



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

## Division of Marine Fisheries

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### Marine Fisheries Advisory

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT SOUGHT ON IN-SEASON ADJUSTMENTS TO COMMERCIAL SUMMER FLOUNDER LIMITS FOR 2021**

In response to fishery performance and quota utilization so far in 2021, DMF is proposing in-season adjustments to 2021 commercial fishing limits for summer flounder. As of August 25, Massachusetts has landed 435,188 pounds of its 1,015,179-pound 2021 quota (45%).

Accordingly, DMF is seeking to liberalize commercial summer flounder limits to enhance the utilization of the state's quota. The proposals are as follows:

- **Open Fishing Days.** During the period of September 24–October 31, eliminate the Friday and Saturday closed fishing days and allow commercial fishermen to fish for, retain, possess, and land summer flounder seven days per week.

This will allow federal permit holders fishing offshore additional flexibility to bring fish to Massachusetts ports that were caught lawfully in federal waters. Additionally, those small number of vessels remaining in the inshore fishery, will be provided with additional open fishing days during the early-fall period to account for potential days lost to weather; this small boat fishery is frequently limited by worsening seasonal weather during this period.

- **Trip Limits.** During the period of September 23–October 9, increase the commercial summer flounder trawl limits from 400 to 600 pounds. Then during the period of October 10–December 31 or until 100% of the annual quota is taken (whichever occurs sooner), increase the commercial summer flounder trip limit to 2,000 pounds. This effectively opens the November 1–December 31 offshore fishery three weeks earlier—after the end of the recreational fishery—and increases the anticipated possession and landing limit for this period from 1,000 pounds to 2,000 pounds.

This will increase the allowable possession and landing limit for federally permitted vessels fishing offshore, thereby encouraging these vessels to land their catch in Massachusetts ports. For those small number of vessels remaining in the inshore trawl fishery, this action will provide them with higher trip limits during the early-fall period when these fish remain in our waters. This will offset the economic impacts associated with deteriorating fall weather and additional steaming time to fishing grounds due to the seasonal migration of this resource offshore. Additionally, it may reduce regulatory discarding among these inshore trawlers when they reach their summer flounder trip limit

but continue to fish and target other species (e.g., knobbed whelk) when they may be a bycatch of summer flounder

The state's commercial summer flounder quota, as allocated by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, was increased from 786,399 pounds in 2020 to 1,015,179 pounds in 2021 (29%). This occurred in response to robust stock conditions and a shift in geographic distribution of the resource to the north and east. However, despite this sizeable quota increase, DMF did not take action to adjust commercial fishing limits at the start of the fishing year, instead favoring to make in-season adjustments in response to fishery performance. At this time, DMF seeks to make in-season adjustments to benefit the inshore trawl fishery during late-September and early-October and the offshore fishery that occurs during the fall and winter months in the federal zone.

### **Instructions for Public Comment**

DMF is seeking written public comments on the proposals described above. Of specific interest is whether the proposed adjustments should occur earlier or later in the season or whether additional adjustments and trip limit increases are necessary. DMF will be accepting public comment on these proposals through Friday, September 10, 2021. All comments are to be submitted to DMF by e-mail ([marine.fish@mass.gov](mailto:marine.fish@mass.gov)) to the attention of Director McKiernan.

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 September 22, 2021 business meeting. If approved by the MFAC, the in-season adjustments will go into effect on September 23, 2021 for the remainder of 2021 fishing season, unless otherwise amended.

For more information about the management of marine fisheries in Massachusetts, contact DMF at 617-626-1520 or visit our website at [www.mass.gov/marinefisheries](http://www.mass.gov/marinefisheries).