



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

## Division of Marine Fisheries

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### Marine Fisheries Advisory

#### **SCHEDULED WHELK GAUGE INCREASES TEMPORARILY PAUSED**

DMF is postponing implementation of the next scheduled increase to the whelk minimum gauge width for three years, from 2024 to 2027. This means that the  $3\frac{1}{8}$ " minimum gauge width, in place since 2021, will remain in effect and the pending increase to  $3\frac{1}{4}$ " will not occur until April 15, 2027. This applies to both knobbed and channeled whelks. The three additional  $\frac{1}{8}$ " increases will occur every third year afterward, bringing the minimum gauge width size to  $3\frac{5}{8}$ " in 2036, unless modified by future management action. This delay is meant to accommodate additional evaluation of the management approach for whelks.

Adjustments to Schedule for Increases to Whelk Gauge Width					
Gauge Size	$3\frac{1}{8}$ "	$3\frac{1}{4}$ "	$3\frac{3}{8}$ "	$3\frac{1}{2}$ "	$3\frac{5}{8}$ "
Prior Schedule	2021 - 2023	2024 – 2026	2027 – 2029	2030 – 2032	2033
New Schedule	2021 – 2026	2027 – 2029	2030 – 2032	2033 – 2035	2036

In 2019, DMF implemented a schedule to gradually increase the whelk gauge width by  $\frac{1}{8}$ " intervals to enhance spawning stock biomass by bringing the size-at-harvest closer to a terminal gauge width of  $3\frac{5}{8}$ ". Based on DMF size-at-maturity studies, this corresponds to a shell width where 50% of female whelks are sexually mature. However, there are concerns about how this management program may result in the fishery harvesting exclusively female whelks, thereby skewing sex ratios in the population. DMF intends to gain insight from the results of a Management Strategy Evaluation that we anticipate will be conducted by the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's School for Marine Science and Technology during the pause to evaluate management alternatives.

For more information, please visit our website: [www.mass.gov/marinefisheries](http://www.mass.gov/marinefisheries).