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04333-0021

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2023 Compliance Guide for Maine State Waters Halibut Fishery Regulations

The document was developed as an alternative to the mandatory training class for first time halibut fishermen; 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.** The NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office Sustainable Fisheries Division can be reached at (978) 281-9315.

Information for each sector is located on the following pages:

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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. Regulations related to halibut can be found in [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

- Unless eligible for an exemption, recreational fishermen are required to register in the Saltwater Recreational Fishing Registry. The online registry can be accessed at: [Saltwater Recreational Fishing Registry and Other Licenses and Permits | Department of Marine Resources \(maine.gov\)](https://www.maine.gov/dmr/sites/maine.gov/dmr/files/docs/2020%20Halibut%20Recreational%20Tag%20Order%20Form.pdf)

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.
- 2023 recreational halibut tags are pink with a green plug.
- Recreational halibut tag applications can be downloaded at: <https://www.maine.gov/dmr/sites/maine.gov/dmr/files/docs/2020%20Halibut%20Recreational%20Tag%20Order%20Form.pdf>
- 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

- If a party/charter vessel operator intends to provide the saltwater registration information on behalf of their clients, they are required to obtain a Recreational Saltwater Fishing Operators License, and register in the Saltwater Recreational Fishing Registry, unless eligible for an exemption. The Operator's License can be accessed at <https://www.maine.gov/dmr/sites/maine.gov/dmr/files/inline-files/2023%20Saltwater%20Recreational%20Fishing%20Operator%20Application.pdf>

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.
- 2023 recreational halibut tags are pink with a green plug.
- Recreational halibut tag applications can be downloaded at <https://www.maine.gov/dmr/sites/maine.gov/dmr/files/docs/2020%20Halibut%20Recreational%20Tag%20Order%20Form.pdf>
- 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

- A DMR Halibut Fishing License is required to commercially fish for halibut. This license is new for the 2023 fishing year and replaces the halibut endorsement on the Commercial Fishing License. Those who previously purchased a Commercial Fishing License for the sole purpose of obtaining a halibut endorsement should now purchase the new Halibut Fishing License instead. The new Halibut Fishing License is open access, meaning there are no restrictions to obtain the license based on past participation or landings history. Application can be downloaded at: <https://www.maine.gov/dmr/fisheries/commercial/licenses> or by contacting licensing at (207) 624-6550, Option 2.
- Commercial tags can be requested on the Halibut Fishing License application. New for 2023 there are two tiers of tags which can be purchased: 10 halibut tags for \$10, or 25 halibut tags for \$100.

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.
- 2023 commercial halibut tags are yellow with a blue plug.
- Commercial fishermen are allowed a maximum of 25 tags per year.
 - All tags must be declared to one vessel.
 - A vessel may have only one license holder's tags assigned to that 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 Halibut 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 authorized to commercially fish for halibut is required to submit trip level catch reports on a weekly basis during the halibut season (May 18 – June 13) for landings from Maine’s territorial waters. Reporting must be submitted through an approved electronic method. Refer to DMR’s [Chapter 8 regulations](#) or contact the landings program at 207-633-9500 (Option 2 for Landings then Option 4 for electronic reporting options/help) with questions.
- Below is a calendar which outlines the requirements for weekly trip level reporting in the commercial halibut fishery for 2023. The state waters fishery runs from May 18 – June 13, inclusive. The reporting week starts Sunday at 12:01AM and ends Saturday at 12:00 midnight; reports must be submitted by the following Monday at midnight which is two days after the end of the reporting week. As a result, harvester reports will be due on five Mondays in 2023. These reports cover fishing activity in the previous week. For example, on May 22, trip level reports would be due covering May 18-20. On May 29, trip level reports would be due covering May 21-27.

MAY

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18 START	19	20
21	22 REPORT	23	24	25	26	27
28	29 REPORT	30	31			

JUNE

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5 REPORT	6	7	8	9	10
11	12 REPORT	13 END	14	15	16	17
18	19 REPORT	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: Can I purchase a Halibut Fishing License without purchasing tags?

Answer: No. When purchasing the Halibut Fishing License, you must purchase either 10 or 25 tags. Please note that if you purchase 10 tags at the time when you purchase your license, you may not purchase the additional 15 tags later in the same licensing year.

Question: I used to purchase the Commercial Fishing License only to get the halibut endorsement. Do I still need to purchase the Commercial Fishing License in addition to the new Halibut Fishing License?

Answer: If you purchased the Commercial Fishing License for the sole purpose of fishing for halibut, you do not need to purchase a Commercial Fishing License in 2023 and should instead purchase the Halibut Fishing License. As a reminder, the Halibut Fishing License replaces the Commercial Fishing License with the halibut endorsement. The Commercial Fishing License is required to commercially fish for any species not authorized under another license type; with the removal of halibut, the remaining endorsements on the Commercial Fishing License are periwinkle, whelk, and crab taken by otter trawl.

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 commercial tags cost?

Answer: There are two options for purchasing commercial tags: 1) purchase 10 tags for \$10 resulting in a cost per tag of \$1.00; 2) purchase 25 tags for \$100 resulting in a cost per tag of \$4.00.

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 land any halibut, do I have to turn in a landings report?

Answer: Yes, you must submit a landings report regardless of your fishing activity and, if no halibut were caught, complete a negative catch report.

Question: Those authorized to commercially fish for halibut must report electronically. What options do I have for electronic reporting?

Answer: Electronic reporting can be completed through DMR's harvester reporting app called VESL, or through LEEDS. A FAQ regarding halibut reporting, including how to report via VESL and LEEDS, can be found at: <https://www.maine.gov/dmr/fisheries/commercial/fisheries-by-species/halibut>

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: DMR Landings Program, W. Boothbay Harbor, 207-633-9500 (Option 2 for Landings then Option 4 for electronic reporting options/help)

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, Option 2. Lobby hours for licensing are Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 8 am to 4:30 pm. You may speak with anyone from licensing Monday – Friday 8 am to 4:30 pm. If you need to leave anything for licensing to review or process, there is a secure drop box in the entryway.

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