



# Recommendations from the Circle Hook Ad Hoc Committee



Striped Bass Management Board Meeting  
March 16, 2021

# Addendum VI Language



“The use of circle hooks, as defined herein, is required when recreationally fishing for striped bass with bait.”

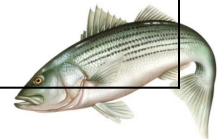
“The use of circle hooks by anglers targeting striped bass with bait, live or chunk, has been identified as a method to reduce the discard mortality of striped bass in recreational fisheries.”



# Timeline of Circle Hook Requirements



October 2019	Addendum VI was approved and requires the mandatory use of circle hooks when fishing with bait.
October 2020	Board approved state implementation plans for circle hook requirements but did not permit any exemptions.
January 2021	Implementation of mandatory circle hook requirements.
February 2021	<p>Board approved the Maine/Massachusetts proposal to study the tube rig fishery and approved a coastwide exemption to the circle hook requirement for tube rig gear through 2022.</p> <p><b>Board created ad hoc committee to develop a definition of bait and identify methods of fishing that would require circle hooks and discuss how to handle incidental catch.</b></p>



# Ad Hoc Committee Tasks



Provide recommendations for the Striped Bass Management Board to consider in March:

1. Develop a definition of bait that would require the use of circle hooks.
2. Identify methods of fishing that would require the use of circle hooks.
3. Discuss how to handle incidental catch of striped bass when targeting other species with non-circle hooks.





# **TASK #1: DEFINITION OF BAIT**

# Task #1: Bait Definition



- Quick consensus that any marine or aquatic organism (live or dead, whole or part) as bait should require circle hooks
- Discussed using the term “natural”
- Discussed extending to all organisms





# **TASK #2: METHODS OF FISHING**

# Task #2: Methods of Fishing



- Agreement that circle hook requirement was not intended to apply to actively fished artificial lures with bait attached
- Considered language specifying active fishing methods (e.g. “trolled, cast and retrieved, or vertically jigged”)





# Committee Recommendation



- Task #1: Definition of Bait
- Task #2: Methods of Fishing

## Recommended Language:

***Circle hooks are required when fishing for striped bass with bait, which is defined as any marine or aquatic organism live or dead, whole or parts thereof. This shall not apply to any artificial lure with bait attached.***



# Rigged Eels Discussion



- Discussed the use of rigged eels, which would require a circle hook under the recommended language since it is a marine organism and not an artificial lure
- Committee noted that because fisheries vary among the states, recommended language should be clear and simple guidance that covers the majority of scenarios
- Committee agreed recommended language should not include specific exemptions beyond artificial lures



# Future Exemption Requests



- States could pursue exemptions in the future for fishing methods not covered by recommended language
- Process would be to request an exemption via state implementation plan
- Committee noted states should consider working with industry and conducting scientific studies for potential exemption requests





# **TASK #3: INCIDENTAL CATCH**

# Task #3: Incidental Catch



- How to handle incidental catch of striped bass when targeting other species with non-circle hooks with bait attached
- Committee could not reach consensus after extensive discussion:
  - Option A: Allow anglers to keep striped bass that are incidentally caught
  - Option B: Require anglers to release striped bass that are incidentally caught



# Task #3: Incidental Catch



Option A: Allow anglers to keep striped bass that are incidentally caught. Committee members noted:

- Requiring release does not align with goal of reducing discards
- May not seem reasonable to release fish with low survival probability
- Lack of data on rates of incidental capture of striped bass in other fisheries
- Requiring release may go beyond mandate in Addendum VI



# Task #3: Incidental Catch



Option B: Require anglers to release striped bass that are incidentally caught. Committee members noted:

- Only means to provide enforceability of circle hook requirement; enforcement cannot prove angler intent or target species
- Although there is a chance of release mortality, keeping the fish guarantees mortality
- May encourage anglers to use more circle hooks when targeting other species



# Task #3: Incidental Catch



- How to handle incidental catch of striped bass when targeting other species with non-circle hooks with bait attached
  - Option A: Allow anglers to keep striped bass that are incidentally caught (*no additional language*)
  - Option B: Require anglers to release striped bass that are incidentally caught (*additional language*)

Language for Option B: *Striped bass caught on any unapproved method of take must be returned to the water immediately without unnecessary injury.*





# Questions?

