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## **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

### **FISH AND WILDLIFE**

#### **Notice of Administrative Changes**

##### **Marine Fisheries**

#### **Modification of Recreational Cobia Vessel Possession Limit and Size Limit**

##### **N.J.A.C. 7:25-18.1**

**Take notice** that, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 7:25-18.1(p), the Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP or Department), with the approval of the New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council (Council) at its January 9, 2025, meeting, has modified the recreational vessel possession limits and size limit for cobia. These actions have been taken to comply with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) management plan for cobia.

At its August 2024 meeting, the ASMFC Coastal Pelagics Management Board (Board) approved Addendum II to Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Atlantic Migratory Group Cobia (see [https://asmfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/AtlCobia\\_AddendumII\\_August2024.pdf](https://asmfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/AtlCobia_AddendumII_August2024.pdf)). The addendum established a new regional recreational allocation framework resulting in new regional harvest targets based on the current coastwide total recreational harvest quota in place through 2026. To determine 2025-2026 measures for each region, the average 2021-2023 recreational harvest for each region was compared against its regional harvest target. The Northern Region's (Rhode Island through Virginia) average harvest was above its target, requiring a 15.9% reduction in harvest. The Southern Region's (North Carolina through Georgia) average harvest was below its target, so

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states in the Southern Region will maintain status quo measures for 2025. The Cobia Technical Committee (TC) developed a suite of recreational management options for the Northern Region estimated to meet the required 15.9% reduction.

At its October 2024 meeting, the Board approved the Cobia Technical Committee methodology for developing recreational management options to meet the northern reduction. States in the Northern Region coordinated to select a preferred regionwide size limit of 43 inches, regionwide vessel possession limit of two cobia, and season of June 15th through September 20th for Maryland, Potomac River Fisheries Commission, and Virginia only – no seasonal restriction was required for New Jersey and other Northern Region states. New Jersey, along with the other Northern region States were required submit implementation plans for Board consideration by January 1, 2025, and must implement the new measures by April 1, 2025.

On December 18, 2024, the Council voted in favor of the regionally preferred option, thereby amending the previous recreational cobia fishery possession limit of one fish per vessel per trip, with a 37-inch minimum size limit, and no seasonal restriction, to two fish per vessel per trip with a minimum size of 43 inches, and no seasonal restriction remaining. Accordingly, New Jersey submitted its implementation plan to the Board on December 19, 2024. On January 31, 2025, the ASMFC Coastal Pelagics Management Board approved the Atlantic Cobia Addendum II Northern Region implementation plan as proposed.

These changes will be reflected in the Fish and Wildlife rules at N.J.A.C. 7:25-18.1(c). As required in N.J.A.C. 7:25-18.1(p), changes to N.J.A.C. 7:25-18.1(c) are published in the New Jersey Marine Digest, the New Jersey Register, on the Department's website, through email,

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when provided, to commercial license holders, and in the NJDEP Fish & Wildlife commercial regulation publication.

**Full text** of the changed rule follows (additions indicated in boldface **thus**, deletions indicated in brackets [thus]):

## SUBCHAPTER 18. MARINE FISHERIES

### 7:25-18.1 Size, season, and possession limits

(a) – (b) (No change.)

(c) A person angling with a hand line or with a rod and line or using a bait net or spearfishing shall not have in his or her possession any species listed below less than the minimum length, nor shall such person take in any one day or possess more than the possession limits as provided below, nor shall such person possess any species listed below during the closed season for that species. Exceptions to this section as may be provided elsewhere in this subchapter shall be subject to the specific provisions of any such section. Fish length shall measure from the tip of the snout to the tip of the tail (total length), except as noted below:

<u>Species</u>	<u>Minimum Size In Inches</u>	<u>Open Season</u>	<u>Possession Limit</u>
...			
Cobia	[37] <b>43</b>	Jan. 1 – Dec. 31	[1] <b>2</b> per vessel

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. . .

(d) – (r) (No change.)

Dated: March 10, 2025

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Shawn M. LaTourette, Commissioner  
Department of Environmental Protection