

GEAR — Hooks in Tidal Waters

What was proposed?

The Department proposed modifications to its rules for hook usage in tidal waters, specifically the requirement to use a circle hook while live-lining. “Live-lining” is defined as using a live finfish on a hook for the purpose of catching other fish with: (a) Hook and line; (b) Rod and reel; or (c) Handlines. This includes everything from using a live spot as bait for striped bass, to minnows as bait for yellow perch or Northern snakeheads, also known as Chesapeake Channa, to eels for cobia. The Department has required circle hooks while live-lining since 2019. The main intention of the rule was to minimize release mortality when targeting striped bass, but the rule was written broadly in order to ensure its enforceability by the Natural Resources Police. Over time, the Department has heard concerns from anglers regarding the ability to target certain species in traditional manners, such as using minnows to target perch in the spring. The proposed action modifies the hook rules to allow anglers to use either circle hooks or J hooks under the described circumstances.

The proposed action establishes an exemption to the requirement that a circle hook be used while live-lining when an angler is using a finfish species listed in the Department’s bait regulations codified at [COMAR 08.02.20.02](#). The benefit to this exemption is to consistently use the same list of species that a commercial bait harvester is allowed to harvest so the Department would not have different lists of “bait” in different places in regulation. These species are also not commonly used to target striped bass in the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries, so it is unlikely to result in increased release mortality on striped bass.

The proposed action also establishes an exemption to the requirement that a circle hook be used while live-lining when an angler is using a finfish, except spot and white perch, which measures 4 inches or less in length. Circle hooks will still be required if using spot or white perch for bait. The benefit of this exemption is that it lessens the amount of identification needed, while allowing a larger number of species to be used as bait while live-lining. By still requiring circle hooks to be used when using spot or white perch as bait (the most common species used when targeting striped bass), the Department maintains the majority of the protections for striped bass.

Why is this change necessary?

Adding these flexibilities is necessary to address concerns raised by various angler groups regarding the use and effectiveness of circle hooks when targeting species other than striped bass. The proposed action makes it clear that these new exceptions are in addition to current hook requirements when using certain types of bait, maintaining protections already in place.

Who will this affect?

Recreational and Charter anglers

Has this change been discussed with advisory bodies or other interested individuals?

- The idea was scoped with the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission and the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission at their meetings in July 2024.
- The idea was scoped with the general public July 29, 2024, through August 13, 2024.

Additional Information

“Circle hook” means a non-offset hook with the point turned perpendicularly back to the shank.

“J hook” means a hook having a point parallel to the hook shank.

“Live-lining” means using a live finfish on a hook for the purpose of catching other fish with:

- (a) Hook and line;
- (b) Rod and reel; or
- (c) Handlines.

Regulatory Process

- The Department followed our normal [procedures](#) as this concept moved forward.
- At the conclusion of the scoping process, the Department determined that the action is necessary and appropriate. The rules are being promulgated following the Administrative Procedures Act described in Title 10, Subtitle 1 of the State Government Article Annotated Code of Maryland.
- The General Assembly’s Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review Committee reviews the regulatory proposal for fiscal and legal analysis.
- The proposal was printed by the Division of State Documents in the Maryland Register on January 10, 2025.
- A 30 day public comment period began on the day of publication.
- After review of the comments, the Department adopted the changes.
- The final action was published in the Maryland Register on March 7, 2025.

Effective Date of Change

March 17, 2025