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Department of Fish and Game

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Division of Marine Fisheries

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Recreational Regulations

This page is intended as a general summary of Massachusetts marine recreational fishing regulations. Please refer to the [full text regulations \(322 CMR\)](#), for the complete details.

Recreational Regulations

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Last Updated:
April 29, 2011

Recreational Finfish Regulations as of April 21, 2011

Species	Season	Size Limit	Possession Limit
American Eel (1)	All Year	6 in	50 fish
Black Sea Bass (2)	May 22 - Oct 11	14 in	10 fish
Blue Marlin (6)	All Year	86 in	1 fish
Bluefish	All Year	No Limit	10 fish
Cod (North of Cape Cod) Spring Cod Conservation Zone	Apr 16 - Jul 21		Closed

https://web.archive.org/web/20110603144511/http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dmf/recreationalfishing/rec_index.htm

1/4

Winter Cod Conservation Zone	Nov 15 - Jan 31		Closed
All Other Areas in State Waters	Apr 01 - Oct 31	24 in	10 fish
All Other Areas in State Waters	Nov 01 - Mar 31	24 in	2 fish / person (75 lb / boat)
Cod (South & East of Cape Cod)	All Year	22 in	10 fish
Dab (Plaice)	All Year	14 in	No Limit
Fluke	May 22 - Sept 30	17.5 in	5 fish
Gray Sole (Witch)	All Year	14 in	No Limit
Haddock (7)	All Year	18 in	No Limit
Halibut	All Year	36 in	1 fish
Monkfish	All Year	17 in	No Limit
Pollock	All Year	No Limit	No Limit
Redfish	All Year	9 in	No Limit
River Herring (5)	<i>Harvest, possession, sale and use are prohibited</i>		
Sailfish (6)	All Year	57 in	1 fish
Scup (3)			
Private	May 24 - Sep 26	10.5 in	10 fish
For-Hire (Bonus)	May 15 - Jun 18	11 in	40 fish
For-Hire (Regular Season)	Jun 19 - Sep 17	11 in	10 fish
Shad	All Year	No Limit	6 fish
Sharks (excludes spiny dogfish)	refer to shark section		
Smelt	Jun 16 - Mar 14	No Limit	50 fish
Spiny Dogfish	All Year	No Limit	No Limit
Striped Bass (4)	All Year	28 in	2 fish
Tautog	All Year	16 in	3 fish
Tunas	<i>Federal rules apply. Consult NOAA Fisheries</i>		
Weakfish	All Year	16 in	1 fish
White Marlin (6)	All Year	62 in	1 fish
White Perch	All Year	8 in	25 fish
Windowpane	All Year	12 in	No Limit
Winter Flounder North of Cape Cod	Nov 1 - Aug 31	12 in	8 fish
Winter Flounder South & East of Cape Cod	Apr 23 - May 22	12 in	2 fish
	Sep 24 - Oct 23	12 in	2 fish
Yellowtail Flounder	All Year	13 in	No Limit

Notes:

- 1) Subject to regulation by the Division and local community. Consult local 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) Maximum 50 scup per private vessel. Party/charter vessel patrons: 11" size limit, 40 fish May 15 - Jun 18, 10 fish Jun 19 - Sep 17.
- 4) Striped bass must be kept whole, with head, tail and body intact - no mutilation permitted (other than evisceration). The discard of dead, legal size striped bass is prohibited. To prohibit the practice of high-grading, recreational fishermen may not retain legal-sized striped bass and release said fish in favor of another larger legal-sized striped bass captured subsequently. It shall be unlawful to keep striped bass alive in the water by attaching a line or chain to the fish or placing the fish in a live well or holding car. Striped bass are measured from the tip of the snout or jaw (mouth closed) to the farthest extremity of the tail. Note: Permitted party/charter vessel operators may fillet striped bass for their customers. See 322 CMR 6.07 (4)(g) for details.
- 5) It is unlawful for any person to harvest, possess or sell river herring in the Commonwealth or in the waters under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth. These measures will expire on January 1, 2012.

- 6) Billfish are measured from the tip of the lower jaw to the tail fork
- 7) Federal rules apply beyond state waters. consult [NOAA Fisheries](#).

[How to measure finfish](#)

Recreational Shark Regulations

Species	Minimum Size	Possession Limit
All Permitted Sharks (exceptions listed below)	54 inches	1 total per trip
Atlantic Sharpnose Shark	No min size	included in total shark bag limit + 1 additional
Bonnethead Shark	No min size	included in total shark bag limit + 1 additional
Smooth Dogfish	No min size	included in total shark bag limit + 1 additional
Blacknose Shark	No min size	included in total shark bag limit
Finetooth Shark	No min size	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 Scallop	well defined growth ring	Closed 4/1 - 10/1 consult town regulations
Conch	2 ¾" shell width	consult town regulations
Oyster	3" shell diameter	consult town regulations
Quahog	1" shell thickness	consult town regulations
Sea Scallop	3 ½" shell diameter	daily limit of 1 bushel in shell, or 4 quarts of shucked meats
Softshell Clam	2" shell diameter	consult town regulations
Surf Clam	5" shell diameter	consult town regulations

[How to measure shellfish](#)

Recreational Lobster and Crab Regulations

[Massachusetts Recreational Lobstering and Crabbing Guide](#) (1.2 Mb) **PDF**

How to Measure Your Catch

How to measure finfish

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 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.

How to Measure Lobster & Crab

[Massachusetts Recreational Lobstering and Crabbing Guide](#) (1.2 Mb) **PDF**

How to Measure Shellfish

Measurement rules vary by species



Shell Diameter

surf clam, softshell clam, sea scallop, oyster



Shell Thickness
quahogs



Shell Width
whelks

Sportfish Biologists

[Matt Ayer](#) - North Shore; Boston to Hull

[John Boardman](#) - South Shore and South Coast

[Paul Caruso](#) - Cape Cod and Islands

Environmental Law Enforcement

Hewitts Cove: (617) 727 - 0082

Radio Room: (617) 727 - 6398

North Coastal Bureau: (978) 283 - 7764

Toll Free Number: (800) 632 - 8075

Questions or comments
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