



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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New Rules Affecting Commercial and Recreational Lobster Fishers and Seafood Dealers Changes to Minimum and Maximum Sizes, V-Notch Standards, and Escape Vents

The Division of Marine Fisheries has promulgated a series of regulatory changes affecting the harvest and possession of lobsters by commercial and recreational fishers and seafood dealers. This is being done to comply with Addenda XXVII and XXXI to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Lobster to increase the spawning stock biomass of the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank lobster stock by proactively implementing measures in response to declining recruitment trends and an anticipated decline in stock abundance driven primarily by environmental factors. This includes changes to the minimum and maximum carapace size standards, v-notch possession rules, and minimum escape vent sizes for traps. These changes will be phased in over the next five-years beginning in 2025. See the text and tables below for more details.

Commercial Fishers

During this year's permit renewal process, the issuance of annual lobster trap tags for Lobster Conservation Management Area 1 (LCMA 1) and Lobster Conservation Management Area 3 (LCMA 3) will be limited to the individual's trap allocation. This eliminates the practice of issuing an additional 10% to pre-emptively cover trap loss.

Next, a series of changes to biological measures will go into effect on July 1, 2025. For LCMA 1, the minimum carapace size will be increased by 1/16" from 3 1/4" to 3 5/16". Additionally, standardized maximum carapace size and v-notch possession rules will be adopted for all permit holders in the Outer Cape Cod Lobster Conservation Management Area (OCCLCMA). The maximum carapace size will be 6 3/4" and the v-notch possession limit will be 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs. Effectively, this will change the rules for state-only permit holders—who currently do not have a maximum carapace size and are subject to a v-notch possession rule of 1/4" depth without setal hairs—to bring them in line with federal permit holders.

Then over the following four years a series of additional measures are scheduled to be implemented. On July 1, 2027, the minimum carapace size for LCMA 1 will again be increased by 1/16" from 3 5/16" to 3 3/8". On July 1, 2028, the minimum escape vent sizes for lobster traps in LCMA 1 will be increased from 1 15/16" by 5 3/4" to 2" by 5 3/4" (rectangular vents) and from 2 7/16" diameter to 2 5/8" diameter (circular vents). This is consistent with the escape vents used in other Lobster Conservation Management Areas with a minimum carapace size of 3 3/8". Lastly, on July 1, 2029, the maximum carapace size for OCCLCMA and LCMA 3 will be reduced from 6 3/4" to 6 1/2". See Table 1.

Seafood Dealers

With the above-described changes to the carapace size and v-notch rules affecting the commercial harvest of lobster along the coast, the corresponding standards for seafood dealers are being amended. These changes will enable seafood dealers to continue to possess to the smallest carapace size, largest maximum

size, and least restrictive v-notch standard among the various US jurisdictions. The changes are being implemented in two parts. Immediately upon implementation of each change to the commercial carapace size and v-notch standards, seafood dealers who are primary buyers will be prohibited from purchasing non-conforming lobsters from commercial fishers. See Table 1. However, seafood dealers will be given a three-month grace period after each change to the commercial fishing regulations whereby they are allowed to possess lawfully purchased non-conforming lobsters to allow them to liquidate existing inventory (see Table 2).

Accordingly, through September 30, 2025, seafood dealers will be able to possess any lobsters with a carapace measuring at least 3 1/4" and any female lobster with a sharp v-notch of up to 1/4" depth without setal hairs. Then on October 1, 2025, seafood dealers will be restricted to possessing lobsters with a carapace size measuring between 3 5/16" and 6 3/4" and female lobsters with a notch (or indentation) up to 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs. During the period between now and June 30, 2025, the primary purchase of lobsters direct from commercial fishers shall conform to the existing LCMA-specific biological measures; then on July 1, 2025 the minimum carapace size for lobsters purchased from LCMA 1 commercial fishers will increase to 3 5/16"; the maximum carapace size for lobsters purchased from OCCLCMA commercial fishers will be 6 3/4"; and the v-notch standard for lobsters purchased from OCCLCMA commercial fishers will be 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs.

Recreational Fishers

Persons who fish in the Gulf of Maine and Outer Cape Cod Recreational Areas will also be subject to changing minimum and maximum carapace size standards and escape vent rules to match what is occurring in the commercial fisheries in LCMA 1 and OCCLCMA rules. See Table 3. However, these recreational standards will go into effect on May 1—for the start of the recreational fishing season—rather than in-season on July 1 like the commercial fishery. Accordingly, for May 1, 2025, recreational fishers in the Gulf of Maine Recreational Area will have a new minimum carapace size of 3 5/16", increasing from 3 1/4", and recreational fishers in the Outer Cape Cod Recreational Area will have a new maximum carapace size of 6 3/4". Note that state-wide the recreational fishery is already subject to a v-notch possession standard of 1/8" with or without setal hairs, so this rule will not be changing.

For more information on the management of commercial fisheries in Massachusetts, please visit our website: www.mass.gov/marinefisheries

Table 1. Changes to Lobster Carapace Size, V-Notch, and Escape Vent Rules for LCMA1, LCMA3, and OCCLCMA by Year from 2025 – 2029; New Rules in Red Bold-Faced Type			
Implementation Date	LCMA1 Rules	LCMA3 Rules	OCCLCMA Rules
Existing Rules	Min Size: 3 1/4"	Min Size: 3 17/32"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: 6 3/4"	Federal Max Size: 6 3/4"
	V-Notch: Any v-shaped notch with or without setal hairs	V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs	State Max Size: None
			Federal V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs State V-Notch: Sharp v at 1/4" depth without setal hairs.
July 1, 2025	Min Size: 3 5/16"	Min Size: 3 17/32"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: 6 3/4"	Max Size: 6 3/4"
	V-Notch: Any v-shaped notch with or without setal hairs	V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs	V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs
	Escape Vent: 1 15/16" by 5 3/4" or 2 7/16 diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.
July 1, 2026	Min Size: 3 5/16"	Min Size: 3 17/32"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: 6 3/4"	Max Size: 6 3/4"
	V-Notch: Any v-shaped notch with or without setal hairs	V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs	V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs
	Escape Vent: 1 15/16" by 5 3/4" or 2 7/16 diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.
July 1, 2027	Min Size: 3 3/8"	Min Size: 3 17/32"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: 6 3/4"	Max Size: 6 3/4"
	V-Notch: Any v-shaped notch with or without setal hairs	V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs	V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs
	Escape Vent: 1 15/16" by 5 3/4" or 2 7/16 diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.
July 1, 2028	Min Size: 3 3/8"	Min Size: 3 17/32"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: 6 3/4"	Max Size: 6 3/4"
	V-Notch: Any v-shaped notch with or without setal hairs	V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs	V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs
	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.
July 1, 2029	Min Size: 3 3/8"	Min Size: 3 17/32"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: 6 1/2"	Max Size: 6 1/2"
	V-Notch: Any v-shaped notch with or without setal hairs	V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs	V-Notch: 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs
	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.

Table 2. Changes to Lobster Possession Rules for Seafood Dealers by Year from 2025 – 2029; New Rules in Red Bold-Faced Type	
Dates	Seafood Dealer Lobster Possession Rules
Present – September 30, 2025	Min Size: 3 1/4"
	Max Size: None
	V-Notch: Sharp V up to 1/4" depth without setal hairs
October 1, 2025 – September 30, 2027	Min Size: 3 5/16"
	Max Size: 6 3/4"
	V-Notch: V-shaped notch up to 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs
October 1, 2027 – September 30, 2029	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 6 3/4"
	V-Notch: V-shaped notch up to 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs
October 1, 2029 and Thereafter	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 6 1/2"
	V-Notch: V-shaped notch up to 1/8" depth with or without setal hairs

Table 3. Changes to Recreational Lobster Size Limits and Escape Vent Rules by Year from 2025 – 2029; New Rules in Red Bold-Faced Type		
Implementation Date	Gulf of Maine Recreational Area Rules	Outer Cape Recreational Area Rules
Current Rules	Min Size: 3 1/4"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: No size limit
	Escape Vent: 1 15/16" by 5 3/4" or 2 7/16 diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.
May 1, 2025	Min Size: 3 5/16"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: 6 3/4"
	Escape Vent: 1 15/16" by 5 3/4" or 2 7/16 diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.
May 1, 2026	Min Size: 3 5/16"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: 6 3/4"
	Escape Vent: 1 15/16" by 5 3/4" or 2 7/16 diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.
May 1, 2027	Min Size: 3 3/8"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: 6 3/4"
	Escape Vent: 1 15/16" by 5 3/4" or 2 7/16 diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.
May 1, 2028	Min Size: 3 3/8"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: 6 3/4"
	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.
May 1 2029	Min Size: 3 3/8"	Min Size: 3 3/8"
	Max Size: 5"	Max Size: 6 1/2"
	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.	Escape Vent: 2" by 5 3/4" or 2 5/8" diameter.