

RI Shellfish Management Plan

Dealer Scoping Session
March 14, 2013, 11am to 1pm, Warwick Town Hall
Additional meeting March 26, 11:30am

Purpose:

- To inform RI Shellfish dealers about the SMP purpose and process to date
- Better understand the needs and issues of shellfish dealers and how the SMP might address those.
- Discuss how to involve the dealers in the SMP process

Comments:

Tom S. – Atlantic Capes has over 140 employees; while they participate in Federal fishery (surf clams/ocean quahogs), their size makes them a significant economic contributor. Comments that the surf clam industry has more than doubled the herring industry in the state, so is large.

FDA in Washington D.C. is a “black hole” in terms of dealers or fishermen trying to affect change. Concerns that FDA would like to eliminate the entire live shellfish industry and see only processed (dead) product. Comments to encourage DEM and DOH work with the RI shellfish industry to understand the needs and create regulations that protect the public resources and the public health while fostering a good business environment for the industry to expand and create jobs. This will require that the DEM and DOH challenge the FDA on their perceived rigid positions. Other states and member Nations to the ISSC do this quite effectively and comments were that our state agencies should “push back” FDA and to do so harder to prevent this from happening.

Concerns over shellfishermen having a dealer’s license; shouldn’t be allowed.

Price of clams – It’s hard to support local fishermen when price from NY or south is \$0.07-0.08/clam and the RI harvesters get paid \$0.18/clam – big difference to support local. There’s also not enough clams coming out of RI.

Lift the moratorium on licenses – This freezes the capacity of dealers, limits the amount of shellfish they can buy, which limits the profitability of their business. Lifting the moratorium would provide needed jobs.

Concern over the tractor trailer truck full of product going to Charlestown – whose going to get to use those clams? Why can’t the dealers benefit from those? (Referring to the TNC project which took contaminated clams to ponds?)

For the SMP, state needs to create a plan that allows fishermen and dealers to plan their product flow better.

Water quality closures – Discussion of possibly opening areas that have been closed for a while to at least re-evaluate why closed and if ready to open.

Suggestion to change the scheme to open 8am-12pm, 3 days a week. This would allow steady and predictable supply; price would be competitive with product from the south.

Last year, you could drop a rake anywhere and make \$200/day.

Suggestion to hire the best clammers to do the stock assessments.

How do we get a steady supply at the right price? – Wet storage in designated parts of the Bay; this will allow an inventory to build and a buffer in tough/slow times. This will also prevent a derby and a drop in prices.

Suggested read: “From Clams to Soup” about the Blount’s

State needs to start promoting seafood in general – state in general has not been active in supporting seafood; others states have – was seen at the Boston Seafood Show.

Need to help the full time guys out somehow – industry is shrinking; dealers could use more product and people could use the job opportunity; it’s been a slow winter and could have really used more product flowing in.

Release the licenses – the more people allowed to shellfish the better for them; not going to create a glut in the market; add another 100+ guys would be good for all

A need to improve coordination between the state agencies

In general, expressed that DOH is on board with shellfish and has been helpful, seen as an ally. Rigorous but seen as beneficial system of tracking clams. DOH is doing good here; not easy to do all the steps as a dealer, lots of paperwork, but it is a good and thorough system.

The idea of depuration could work, might be costly to set up but could work for their business. Interesting idea to have wet storage in a clean part of the Bay for constant product flow, especially in slow times.

Should re-examine areas that have been closed like Providence River. Work over the years to mitigate outflows should be paying off?

In general, drainage from towns into the Bay is a problem, especially in Warren – should be reduced.

Important to re-do the DEM maps, not clear or helpful. Also the phone line – not a clear message; should be changed