

**POSSIBLE CHANGES TO REGULATIONS
FISHING RESTRICTIONS FOR THE CHESAPEAKE BAY AND ITS TIDAL
TRIBUTARIES FROM MAY 16 THROUGH DECEMBER 15**

The department is considering changes to the recreational and charter boat summer and fall striped bass fishery. The changes will require the use of circle hooks while chumming or live-lining, regardless of the target species. There is a possibility that the regulation may limit the size of the “J” hook when you are using bait (fish, crabs, worms or processed bait).

The department, in cooperation with stakeholder groups, has completed a process with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission that will allow us to reduce the minimum size of striped bass for the recreational and charter boat summer and fall fishery in the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries from 20 inches to 19 inches. The department’s intention is to reduce dead discards of striped bass that occur throughout the summer/fall when anglers are chumming and live-lining. Therefore, the focus of this regulation will be on those two methods of fishing. The regulation would change the striped bass regulation by reducing the minimum size and shortening the season by five days. Non-offset circle hooks will be required from May 16 through December 15 when chumming or live-lining, regardless of which species is being targeted. Both chumming and live-lining will be defined. “J” hooks will be permitted as long as the angler is not engaged in one of these two fishing methods. In addition, the department may consider a size requirement for “J” hooks, similar to the early striped bass season, while using bait (fish, crabs, worms or processed bait).

Summary

On February 7, 2018, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission’s Atlantic Striped Bass Board approved a request from the State of Maryland to reduce the recreational striped bass minimum size limit from 20 inches to 19 inches from May 16 through December 15 this year. If the department decides to make this change, we are also required to implement a regulation to mandate the use of circle hooks when chumming and/or live-lining. Our proposal to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was presented as a ‘conservation equivalency’ plan, meaning that we expect the same overall fishing mortality (both kept/harvested fish and fish that die after being released – dead discards) to occur with the smaller size limit – but we anticipate less dead discards and more harvest in 2018. It has been proven that circle hooks reduce discard mortality. The configuration of the hook makes it less likely to fatally hook or ‘deep hook’ a fish when using bait compared with the standard ‘J’ hook. The Board approved the proposal and gave us permission to proceed with implementing these measures. The department is required to submit a follow up report to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission next year focused on compliance and enforcement of these new regulations.

Background

In 2015, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission required that all states implement management measures to reduce commercial and recreational striped bass harvest coastwide. This action was taken due to concerns about the size of the

adult/migratory female portion of the population. In Maryland, we increased our minimum size for recreational anglers from 18 to 20 inches. At the same time, the 2011 year class of striped bass in the Chesapeake Bay was just about to reach an 18-20 inch size. Because of this, we expected to see a large number of sublegal fish caught and released that first year. As expected, our estimated number of released fish increased in 2015 and this trend continued in 2016 and 2017. Concerned recreational anglers reported to the department that large numbers of sublegal fish caught and released were dying as a result of a combination of factors including high water temperatures and ‘deep hooking’ while chumming and live-lining. In the summer of 2017, the department held a meeting with stakeholders to talk about their concerns. Stakeholder groups represented included the Coastal Conservation Association, Maryland Charter Boat Association, Maryland Watermen’s Association, Maryland Sportsmen’s Foundation, and the Delmarva Fisheries Association. Concerns over the number of dead discards were raised and the department committed to working with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to develop a plan to address the issue. The department considered a number of management alternatives to address the issue and presented options to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Technical Committee for approval. Based on feedback we received from the groups mentioned above we decided to present the 19 inch/circle hook option to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission for approval.

Specific Requirements

All measures apply to recreational fishing.

Dates: May 16 through December 15

Minimum size of striped bass: 19 inches

Method of Fishing:

- You must use non-offset circle hooks when chumming or live-lining. Non-offset circle hooks must be used whenever these methods are used, not just when fishing for striped bass.
- ‘J’ Hooks will be permitted as long as the angler is not engaged in chumming or live-lining. There is a possibility that the regulation may limit the size of the “J” hook when you are using bait (fish, crabs, worms or processed bait).

Possible Definitions:

- “Chumming” means placing fish, parts of fish or other natural or manmade attractants upon which fish might feed, in the water, not attached to a hook, for the purpose of attracting fish to a particular area so that they might be caught.
- “Live-lining” means using a live finfish (e.g. minnows, spot, eels, perch) on a hook for the purpose of catching other fish with:
 - a) Hook and line;
 - b) Rod and reel; or
 - c) Handlines.