nantucket and increase the entanglement risk for protected whales and sea turtles.

In response, a suite of new regulations will go into effect on May 9, 2025. First, any Massachusetts commercial permit holder possessing or landing knobbed or channeled whelks taken by conch pot gear in state or federal waters must hold a DMF-issued conch pot regulated fishing permit endorsement. Second, all conch pots present on a vessel or set in state or federal waters by a Massachusetts permit holder must have a valid annual trap tag affixed to the bridge or cross member of the pot. Lastly, whether fishing in state or federal waters Massachusetts commercial permit holders must adhere to the 200-conch pot maximum limit and the April 15 – December 15 conch pot fishing season.

Buoy line marking and configuration rules remain unchanged. All conch pots set in waters under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth, including the center of Nantucket Sound, must conform to the rules for the Massachusetts Mixed Species Trap/Pot Fishery. Buoy lines may not exceed 3/8" diameter or a tensile strength of 1,700 pounds. To comply with the tensile strength requirement, you can use [approved fully formed weak rope](#) or insert an [approved 1,700 lb weak contrivance](#) once every 60' feet in the 75% of your buoy line. Buoy lines should also be marked with at least five red marks — a single three-foot solid mark in the surface system (top 12' from buoy) and at least four two-foot solid or non-solid marks throughout the remainder of the buoy line with at least two marks in the top 50% and two marks in the bottom 50% of the buoy line and no more than 60' between marks. Solid marks include tape, paint, or heat shrink tubing; non-solid marks include twine or zip ties. If you are fishing with a buoy line that is red or candy cane colored (red and white), then all the marks must be white.

Please note that there are different buoy line configuration and marking requirements for conch pot gear set in federal waters. Consult NOAA' Fisheries [Northeast Trap Pot Fisheries Guide](#) for federal rules governing Other Trap Pot Fishers in the Northern Nearshore Trap/Pot Waters (see pages 30-35). for additional details.

For more information, please see our [April 18 Advisory](#) on buoy line rules or visit our [website](#).