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Marine Fisheries Advisory

Public Scoping Meeting: Commercial Menhaden Management

DMF has scheduled a meeting to discuss its management of the Commonwealth's commercial menhaden fishery. The scoping meeting responds, in part, to a roughly 65% increase in the Massachusetts commercial menhaden quota for 2018, and DMF's interest in stakeholder feedback on how best to utilize the quota. It has also been five years since the fishery was first subject to a quota—and accompanying trip limits and permit requirements—providing an opportune time to review the fishery's performance and consider potential improvements. One particular issue of interest concerns the use of carrier vessels in the fishery. The meeting schedule is:

Thursday, February 15 at 6:30 PM
Thayer Public Library, Program Room
798 Washington Street
Braintree, MA 02184

State-by-state menhaden quotas were first implemented in 2013 under Amendment 2 to the interstate fishery management plan. Massachusetts's share was 0.84%. Based on the coastwide quotas in place between 2013 and 2017, this share equated to between 3.1 and 3.7 million pounds. Amendment 3 was recently approved, increasing Massachusetts' allocation to 1.27%. The coastwide quota was also increased 8% for 2018, providing for over 6 million pounds of quota in Massachusetts this coming fishing season.

Massachusetts' season opens January 1 although the fish don't generally arrive in local waters until May. Menhaden depart Massachusetts by the end of October. State regulations allow anyone with a commercial fishing permit to take 6,000 pounds per trip or day (whichever is longer) until the quota is harvested. Those with a limited entry menhaden permit endorsement have a 125,000-pound trip limit until 85% of the quota is taken, then a 25,000-pound trip limit until 95% of the quota is taken, followed by a 6,000-pound trip limit until the quota is harvested. The intent of these trip limits is to stretch out the season and provide for small-scale access throughout it. We've avoided a quota closure in all years under this system.

Purse seines are responsible for about 95% of menhaden landings in Massachusetts on average. The remaining 5% of state landings are attributed to cast nets, gill nets, and weirs generally. The vessels that contribute significantly to the Massachusetts fishery are few in number. Only 12 harvesters are authorized to fish purse seines in the state's inshore harbors and estuaries for menhaden, where the fish are most catchable. Cast nets and small bait nets (<250ft²) can also be used to take bait for personal use from within the inshore restricted waters without a special permit. A total of 61 limited entry permit endorsements (allowing harvest at the higher trip limits) were issued in 2016.

Following the meeting, DMF will consider the comments received and begin to draft any proposed regulatory changes, which would be subject to additional public hearings before implementation. For more information, please contact DMF at 617-626-1520.

www.mass.gov/marinefisheries