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2021 Compliance Guide for Maine State Waters Halibut Fishery Regulations

The document was developed as an alternative to the mandatory training class for first time commercial fishermen to receive their halibut endorsement; and as a as a general guide for all state waters-only fishermen to understand and comply with the Maine Department of Marine Resources Atlantic halibut regulations.

Please note that **this summary applies to fishing activity occurring in Maine territorial waters¹ only** and does not address any vessel with a federal permit (for lobster or Northeast Multispecies, etc.). **Please refer to NOAA Fisheries for additional information about fishing for halibut if you hold a federal permit or are fishing for halibut in federal waters** at NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office Sustainable Fisheries Division (978) 281-9315.

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For questions or more information contact your local Marine Patrol officer, or Megan Ware at megan.ware@maine.gov or (207) 446-0932, or refer to [DMR Chapter 34: Groundfish](#) and [Chapter 8: Landings Program](#), section 8.20F

¹ Territorial waters" means all waters of the State within the rise and fall of the tide seaward to the 3-nautical-mile line.

Recreational (Non-Party/Charter) Fishermen:

Season

- Open May 18 – June 13 inclusive
- Closed June 14 – May 17 inclusive

License

- Recreational fishermen are required to register in the Saltwater Recreational Fishing Registry. The online registry can be accessed at: <http://www.maine.gov/dmr/commercial-fishing/licenses/index.html>

Tagging Requirement and Annual Landing Limits

- Atlantic halibut must be immediately tagged with a Maine State Recreational tag or be released. Tags must remain attached through arrival at the fish's final destination.
- 2021 recreational halibut tags are light blue with a green plug.
- Recreational halibut tag applications can be downloaded at: <http://www.maine.gov/dmr/commercial-fishing/licenses/index.html>
- Anglers may be issued up to 5 Atlantic halibut tags per year.
 - All tags must be assigned to one vessel.
 - Maximum of 5 Atlantic halibut may be landed per vessel per year.
 - A person who has not been issued Atlantic halibut tags may land an Atlantic halibut using tags issued to another person, when aboard the vessel that the tags are assigned to.
- Individuals may possess only one type of landing tag (recreational or commercial) per year. Only one type of landing tag (recreational or commercial) may be assigned to any one vessel per year.

Minimum Size Limit

- Head on: 41"
- Head off: 32" (Measurement made from the base of the pectoral fin where it joins the fish's body to the tip of the tail).
- Filleting at sea is prohibited. Halibut may not be dressed or processed at sea in a manner that inhibits Marine Patrol's ability to determine compliance with the head off measurement as specified above.

Gear and Handling Requirements

- Must use size 14/0, 15/0, or 16/0 circle hooks only.
- Maximum of 100 hooks per angler.
- Tub trawls are legal and anglers must mark the trawl buoys with their name and the words "tub trawl".
- Atlantic halibut may not be transferred between vessels.

Party/Charter Vessel Operators

Season

- Open May 18 – June 13 inclusive
- Closed June 14 – May 17 inclusive

License

- Party/charter vessel operators are required to obtain a Recreational Saltwater Fishing Operators License and register in the Saltwater Recreational Fishing Registry. The Operator's License can be downloaded and the online registry can be accessed at:
<http://www.maine.gov/dmr/commercial-fishing/licenses/index.html>

Tagging Requirement and Annual Landing Limits

- Atlantic halibut must be immediately tagged with a Maine State Recreational tag or be released immediately. Tags must remain attached through arrival at the fish's final destination.
- 2021 recreational halibut tags are light blue with a green plug.
- Recreational halibut tag applications can be downloaded at:
<http://www.maine.gov/dmr/commercial-fishing/licenses/index.html>
- Party/charter vessel operators may be issued a maximum of 25 halibut tags per year.
- Party/charter vessels may land a maximum of 25 halibut per year.
- Individuals may possess only one type of landing tag (recreational or commercial) per year. Only one type of landing tag (recreational or commercial) may be assigned to any one vessel per year.

Minimum Size Limit

- Head on is 41"
- Head off is 32" (Measurement made from the base of the pectoral fin where it joins the fish's body to the tip of the tail).
 - Exception: Legal size halibut may be fileted at sea under the following conditions:
 - Fillets must come from a legal sized Atlantic Halibut;
 - Fillets must remain whole with skin left on;
 - Halibut carcasses must be tagged and retained until the boat has been landed;
 - Fillets must fit with the Atlantic Halibut carcass.

Gear and Handling Requirements

- Must use size 14/0, 15/0, or 16/0 circle hooks only.
- Maximum of 100 hooks per angler.
- Tub trawls are legal and anglers must mark the trawl buoys with their name and the words "tub trawl".
- Atlantic halibut may not be transferred between vessels.

Maine State Waters-Only Commercial Fishermen Without a Federal Groundfish or Federal Lobster Permit

Season

- Open May 18 – June 13 inclusive
- Closed June 14 – May 17 inclusive

License Requirement

- DMR Commercial Fishing License with Atlantic halibut endorsement. Application can be downloaded at: <http://www.maine.gov/dmr/commercial-fishing/licenses/index.html> or by contacting licensing at (207) 624-6550.
- Commercial tags can be requested on the Commercial Harvesting License application or by contacting licensing.

Tagging Requirement and Annual Landing Limits

- Commercial fishermen must immediately tag Atlantic halibut with a Maine State Commercial tag or release them immediately. Landing tags must be attached tightly around or through the tail just before the tail fin and must remain attached to the fish until it has reached its final destination.
- It is illegal to possess a halibut seaward of Maine's territorial waters that is tagged with Maine State Commercial tags.
- 2021 commercial halibut tags are lime green with a red plug.
- Commercial fishermen are allowed a maximum of 25 tags per year.
 - All tags must be declared to one vessel.
 - Vessels may land a maximum of 25 Atlantic halibut per year.
- It is illegal for more than one type (recreational or commercial) of landing tag to be assigned to any one vessel per year.
- No individual may possess more than one type of landing tag per year.

Gear and Handling Requirements

- Must use size 14/0, 15/0, or 16/0 circle hooks.
- No vessel may fish using more than 250 circle hooks.
- With the exception of lobster, it is illegal to possess or land other marine species while fishing for Atlantic halibut aboard commercial vessels in Maine's territorial waters.
- Lobster must be harvested in accordance with [DMR Chapter 25](#).
- When fishing with a tub trawl, must have marking buoys on each end of trawl clearly labeled with your name and Maine Commercial Fishing License number.
- Atlantic halibut may not be transferred between vessels.

Minimum Size Restrictions

- Head on is 41"
- Head off is 32" (Measurement made from the base of the pectoral fin where it joins the fish's body to the tip of the tail).
- Filleting at sea is prohibited. Halibut may not be dressed or processed at sea in a manner that inhibits Marine Patrol's ability to determine compliance with the head off measurement as specified above.

Reporting

- Any harvester with a halibut endorsement is required to maintain a log of trip level catch and effort information and submit it to the DMR Landings Program each month of the halibut season. Contact the landings program at (207) 633-9560 to obtain logbooks.

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: Can I still get commercial halibut tags even if I did not request them when I applied for my Commercial Fishing License application?

Answer: Yes. You can request commercial halibut tags at any time. Tags can be requested on the Commercial Harvesting License application. However, your license will need to accompany your application and be returned to DMR as you will be issued a new license with the Halibut Endorsement on it.

Question: Does the Department require a training course to catch Atlantic halibut commercially?

Answer: No. The training course is no longer required.

Question: How much do tags cost?

Answer: \$1.00 each for recreational and commercial tags.

Question: What is the difference between Maine regulations for commercial vessels with and without a Federal Multispecies (groundfish) Permit?

Answer: Individuals without a federal groundfish permit may land up to 25 Atlantic halibut per year with one vessel. Federal groundfish permit holders may land up to 25 halibut per year for each vessel that has been assigned a groundfish permit. Additional regulations apply to federal groundfish permit holders when fishing in both federal waters and Maine territorial waters. Please contact National Marine Fisheries Service's Sustainable Fisheries Division for additional information.

Question: If I hold a federal groundfish permit, I am limited to one halibut per trip. Do I still have to apply for a DMR landing tag?

Answer: Yes, all halibut landed in Maine must have a DMR landing tag.

Question: May I transit Federal waters while in possession of Halibut caught in State waters?

Answer: Harvesters must possess a Federal permit to possess Halibut while in Federal waters regardless of where the fish were caught.

Question: Do the groundfish spawning closures in territorial waters apply to halibut?

Answer: No. Halibut are exempt from the groundfish spawning closure. All of Maine's territorial waters are open to halibut fishing during the open season May 18 – June 13 (inclusive).

Question: Can I set a "gangion" off one of my lobster traps to fish for halibut?

Answer: Yes, as long as the hooks are 14/0, 15/0 or 16/0 circle hooks.

Question: If I do not fish, do I have to turn in a landings report?

Answer: Yes, you must submit a landings report for each of the two months of Maine's Atlantic halibut season (twice per season) regardless of your fishing activity. If you do not fish, you should check the "did not fish" box on the landings report.

Question: What would I record for my sea time if I haul halibut trawls and lobster traps on the same trip?

Answer: Estimate the time that it took you to haul your halibut trawls and steam time. Do not record the time it took you to haul your lobster gear.

Additional Contact Information

If you have questions about Maine's Atlantic halibut fishery, please contact the following departments or individuals:

Reporting requirements: Alice Mayberry, DMR Landings Program, W. Boothbay Harbor, (207) 633-9560.

Research questions: Bill DeVoe, Scientist, W. Boothbay Harbor, (207) 592-7084,
William.DeVoe@maine.gov

Management questions: Megan Ware, Augusta, (207) 446-0932, Megan.Ware@maine.gov

Licensing questions: DMR's Licensing Division, Augusta, (207) 624-6550

*Currently, due to Covid-19 the Licensing office is closed, but please call and leave a message. Staff are frequently checking messages and will return your call as soon as possible. The fastest way to obtain an endorsement and tags is to go online. There is also a secure drop box at the Augusta office which is checked regularly where individuals can drop off their application and payment. Paper applications are accepted by mail; however, these take a little longer to process.

Questions concerning enforcement:

Marine Patrol

Division I (NH border to Belfast) (207) 633-9595;

Division II (Stockton Springs/Searsport to the Canadian border) (207) 664-2392.

Questions about regulations in federal waters: NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, Sustainable Fisheries Division (978) 281-9315