

SPINY DOGFISH — Gill Nets

What is being considered?

The Department needs to implement area-based gear requirements in the spiny dogfish gill net fishery to reduce bycatch of Atlantic sturgeon.

Harvesters that possess a Maryland Spiny Dogfish Permit and use roundfish gill nets (i.e., not tie-down gill nets) with a mesh size equal to or greater than 5.25 inches (13.3 centimeters) and less than 10 inches (25.4 centimeters) will be required to remove nets from the water by 8:00 p.m. each day and may not set them prior to 5:00 a.m. the following day. The overnight restriction would be in place from November 1 through March 31 each year.

Why is this change necessary?

This action is necessary to implement the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Addendum VII to the Spiny Dogfish Interstate Fishery Management Plan. Addendum VII has gear restrictions for the Delaware and Maryland Sturgeon Bycatch Reduction Areas.

In August 2024, NOAA Fisheries published a proposed rule (Federal Register notice 89 FR 65576; August 12, 2024) to approve and implement Spiny Dogfish Framework Adjustment 6, as recommended by the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils. The Councils developed Spiny Dogfish Framework Adjustment 6 in response to a 2021 Biological Opinion and 2022 Action Plan that called for reducing bycatch of Atlantic sturgeon in spiny dogfish gill net fisheries. Atlantic sturgeon harvest has been under a coastwide moratorium in federal and state waters since 1998. The ASMFC Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Sturgeon maintains the moratorium through at least 2038, and while the 2024 stock assessment update showed signs of improvement, the stock remains depleted coastwide. The proposed rule was approved in December 2024 by NOAA Fisheries and will implement area-based gear requirements in the spiny dogfish gill net fishery to reduce bycatch of Atlantic sturgeon for harvesters that possess a federal spiny dogfish permit.

Harvesters who hold a Maryland Spiny Dogfish Permit, do not possess a federal spiny dogfish permit, and only fish in state waters are not captured by the federal action. Because the specific areas included for additional management span state and federal waters, action is needed to implement corresponding measures for state-only permit holders to maintain consistency between the federal and interstate fishery management plans. ASMFC developed Addendum VII to ensure consistency with the the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils Spiny Dogfish Framework Adjustment 6 by applying the overnight soak restrictions for harvesters who have state spiny dogfish permits in Maryland but do not possess a federal spiny dogfish permit. Consistency with state and federal waters is important for this fishery as it operates in both areas.

Who will this affect?

Anyone who:

1. Holds a Maryland Spiny Dogfish Permit,
2. Does not hold a federal spiny dogfish permit, **and**
3. Harvests spiny dogfish using roundfish gill nets with the described mesh size in Maryland waters of the Atlantic Ocean (0-3 miles from shore).

Definition

Roundfish gill net means a gill net that is constructed with floats on the float line and that has no tie-down twine between the float line and the lead line.

When would this be effective?

The Addendum's measures will be effective May 1, 2025 in federal waters for federal spiny dogfish permit holders, but the Department is following our normal [procedures](#) for creating a regulation in state waters (0-3 miles from shore). The Department projects that this change could be effective in the fall of 2025. However, the exact date cannot be determined.

Additional Information

- Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission [Press Release](#) approving Addendum VII
- [Addendum VII](#) to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Spiny Dogfish

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

- This was discussed at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and New England Fishery Management Council boards, with the Spiny Dogfish Committee, and at public meetings.
- The addendum was discussed at the ASMFC Board meeting in October 2024 and public hearings were held. The Maryland public hearing was held December 18, 2024. ASMFC approved Addendum VII at their board meeting in February 2025.
- This idea was scoped with the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission and the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission at their meetings in April 2025.