



Recreational saltwater fishing regulations

You can learn about the recreational saltwater fishing regulations by looking at the documents below. Updated as of August 10, 2017. These regulations apply to state-waters only.

DMF makes every attempt to keep these regulations tables accurate and up to date. This is an “unofficial” copy. The Secretary of State maintains the official copy of the 322 CMR . You can buy an official copy from the state bookstore. For more information on ordering a copy of 322 CMR [visit the Secretary of State website.](#)

Recreational finfish regulations

Species	Season	Size Limit	Possession Limit
American eel (1)	Jan 01 - Dec 31	9 in.	25 fish
Black sea bass (2) (6)*	May 20 - Aug 29	15 in.	5 fish

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Bluefish	Jan 01 - Dec 31	no limit	10 fish
Cod (North of Cape Cod) Private (3) (4)*	Jan 01 - Dec 31	19 in.	1 fish
Cod (North of Cape Cod) For-Hire (3) (4)	closed year round	N/A	N/A
Cod (South of Cape Cod) (3) (4)*	Jan 01 - Dec 31	22 in.	10 fish
Dab (plaice) (3) (4)	Jan 01 - Dec 31	14 in.	no limit
Fluke*	May 22 - Sept 23	17 in.	4 fish
Gray sole (3) (4)	Jan 01 - Dec 31	14 in.	no limit
Haddock (North of Cape Cod) Private* (3) (4)*	Jan 01 - Dec 31	17 in.	12 fish
Haddock (North of Cape Cod) For-Hire* (3) (4)*	Jan 01 - Feb 28	17 in.	12 fish
		17 in.	12 fish
	Apr 15 - Sept 16	17 in.	12 fish
	Nov 01 - Dec 31		
Haddock (South of Cape Cod) (3) (4)	Jan 01 - Dec 31	18 in.	no limit
Halibut (3) (4)	Jan 01 - Dec 31	41 in.	1 fish

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Monkfish (3) (4)	Jan 01 - Dec 31	no limit	no limit
Ocean pout (3) (4)	prohibited	N/A	N/A
Pollock (3) (4)	Jan 01 - Dec 31	no limit	no limit
Redfish (3) (4)	Jan 01 - Dec 01	no limit	no limit
River herring	prohibited	N/A	N/A
Scup Private (6)*	May 01 - Dec 31	10 in.	30 fish or 150 fish/vessel if 5 or more anglers are aboard
Scup For-Hire Bonus (6)*	May 01 - Jun 30	10 in.	45 fish
Scup For-Hire Regular (6)*	Jul 01 - Dec 31	10 in.	30 fish
American shad Merrimack River	Jan 01 - Dec 31	no limit	3 fish
American shad Connecticut River	Jan 01 - Dec 31	no limit	3 fish
American shad Other Rivers	Jan 01 - Dec 31	no limit	catch and release only
Smelt	Jun 16 - March 14	no limit	50 fish
Spiny dogfish	Jan 01 - Dec 31	no limit	no limit

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Striped bass (5)	Jan 01 - Dec 31	28 in.	1 fish
Tautog*	Jan 01 - Dec 31	16 in.	3 fish
Weakfish	Jan 01 - Dec 31	16 in.	1 fish
White perch	Jan 01 - Dec 31	8 in.	25 fish
Windowpane (3) (4)	prohibited	N/A	N/A
Winter flounder (North of Cape Cod) (3) (4)	Jan 01 - Dec 31	12 in.	8 fish
Winter flounder (South & East of Cape Cod) (3) (4)	Mar 01 - Dec 31	12 in.	2 fish
Wolffish (3) (4)	prohibited	N/A	N/A
Yellowtail flounder (3) (4)	Jan 01 - Dec 31	13 in.	no limit

Tunas, billfish, and swordfish are managed by [NOAA's Highly Migratory Species](#) Office. Please consult NOAA Fisheries for permitting requirements and regulations.

*Rules listed are for Fishing Year (FY) 2017 (5/1/17 - 4/30/18). Rule changes are anticipated later this winter for FY 2018. FY 2018 limits will be published as soon as they are finalized. Please consult DMF for further information.

1) Subject to regulation by the Division and the municipality. Please consult municipal regulations.

2) Black sea bass are measured from the tip of the snout or jaw (mouth closed) to the farthest extremity of the tail, not including the tail filament.

3) Federal rules apply beyond state waters. Consult NOAA Fisheries for [regulations](#).

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5) Striped bass are measured from the tip of the snout or jaw (mouth closed) to the farthest extremity of the tail. The discard of dead legal sized striped bass is unlawful. The practice of high-grading, whereby legal sized striped bass are released in favor of larger fish caught subsequently is unlawful. Accordingly, it is also unlawful to keep a striped bass alive in water by attaching a line or chain to the fish (stringer), or placing it in a live well or holding car. Striped bass must be kept whole, meaning the head, tail, and body remain intact. Only evisceration is allowed. Permitted for-hire vessels may fillet striped bass for their customers.

6) Black sea bass and scup may be filleted but not skinned while at-sea. No more than two fillets per allowed fish may be possessed.

Additional Resources



[MA Recreational Groundfish Management Areas](#) (PDF 1.03 MB)



[For-Hire Rules Poster](#) (PDF 758.08 KB)



[Private Angler Rules Poster](#) (PDF 545.63 KB)

Recreational shark regulations

Species	Minimum Size	Possession Limit
All permitted sharks (exceptions listed below)	54 in.	1 total per trip
Atlantic sharpnose shark	no minimum size	included in total shark bag limit +1 additional

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Bonnethead shark	no minimum size	included in total shark bag limit +1 additional
Smooth dogfish	no minimum size	included in total shark bag limit +1 additional
Blacknose shark	no minimum size	included in total shark bag limit
Finetooth shark	no minimum size	included in total shark bag limit
Hammerhead shark	72 in.	included in total shark bag limit

Permitted Species

The following species are allowed to be harvested:

Smooth Dogfish, Atlantic sharpnose, Bonnethead, Finetooth, Blacknose, Tiger, Blacktip, Spinner, Bull, Lemon, Nurse, Scalloped hammerhead, Great hammerhead, Smooth hammerhead, Shortfin mako, Porbeagle, Common thresher, Oceanic whitetip, Blue

Prohibited Species

The following species are prohibited from harvest:

Silky, Sandbar, Sand tiger, Bigeye sand tiger, Whale, Basking, White, Dusky, Bignose, Galapagos, Night, Caribbean reef, Narrowtooth, Caribbean sharpnose, Smalltail, Atlantic angel, Longfin mako, Bigeye thresher, Sharpnose sevengill, Bluntnose sixgill, Bigeye sixgill

Recreational shellfish regulations

Species	Minimum Size	Other Restrictions
Bay scallops	well defined growth ring	Closed Apr 01 - Oct 01, consult town regulations
Conch	3 in. shell width	consult town regulations
Oyster	3 in. shell diameter	consult town regulations

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Quahog 1 in. shell thickness consult town regulations

Sea Scallop 3 1/2 in. shell diameter daily limit of 1 bushel in shell, or 4 quarts of shucked meats

Softshell clam 2 in. shell diameter consult town regulations

Surf clam 5 in. shell diameter consult town regulations

Additional Resources

[How to measure shellfish](#) (PDF 207.25 KB)

Recreational lobster regulations

Gulf of Maine Recreational Lobster Area

Minimum
carapace size 3 1/4 in.Maximum
carapace size 5 in.V-notched
females:
definition Illegal to possess any female lobster that bears a notch or indentation in the base of the flipper that is at least as deep as 1/8 in. with or without setal hairs

Trap limit 10 traps

Escape vent One rectangular vent 1 15/16 in. × 5 3/4 in. or two circular vents of 2 7/16 in. in diameter

Bag limit 15 lobsters per day

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Minimum 3 3/8 in.

carapace size

Maximum
carapace size

V-notched
females:
definition

Illegal to possess any female lobster that bears a notch or indentation in the base of the flipper that is at least as deep as 1/8 in. with or without setal hairs

Trap limit

10 traps

Escape vent

One rectangular vent 2 in. × 5 3/4 in. or two circular vents of 2 5/8 in. in diameter

Bag limit

15 lobsters per day

Southern New England Recreational Lobster Area

Minimum
carapace size

3 3/8 in.

Maximum
carapace size

5 1/4 in.

V-notched
females:
definition

Illegal to possess any female lobster that bears a notch or indentation in the base of the flipper that is at least as deep as 1/8 in. with or without setal hairs

Trap limit

10 traps

Escape vent

One rectangular vent 2 in. × 5 3/4 in. or two circular vents of 2 5/8 in. in diameter

Bag limit

15 lobsters per day

Additional Resources

Recreational crab regulations

Species	Minimum size	Other regulations
Blue crab	5 in. shell width (spine to spine)	Egg-bearers cannot be taken; 25 crabs/day; no permit required unless using traps or SCUBA; closed season is January 01–April 30, inclusive
Other edible crabs*	none	50 crabs total per day (including up to 25 blue)—other regulations are the same as for blue crab

* Excludes green crabs. In order to harvest green crabs, you must obtain a Letter of Authorization (LOA) from the Division. Please contact Kerry Allard for a LOA or more information at (617) 626-1633 or kerry.allard@state.ma.us.

Spearfishing

Spearfishing is the taking of fish by use of a speargun. When spearfishing, you must comply with all recreational fishing regulations regarding size, seasons and bag limits on the species. You are not allowed to catch striped bass or lobster by spearfishing. For federally regulated species, please [visit NOAA Fisheries](#). Popular spearfishing species in Massachusetts waters include tautog and black sea bass.

How to measure your finfish catch

For Massachusetts marine waters, the minimum size for fish (exceptions listed below) is the greatest straight line length (not curved over the body) from the anterior tip of the jaw or snout (mouth closed) to the farthest extremity of the tail. Fish should be firmly grasped with both hands for proper measuring. Care should be taken so that the head firmly contacts the zero mark on rulers and tapes simultaneously

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Black sea bass if the tail filament (tendrill) is present, it is not included in the total length measurement.

Billfish (swordfish, sailfish, marlin) are measured from the tip of the lower jaw to the tail fork.

Sharks are measured from the tip of the snout to the fork of the tail.

Tunas measurement is taken in a line, tracing the contour of the body from the tip of the upper jaw to the fork of the tail, which crosses the dorsal insertion of the pectoral fin and the dorsal side of the caudal keel.

Contact environmental law enforcement

Hewitts Cove (Hingham): (781) 740-1163

Radio Room (Boston): (617) 626-1650

North Coastal Bureau (Gloucester): (978) 283-7764

Toll Free Number (Boston): (800) 632-8075

CONTACT

Division of Marine Fisheries - Boston Office

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[directions](#) →

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