



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Marine Fisheries
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MarineFisheries Advisory

**Applicants Sought for Potential Pilot Program
Authorizing a Weekly Aggregate Spiny Dogfish Limit**

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries is soliciting interest from commercial permit holders to participate in a potential pilot program that would authorize a weekly aggregate limit of spiny dogfish for a portion of the open season. Specifically, the pilot program would allow participants to land up to 37,500 pounds of spiny dogfish per calendar week (with landings on no more than four days per week) rather than 7,500 pounds per trip, beginning as early as September 1 and extending through December 31, 2026 unless 80% of the Northern Region (ME-CT) Spiny Dogfish Commercial Quota is taken sooner. Initiation of the pilot program is contingent upon NOAA Fisheries' approval of a federal Exempted Fishing Permit application submitted jointly by the states of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut and currently under review. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission recently approved the states' proposal to authorize the experimental weekly limit in state waters.

Eligibility would be restricted to vessels that hold a valid Federal spiny dogfish commercial fishing permit and are authorized to fish for, possess, and land spiny dogfish for commercial purposes in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island or Connecticut. In Massachusetts, this requires a Commercial Fishing Permit and a Spiny Dogfish Permit Endorsement. Each state is soliciting interest from its own permit holders; vessels permitted in multiple of the involved states should only apply to participate through one state. Among all states, total participation is expected to be capped at 50 vessels or less. Depending on the level of interest, prior history of participation in the directed spiny dogfish fishery may be used to qualify applicants. Applicants may also be disqualified based on their enforcement and reporting timeliness history. All participants will follow the federal permit holder requirement to submit Vessel Trip Reports (VTRs) electronically within 48 hours after entering port.

Massachusetts commercial fishing permit holders interested to participate in the pilot program should provide the following information to Bradlie Morgan by e-mail (bradlie.morgan@mass.gov) by the **application deadline of August 25**: (1) Permit Holder Name and Mailing Address, (2) Vessel Name, USCG Documentation Number, and Hull Number, (3) DMF Permit ID#, (4) Federal Vessel Permit #, and (5) Operator Name and Federal Operator Permit # (include all potential operators). This information will be submitted to NOAA Fisheries for use in considering and issuing the Exempted Fishing Permit. Contingent upon the issuance of the Exempted Fishing Permit, DMF will issue Letters of Authorization to the Massachusetts permit holders approved to participate in the pilot program, with the goal of doing so by September 1 or as soon as possible thereafter.

Spiny dogfish are managed jointly by the Atlantic coastal states through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, and NOAA Fisheries. The interstate and federal fishery management plans collectively establish a 58% share of the coastwide quota and a 7,500-pound trip limit for Northern Region fishery participants. However, this 7,500-lb trip limit may be contributing to underutilization of the Northern Region's quota and contraction within the fishery. The weekly aggregate limit pilot program is intended to examine if greater regulatory flexibility will provide for more economically viable fishing trips and enhanced quota utilization, particularly in the fall as the resource moves farther from shore. Information collected during the pilot program may also inform future setting of trip limits.

Prospective Massachusetts applicants seeking more information may contact Nichola Meserve (nichola.meserve@mass.gov, 978-290-1672).