



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries

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DANIEL J. MCKIERNAN
Director

June 16, 2023

Marine Fisheries Advisory

PUBLIC COMMENT SOUGHT ON IN-SEASON ADJUSTMENT TO COMMERCIAL HORSESHOE CRAB BAIT HARVEST LIMITS FOR 2023

In response to fishery performance and quota utilization so far in 2023, DMF is proposing in-season adjustments to reduce the 2023 commercial horseshoe crab limits for mobile gear fishers. The proposal will reduce the trip limit from 300 crabs to 200 crabs for permit holders and 75 crabs to 50 crabs for the open entry bycatch limit.

On May 16, 2023, the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission voted to reduce the bait quota from 165,000 horseshoe crabs to 140,000 horseshoe crabs for this season and this amendment is expected to be finalized in the coming weeks. As of today, Massachusetts has landed 92,648 horseshoe crabs against the bait quota. This leaves less than 50,000 horseshoe crabs available for harvest this summer. The summertime harvest of horseshoe crabs is primarily conducted by mobile gear fishery, specifically the mixed species trawl fishery in Nantucket Sound and state and municipal shellfish dredge fisheries. In recent years, this fishery has taken about 75,000 horseshoe crabs. Therefore, under current limits we anticipate an earlier than expected closure. The proposed action to reduce the trip limits should slow the consumption of the remaining quota so that it remains available during these summertime fisheries and thereby prevents the regulatory discarding of bycatch that may result from an early season closure.

Instructions for Public Comment

DMF will accept written public comment through Friday, June 30, 2023. Please address all written comments to Director Dan McKiernan and submit them by e-mail to marine.fish@mass.gov.

Public comment will be considered in DMF's final recommendation to the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC). The MFAC will review the public comments and vote on DMF's final recommendation at their July 10, 2023 business meeting. If approved by the MFAC, the in-season adjustments will go into effect for July 11 and will be in effect for the remainder of 2023 fishing season, unless otherwise amended.