

Tautog Management Changes Coming for 2018

MA & RI to develop consistent management strategy to maintain the localized stock
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New management strategies for tautog, a popular recreational fish abundant off our south coast, are in the works for 2018. It's been over two decades since the interstate management plan first was adopted and now the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission has drafted its first plan amendment.

This species is one of the most localized of all popular recreational and commercial species, and the proposed changes to the plan will create four regions—each with its own conservation goals and regulations.

The creation of region-specific management is a departure from the previous plan. After twenty years of management, the Commission has concluded there are stark differences in fishery characteristics and tautog biology, warranting regional management measures.

Massachusetts and Rhode Island will form a single region (MA-RI). The other three regions will be Long Island Sound, New Jersey-New York Bight, and



Delmarva. States are expected to adopt consistent rules within each of the regions.

Our local (MA-RI) stock size has been unchanged and at a moderate level over the past two decades. Whereas the other management areas are experiencing overfishing, our conservative management strategies of large size limits (16 inches) and low bag limits for the recreational fishery have prevented overfishing.

On the commercial side, modest annual commercial quotas (about 65,000 lbs. for Massachusetts, and 48,000 lbs. for Rhode Island) and diligent enforcement of the quotas have also contributed to tautog conservation.

According to the latest stock assessment, the MA-RI stock is not overfished nor is overfishing occurring. While the stock is stable, abundance level is considered below its potential—with much higher levels seen in the 80s and early 90s. So, future conservation measures have the potential to bolster the stock to historic highs. **(to page 33)**



Example of the single-use tag that will be affixed to the tautog's gill cover.
(Photo courtesy NYDEC & ASMFC)



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