

## EMERGENCY ALERTS

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# Recreational saltwater fishing regulations

The recreational saltwater fishing regulations table is up to date as of February 22, 2021. 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.](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/) (<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/>)

Below you can view the recreational regulations tables for:

- finfish
- sharks
- lobsters
- crabs
- shellfish

DMF will be publishing the annual recreational fishing posters soon.

## Recreational finfish regulations

| Species                                        | Note | Season   | Size Limit | Possession Limit       |
|------------------------------------------------|------|----------|------------|------------------------|
| American eel                                   | (1)  | All Year | 9 in       | 25 fish                |
| American shad (Merrimack & Connecticut Rivers) |      | All Year | no limit   | 3 fish                 |
| American shad (other waters)                   |      | All Year | N/A        | catch-and-release only |

| Species                                                                                                                                                         | Note   | Season                            | Size Limit | Possession Limit                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Black sea bass                                                                                                                                                  | (2, 6) | May 18 - Sep 8                    | 15 in      | 5 fish                                                                                                    |
| Bluefish                                                                                                                                                        |        | All Year                          | no limit   | 3 fish (anglers fishing from shore or private vessels)<br><br>5 fish (anglers fishing on a for-hire trip) |
| Cod*<br>( <a href="#">North of Cape Cod</a><br>( <a href="/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf">/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf</a> ))     | (3, 4) | Sep 15 - Sep 30                   | 21 in      | 1 fish                                                                                                    |
| Cod<br>( <a href="#">South of Cape Cod</a><br>( <a href="/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf">/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf</a> ))      | (3, 4) | All Year                          | 21 in      | 10 fish                                                                                                   |
| Dab (plaice)                                                                                                                                                    | (3, 4) | All Year                          | 14 in      | no limit                                                                                                  |
| Fluke                                                                                                                                                           |        | May 23 - Oct 9                    | 17 in      | 5 fish                                                                                                    |
| Gray sole                                                                                                                                                       | (3, 4) | All Year                          | 14 in      | no limit                                                                                                  |
| Haddock*<br>( <a href="#">North of Cape Cod</a><br>( <a href="/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf">/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf</a> )) | (3, 4) | Jan 1 - Feb 28<br>Apr 15 - Dec 31 | 17 in      | 15 fish                                                                                                   |
| Haddock<br>( <a href="#">South of Cape Cod</a><br>( <a href="/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf">/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf</a> ))  | (3, 4) | All Year                          | 18 in      | no limit                                                                                                  |
| Halibut                                                                                                                                                         | (3, 4) | All Year                          | 41 in      | 1 fish                                                                                                    |
| Monkfish                                                                                                                                                        | (3, 4) | All Year                          | no limit   | no limit                                                                                                  |
| Ocean pout                                                                                                                                                      | (3, 4) | <b>Closed</b>                     | <b>N/A</b> | <b>Prohibited</b>                                                                                         |
| Pollock                                                                                                                                                         | (3, 4) | All Year                          | no limit   | no limit                                                                                                  |
| Redfish                                                                                                                                                         | (3, 4) | All Year                          | no limit   | no limit                                                                                                  |

| Species        | Note | Season          | Size Limit           | Possession Limit                                                                      |
|----------------|------|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| River herring  |      | Closed          | N/A                  | Prohibited                                                                            |
| Scup, Private  | (6)  | All Year        | 9 in                 | 30 fish per angler. Not to exceed 150 fish per vessel with 5 or more anglers onboard. |
| Scup, For-Hire | (6)  | Jan 1 - Apr 30  | 9 in                 | 30 fish                                                                               |
|                |      | May 1 - Jun 30  | 9 in                 | 50 fish                                                                               |
|                |      | Jul 1 - Dec 31  | 9 in                 | 30 fish                                                                               |
| Smelt          |      | Jun 16 - Mar 14 | no limit             | 50 fish                                                                               |
| Spiny dogfish  |      | All Year        | no limit             | no limit                                                                              |
| Striped bass*  | (5)  | All Year        | 28" to less than 35" | 1 fish                                                                                |
| Tautog         | (7)  | Jan 1 - Mar 31  | N/A                  | prohibited                                                                            |
|                |      | Apr 1 - May 31  | 16 in                | 3 fish                                                                                |
|                |      | Jun 1 - Jul 31  | 16 in                | 1 fish                                                                                |
|                |      | Aug 1 - Oct 14  | 16 in                | 3 fish                                                                                |
|                |      | Oct 15 - Dec 31 | 16 in                | 5 fish                                                                                |
| Weakfish       |      | All Year        | 16 in                | 1 fish                                                                                |
| White perch    |      | All Year        | 8 in                 | 25 fish                                                                               |

| Species                                                                                                                                                                           | Note   | Season            | Size Limit | Possession Limit |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------------------|------------|------------------|
| Windowpane                                                                                                                                                                        | (3, 4) | <b>prohibited</b> | N/A        | N/A              |
| Winter flounder<br>( <a href="#">North of Cape Cod</a><br>( <a href="/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf">/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf</a> ))            | (3, 4) | All Year          | 12 in      | 8 fish           |
| Winter flounder<br>( <a href="#">South &amp; East of Cape Cod</a><br>( <a href="/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf">/files/2017-08/winter-flounder-rec-map_0.pdf</a> )) | (3, 4) | Mar 1 -<br>Dec 31 | 12 in      | 2 fish           |
| Wolffish                                                                                                                                                                          | (3, 4) | <b>prohibited</b> | N/A        | N/A              |
| Yellowtail flounder                                                                                                                                                               | (3, 4) | All Year          | 13 in      | no limit         |

\*Recreational fishing limits for Gulf of Maine cod and haddock and rules governing the use of circle hooks when fishing for striped bass may change for 2021. DMF is currently seeking public comment on proposals (see [Public Hearing Notice](#) (</doc/020421-public-hearing-notice-on-recreational-fishing-measures/download>)). Final rules will be implemented for April 2021.

Tunas, billfish, and swordfish are managed by [NOAA's Highly Migratory Species](#) (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species#overview>) Office. Please consult NOAA Fisheries for permitting requirements and regulations.

**1) 0** Subject to regulation by the Division and the municipality. Please consult municipal regulations.

**2) 0** 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) 0** Federal rules apply beyond state waters. Consult NOAA Fisheries for [regulations](#) (<https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/recfishing/regs/index.html>). Regulatory changes pending for Fishing Year 2021 (May 1 2021 - April 30, 2022).

**4) 0** It is unlawful to fish with hook and line gear in the Winter Cod Conservation Closure from November 15 through January 31. It is unlawful to take cod from the Summer Cod Conservation Closure from April 16 through July 21. See maps in [322 CMR 8.07](#) (</regulations/322-CMR-800-coastal-fisheries-conservation-and-management>) for more details.

**5) 0** 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. All recreational

anglers fishing from shore or a private vessel are required to use inline circle hooks when fishing for striped bass with whole or cut natural baits, except when fishing with a natural bait attached to an artificial lure that is designed to be cast and retrieved, trolled, or jigged. All recreational anglers are required to use non-lethal devices to remove striped bass from the water; gaffing striped bass is prohibited. New rules for using circle hooks when fishing with natural bait may go into effect for 2021.

[6 \(j\)](#) 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.

7) When the tautog fishery is open, private anglers are subject to 10-fish maximum tautog limit for the vessel. The most restrictive limit of the per angler bag limit or per vessel maximum limit applies.

## Additional Resources

### MA Recreational Groundfish Management Areas

(<https://www.mass.gov/doc/ma-recreational-groundfish-management-areas/download>) (PDF 1.03 MB)

## 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 |
| 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                               | 78 in                          | included in total shark bag limit               |
| Shortfin Mako                                  | 83 in (female)<br>71 in (male) | included in total shark bag limit               |

Federal regulations may differ. Please consult [NOAA's Highly Migratory Species](#)

(<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species#overview>) Office.

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 (1), 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

Circle Requirement

Recreational fishermen shall use circle hooks as the terminal tackle except when fishing with flies or artificial lures. Circle hooks are required for any line that is targeting sharks by the angler on a line-to-line basis. Unless caught using flies or artificial lures, any shark caught on any hook other than a circle hook shall be released.

Restrictions on Certain Shark Species When Possessing Tunas, Billfish or Swordfish

Recreational fishermen shall not possess oceanic whitetip sharks, great hammerhead sharks, scalloped hammerhead sharks or smooth hammerhead sharks if in possession of tunas, billfish or swordfish. Porbeagle sharks caught alive shall be released by recreational fishermen if tunas, billfish or swordfish are to be retained, possessed or landed.

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                                                                         |
| Buoy Line Rules               | Buoy lines may not be positively buoyant except in bottom 1/3 of buoy line.<br>Buoy lines may not exceed a maximum diameter of 5/16"                              |

A 600 pound weak link is to be inserted into the buoy line at the buoy (see [NOAA Guide \(https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/all\\_supplements\\_2018\\_alwtrp.pdf\)](https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/all_supplements_2018_alwtrp.pdf)).

Buoy lines to be marked with 4 inch red mark midway up line.

|               |                                                                                                                      |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bag limit     | 15 lobsters per day                                                                                                  |
| Closed Season | November 1 - May 15. All buoyed gear must be removed from the water by November 1 and may not be reset until May 16. |

### Outer Cape Cod Recreational Lobster Area

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Minimum carapace size         | 3 3/8 in                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Maximum carapace size         | none                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 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                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Buoy Line Rules               | Buoy lines may not be positively buoyant except in bottom 1/3 of buoy line.<br>Buoy lines may not exceed a maximum diameter of 5/16"<br>A 600 pound weak link is to be inserted into the buoy line at the buoy (see <a href="https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/all_supplements_2018_alwtrp.pdf">NOAA Guide (https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/all_supplements_2018_alwtrp.pdf)</a> ). |
| Bag limit                     | 15 lobsters per day                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Closed Season                 | November 1 - May 15. All buoyed gear must be removed from the water by November 1 and may not be reset until May 16.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

### 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                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Buoy Line Rules               | <p>Buoy lines may not be positively buoyant except in bottom 1/3 of buoy line.</p> <p>Buoy lines may not exceed a maximum diameter of 5/16"</p> <p>A 600 pound weak link is to be inserted into the buoy line at the buoy (see <a href="https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/all_supplements_2018_alwtrp.pdf">NOAA Guide (https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/all_supplements_2018_alwtrp.pdf)</a>).</p> <p>Buoy lines are to be marked with a 4 inch red mark midway up line.</p> |
| 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                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Closed Season                 | November 1 - May 15. All buoyed gear must be removed from the water by November 1 and may not be reset until May 16.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

## Additional Resources

[Learn the basics of recreational lobster fishing \(/service-details/learn-about-recreational-lobster-harvest\)](/service-details/learn-about-recreational-lobster-harvest)

## Recreational crab regulations

| Species            | Minimum size                      | Other regulations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Blue crab*         | 5 in shell width (spine to spine) | Egg-bearers cannot be taken. Limit of 25 crabs/day. No permit required unless using traps or SCUBA. Closed season on harvest is January 01–April 30, inclusive. Closed season on trap gear is November 1 - May 15, inclusive.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Other edible crabs | none                              | 50 crabs total per day (including up to 25 blue)—other regulations are the same as for blue crab. Closed season on harvest is January 01–April 30, inclusive. Closed season on trap gear is November 1 - May 15, inclusive.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Invasive crabs     | N/A                               | 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 <a href="mailto:kerry.allard@state.ma.us">kerry.allard@state.ma.us</a> ( <a href="mailto:kerry.allard@state.ma.us">mailto:kerry.allard@state.ma.us</a> ). Closed season on harvest is January 01–April 30, inclusive. Closed season on trap gear is November 1 - May 15, inclusive. |

\* DMF has proposed to prohibit the taking of blue crabs by trap gear. DMF is currently seeking public comment on this proposal (see [Public Hearing Notice](#))



([/doc/020421-public-hearing-notice-on-recreational-fishing-measures/download](#))). Final rules will be implemented for April 2021.

Any traps set for the taking of crabs must adhere to the recreational lobster trap limits and gear requirements specified in the above recreational lobster regulations section.

## Recreational shellfish regulations

| Species        | Minimum Size             | Other Restrictions                                             |
|----------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bay scallops   | well defined growth ring | Closed Apr 01 - Oct 01, consult town regulations               |
| Conch          | N/A                      | 15 mixed whelk limit; consult town regulations                 |
| Oyster         | 3 in shell diameter      | consult town regulations                                       |
| 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** (<https://www.mass.gov/doc/how-to-measure-shellfish/download>) (PDF 207.25 KB)

## 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](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/recreational-fishing/recreational-fishing-regulations-species) (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/recreational-fishing/recreational-fishing-regulations-species>). 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 with the tail extremity. For fish with forked tails, the upper and lower fork may be squeezed together to measure the tail extremity.

**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 in fork length, which is the straight line measurement of a fish from the midpoint of the anterior edge of the fish to the fork of the caudal fin and not made along the curve of the body.

**Striped Bass** are measured in total length, which is the greatest straight line from the anterior most tip of the jaw or snout to the farthest extremity of the tail with the forks squeezed together.

**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

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### CONTACT

#### Division of Marine Fisheries - Boston Office

##### Address

251 Causeway Street, Suite 400, Boston, MA 02114

**Directions** (<https://maps.google.com/?q=251+Causeway+Street%2C+Suite+400%2C+Boston%2C+MA+02114>)

##### Phone

Main (617) 626-1520 (tel:6176261520)

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**322 CMR** (</law-library/322-cmr>)