

NOTICE OF AGENCY RULE-MAKING ADOPTION

AGENCY: Department of Marine Resources

CHAPTER NUMBER AND TITLE: Chapter 34.07 Atlantic Halibut Emergency Regulation.

CONCISE SUMMARY:

The Department is taking emergency rulemaking action to implement a clarification that it is illegal to possess Atlantic Halibut when operating seaward of Maine's territorial waters. In January 2017, the New England Fishery Management Council passed a motion to ask the United States Coast Guard and states operating under a Joint Enforcement Agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that enforcement of the three nautical mile limit be a high priority during the Atlantic halibut season in Maine. This motion was passed based on concerns that state waters-only license holders are targeting Atlantic halibut outside of Maine's territorial waters, resulting in increased catch rates. Based on State landing reports, the State waters fishery from 2010-2014 has historically caught an average of 65 percent of the sub-Annual Catch Limit and in fishing year 2015 (May 1, 2015-April 30, 2016), caught 101 percent. It is anticipated that 2016 landings may be even higher. This rule clarifies that fishermen targeting halibut with State commercial tags may not possess Atlantic halibut outside of Maine's territorial waters. This action is intended to protect and conserve the halibut resource from unusual damage and imminent depletion. For these reasons, the Commissioner has determined that it is necessary to take emergency action under 12 MRS 6171 (3)(A).

EFFECTIVE DATE: April 30, 2017

AGENCY CONTACT PERSON:	Trisha Cheney (207-624-6554)
AGENCY NAME:	Department of Marine Resources
ADDRESS:	State House Station 21
	Augusta, Maine 04333-0021
WEB SITE:	http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rulemaking/
E-MAIL:	Trisha.Cheney@maine.gov
FAX:	(207) 624-6024
TTY:	(888) 577-6690 (Deaf/Hard of Hearing)

Chapter 34 Groundfish

34.07 Atlantic Halibut (*Hippoglossus hippoglossus*)

A. Season for Maine's Territorial Waters.

The open season to fish for Atlantic Halibut in Maine's territorial waters shall begin at sunrise May 1st and end at sunset June 30th.

B. License Requirements.

1. Commercial Halibut fishermen must obtain an Atlantic Halibut endorsement on their Department of Marine Resources (DMR) Commercial Fishing License. Commercial Fishing license holders must declare the vessel at the time of license issuance or renewal, to which that license holder's tags will be allocated pursuant to the endorsement. The license holder may only fish for halibut from the vessel that was declared at the time of license issuance or renewal and to which that license holders' tags were allocated.
2. Recreational fishermen are not required to obtain a commercial license and endorsement to fish for Atlantic Halibut but must declare a vessel for which their recreational landings tags will be assigned.

C. Size Limit.

1. It shall be illegal to land, sell, or possess any Atlantic Halibut which measures less than 41 inches in total length or for a fish with the head removed, 32 inches in pectoral length. Except for removing the fish's head, Atlantic Halibut must remain intact until reaching the point of sale at a dealer facility or at the consumer's property.
2. Atlantic Halibut caught at sea which measure less than the minimum legal size, may be tagged with DMR issued research tags and then immediately released.
3. Atlantic Halibut raised by means of aquaculture shall be exempted from the size limit if accompanied by proper documentation identifying the origin of the fish and verification that the fish are an aquaculture product.

D. Prohibitions.

1. It shall be illegal to possess or land marine species other than Atlantic Halibut while fishing for Atlantic Halibut aboard commercial vessels in Maine's territorial waters. Other marine species caught while fishing for Atlantic Halibut shall be immediately liberated.
2. It shall be unlawful to transfer Atlantic Halibut between vessels.
3. It shall be illegal to fish for Atlantic Halibut in Maine's territorial waters by any method other than using size 14/0, 15/0 or 16/0 circle hooks.
4. No vessel may fish for Atlantic Halibut using more than 450 circle hooks.
5. Recreational fishermen or commercial fishing license holders without the halibut endorsement may Halibut fish, for personal use, using a tub-trawl and are limited to 100 hooks in total.
6. No individual may possess more than one type of landing tag per year. In addition, it shall be illegal for more than one type of landing tag to be assigned to any one vessel. The full allotment of landing tags will be issued to individuals one time per year.
7. It shall be illegal to possess a Halibut tag on a vessel that the tag is not registered to.
8. For vessels which have been assigned State commercial landings tags for Atlantic Halibut, it shall be illegal to possess Atlantic Halibut when operating seaward of Maine's territorial waters.

E. Halibut Gear Marking Requirements

1. All persons fishing for Atlantic Halibut with an endorsement issued in accordance with Chapter 34.07 B-1 must have marking buoys on each end of the trawl clearly labeled with their name and Maine Commercial Fishing license number.
2. All persons recreationally tub trawling for Atlantic Halibut must mark the trawl buoys with their name and the words "Halibut Trawl" or other DMR specified marking.

F. Total Allowable Catch

1. Commercial, party, or charter vessels may land no more than 25 Atlantic Halibut per year.
2. Recreational vessels may land no more than 5 Atlantic Halibut per year.

G. Tagging Requirements.

1. All legal size Atlantic Halibut caught in Maine's coastal waters and intended to be retained by a Commercial Fishing license holder or recreational fisherman shall be immediately tagged with a landing tag approved by the Department of Marine Resources (DMR). Landing tags shall be attached in a manner for which the tag was designed tightly around or through the tail just before the tail fin.
2. Landings tags must remain on the fish until the fish has reached its final destination as a legal-sized fish that is not offered or intended for sale, trade, or barter by a recreational fisherman or prior to retail sale by a Commercial Fishing license holder or Wholesale Seafood Dealer. It is illegal to possess Atlantic Halibut which are not properly tagged. Any person in possession of Atlantic Halibut without a DMR landings tag shall not be in violation of this Chapter if that person is in possession of a bill of lading showing the Atlantic Halibut were lawfully obtained from an origin outside the State of Maine or identified in accordance with the exception for Atlantic Halibut raised by means of aquaculture in Chapter 34.07 C-3. The absence of a bill of lading shall be prima facie evidence that the Atlantic Halibut were landed in Maine i.e., not shipped into Maine.
3. No individual or vessel will be issued more than 25 landing tags per (calendar) year except that commercial fishing license holders who also hold a Federal Multispecies Permit shall be exempted from the individual tag limit provided that no one federally permitted vessel is assigned more than 25 landing tags per year.
4. Three types of landing tags may be issued:
 - (a) State Commercial tags will be issued to endorsement holders without a Federal permit fishing in Maine's territorial waters.
 - (b) Federal Commercial tags will be issued to endorsement holders who possess a Federal multispecies permit authorizing access to Federal waters.
 - (c) Recreational tags will be issued to party/charter or recreational vessels which fish in either Federal or territorial waters.

H. Observers.

When fishing for Atlantic Halibut, all commercial, recreational, party and charter boat vessels must accept observers aboard their vessels upon request from the DMR or National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

I. Sampling.

Atlantic Halibut fishers may be requested to preserve stomach, gonad, otolith, scale or other biological samples for analyses by DMR and NMFS scientists. Any training necessary for compliance with such a request would be provided by DMR and/or NMFS personal.

J. Reporting: See Chapter 8.20(F) Landings Program.

Basis Statement

Chapter 34 Atlantic Halibut Emergency Regulation

Justification:

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