

SPANISH MACKEREL - Catch Limits and Public Notices

What is being considered?

The Department would like to modify Spanish mackerel regulations. Specifically, we are considering:

1. Implementing a commercial catch limit of 500 pounds per vessel per day or trip, whichever is longer, regardless of the number of licensees on board the vessel when the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries announces a closure of the northern fishery; and
2. Updating the public notice provision by changing the requirement to publish a notice in a daily newspaper of general circulation to posting the notice on the Fishing and Boating Services' website.

Why is this change necessary?

When commercial landings have reached the commercial quota for the Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel northern zone, NOAA Fisheries announces a closure of the Spanish mackerel northern fishery. The northern zone for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel includes federal waters from North Carolina through New York. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Spanish Mackerel (FMP) allows states to implement a bycatch in state waters. Since 2020, the Department has implemented a 500 pound commercial catch limit after NOAA Fisheries closes the northern fishery. This is not required by the ASMFC FMP. However, this limit is consistent with North Carolina, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, and Virginia. Implementing the bycatch is necessary to prevent the quota from being further exceeded, while allowing a minimal bycatch amount of Spanish mackerel to be landed to avoid dead discards.

Changing the requirement for publishing public notices issued to implement the ASMFC FMP from the newspaper to the Fishing and Boating Services website would allow the Department to make changes in a timely manner if future actions are taken by ASMFC. The public notice would continue to be disseminated through various other media (social media, email lists, publishing in the Maryland Register, etc.) so that an affected individual has a reasonable opportunity to be informed.

Who will this affect?

1. The change to the catch limit will affect anyone who commercially fishes for or catches Spanish mackerel anywhere in Maryland (Chesapeake Bay, tidal tributaries, and coastal waters).
2. The change to the public notice authority may potentially affect anyone who fishes for or catches Spanish mackerel anywhere in Maryland but does not have an immediate impact.

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

This idea was scoped with the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission (SFAC) and the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission (TFAC) at their meetings in January 2026.

Regulatory Process

Fishing rules in Maryland may be created by either the General Assembly or the Department. When the Department creates a fishing rule, it is called a regulation. When the General Assembly creates a rule, it is called a statute. The Department often has to create a regulation to implement a statute. The regulatory process begins with scoping and the Department follows normal [procedures](#) as concepts move forward.

During the scoping process, the Department gathers suggestions and ideas from stakeholders and others about how to solve a fishery problem or address a need. The goal of scoping is to identify issues, potential impacts, and reasonable alternatives associated with the issues so that management actions can be developed. After the public has had an opportunity to comment on possible management actions during the scoping process, the Department considers these comments and develops an appropriate management strategy.

When would this be effective?

The Department projects that this change could be effective in the fall of 2026. However, the exact date cannot be determined at this time.