

# Horseshoe crab fishery closes

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PROVINCETOWN -

The horseshoe crab fishery closes today, July 7, to allow the state Div. of Marine Fisheries to account for the number of horseshoe crabs landed in Massachusetts so far this year. The fishery will remain closed if the harvest totals exceed the quota for horseshoe crabs, recently set at 165,000.

All permit holders were to report by July 5 their landings from the preceding month. Today's closure will give the staff at DMF time to tally reports and assess any "reporting deficiencies," according to the agency. If the number of crabs landed is below the quota and reporting rates are high, the fishery will be re-opened.

The annual quota on horseshoe crabs was recently reduced to 165,000 from 330,377 in a set of emergency rules that went into effect in April. Also included in the rules was a reduction of the daily catch limit from 1,000 to 400 and a moratorium on new permits.

The rules were made final last week, in anticipation of "unprecedented pressure on Massachusetts fisheries," resulting from prohibitions and limits on the crab harvest elsewhere, the DMF says. New Jersey recently enacted a prohibition on all horseshoe crab harvesting, and New York cut back its daily catch limit to 200 crabs, down from 500, in an attempt to cap its annual landings at 150,000 crabs. Federal and state closures have also been put into effect at Monomoy Island and Pleasant Bay, horseshoe crab hotspots.

Massachusetts officials are concerned that those local horseshoe crab fisheries which remain open could be depleted if they have to bear the pressure of additional landings.