

# Massachusetts expansion of commercial striped bass fishing sends anglers a mixed message

*Recreational anglers face increased restrictions to protect striped bass while commercial industry encouraged to catch more*

by Nick Sannicandro



Last month Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries announced that...

**To give Massachusetts commercial striped bass fisherman greater opportunity to land their full quota of striped bass in 2021” the MA DMF is:**

- Starting their striped bass season a week earlier
- Increasing the amount of fishable days from two to four, then progressively raising to seven days per week on 10/1 if quotas are unfilled

This was a proposal from DMF Director Dan McKiernan and intended to bring this to a public hearing before it is set in stone. This proposal came in response to commercial fisherman failing to fulfill the commercial striped bass quotas in the past two seasons.

In 2019 29,564 striped bass were sold and 584,743 of the 869,813 pound quota were sold. In 2020 the quota was reduced to 735,250, but fisherman had only landed 24.4% of the quota as of 8/7/20 which the DMF responded by increasing the number of commercial fishing days from 2 to 3.

This proposal is troubling and sends a mixed message to recreational anglers on a number of fronts. First, it seems that in the commercial fishing world, we do not fully understand what the purpose of a quota is. The intent of a quota is to cap the amount of fish that are captured and sold commercially, so that once that quota is hit, the fishing season is ended.

Why, in a time that we are actively trying to PROTECT the striped bass species, do we feel the need to lower the bar every time the commercial fisherman come up short of their quota? Unfilled quotas mean less fish are killed, it means that populations can rebuild quicker, and that commercial fisherman were not successful in what they did.

Quota may be the wrong choice of words to use here in this regard, rather it should be called a cap.

Calling it a quota makes people feel like they are entitled to fulfill that at any cost. If you have a quota at work, and you are coming up short for the month, many of us will stay and work overtime, weekends, etc.

So now that we continually fall short of this quota, why does DMF feel it is their responsibility to encourage extra ways

for that number to be met, rather than putting the ownership on the fisherman to hit their number on their own?

Maybe, rather than lowering the bar for the commercial industry, the industry should make adjustments based on less fish in the water?

The second troubling aspect of this proposal is that in recent years, **recreational anglers have seen striped bass populations drop sharply**, and they have been imposed with smaller bag limits, and then eventually to what we have today which is size slot limits, thus reducing the number of fish killed recreationally.

Furthermore, restrictions have now been put in place regarding which hooks are allowed to be used, again in an effort to reduce the mortality rate of striped bass.

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So lets look at this big picture, while recreational anglers (often self-imposed so as to protect the future of the species) continually face more and more restrictions (not just with striped bass; bluefish

limits have recently dropped as well) the DEM/DMF have continually made things EASIER year after year for the commercial fleet.

Yes, livelihoods are dependent on the amount of fish produced, I understand this fully, but since when does YOUR job lower the bar when you do not accomplish a goal?

If you can't afford to pay your mortgage does the bank offer to make the payment lower so that you hit your mark every month?

To make a sports reference here, though I am not a Patriots fan, the genius of **Bill Belichick** is that he has been able

to thrive at finding ways to best utilize the rules to his advantage and play within those rules. Think of some of the obscure rules that he has taken advantage of that every other coach forgot about or missed. That is what makes him successful.

If the commercial fishing industry and their income relies on the production of fish, then maybe the burden should be on them to figure out what needs to change on their end, and we need to stop allowing our regulators to lower the bar for them while continually raising the bar for recreational anglers.

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