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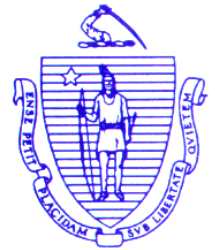
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April 9, 2018

Marine Fisheries Advisory

NEW COMMERCIAL FISHING LIMITS IN EFFECT FOR 2018

The Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) has enacted new regulations following this winter's public hearings. These regulations were reviewed and approved by the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission at the March 15, 2018 business meeting and go into effect on April 20, 2018. A brief description of these regulatory changes follows:

Commercial Striped Bass Fishing Days (322 CMR 6.07)

For 2018, the commercial striped bass fishery will open on Monday, June 25. Open fishing days will remain Mondays and Thursdays and there have been no changes to the commercial possession and landing limits. However, beginning this year, commercial fishing will be prohibited on July 3, July 4 or Labor Day – if those dates fall on an open fishing day during the commercial fishery. This new rule should not impact the 2018 fishery, unless the quota remains available at Labor Day.

Commercial Black Sea Bass Fishing Days (322 CMR 6.28)

The open commercial fishing days in the summer-time directed black sea bass fishery have been adjusted. The summer-time directed fishing season begins on the first open fishing day following July 8th; there are three open fishing days per week. The new open commercial fishing days are Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Prior to this year, the open fishing days were Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. DMF replaced the Wednesday open fishing day with a Thursday open fishing day to provide non-consecutive open fishing days in order to spread the supply of fish out over the week. As July 9th falls on a Monday - a no-fishing day - the 2018 directed summer-time commercial black sea bass season will begin on Tuesday, July 10th.

Black Sea Bass Bycatch Allowance by Trawlers during the Squid Fishery (322 CMR 6.28)

During the April 23 – June 9 inshore small mesh trawl squid fishery, trawlers will be allowed to retain and land a 50 pound bycatch limit of black sea bass. Prior to this rule change, the retention and landing of black sea bass during this period was prohibited. This rule change was implemented to reduce discarding and discard mortality. Overall black sea bass landings by trawlers during the squid fishery will be capped at 50,000 pounds. After the end of the inshore squid fishery or once the 50,000 pound cap is reached, the retention and landing of black sea bass by trawlers will be prohibited until the directed summer-time fishery opens.

Commercial Scup Seasons and Small Mesh Trawl Limits

Two changes to the commercial scup regulations are being enacted to comply with the interstate and federal fishery management plans. The first rule change affects the retention and landing of scup by trawlers using nets with mesh that measures less than 5” diamond (“small mesh”). When trawlers are fishing with small mesh during the period of May 1 – September 30, they may not possess more than 200 pounds of scup; during the period of October 1 – April 30, this scup limit is 1,000 pounds. Second, the quota management periods for scup are being adjusted. The month of October is being moved from the summertime state managed quota period to the winter time federally managed quota period. This is being done to improve the utilization of the federal quota. The state quota is not being changed as a result of this action.

Menhaden Bycatch Limits

DMF is clarifying its menhaden bycatch allowance to comply with the interstate fishery management plan. This clarification will prohibit large purse seiners – defined as using a net that exceeds 150 fathom length or 8 fathom depth – from taking menhaden under the state’s bycatch allowance provision. This provision allows vessels to continue to retain and land up to 1,000 pounds of menhaden taken as bycatch once 100% of the annual menhaden quota is taken, provided the bycatch of menhaden does not exceed 5% the overall catch.

Prohibition on the Use of Bleach to Harvest Razor and Soft-shelled Clams

DMF has clarified that it is unlawful to use bleach to harvest razor and soft-shelled clams. This reinforces state laws that prohibit the discharge of contaminants into marine waters. Clam harvesters have been known to spray solutions into clam holes to force the animals to the surface to make harvest activities more efficient. Bleach and bleach solutions have been used in the past. This is inappropriate given that bleach can kill off important micro-organisms, is harmful to fish and plant species and can have a substantial negative impact on wetland ecosystems.

For more information regarding marine fisheries management in Massachusetts, please visit our website (www.mass.gov/marinefisheries) or call DMF at 617-626-1520.