

Finding Aquaculture's Place in Rhode Island

Sunday, January 20, 2013 at 11:34AM

ecoRI News

By MEREDITH HAAS/ecoRI News contributor

NARRAGANSETT — After the Jan. 7 **kickoff** of the new Rhode Island Shellfish Management Plan, researchers, regulators, business owners, commercial quahoggers and oyster farmers packed the room during a Jan. 16 meeting at the University of Rhode Island's Bay Campus to discuss how to best incorporate current and future aquaculture efforts into the state management plan.

“The intent is to highlight the values of shellfish resources for our state,” said Azure Cygler, fisheries extension specialist for Rhode Island Sea Grant.

Dale Leavitt, associate professor and regional aquaculture extension specialist from Roger Williams University, helped lead the conversation on topics of concern, ranging from sharing information, state agency collaboration, economic and ecological values of shellfish, and regulations and licensing issues. “We know we need a vision. We're still trying to identify issues, and maybe that will lead to subgroups for more specific issues.”

There were multiple remarks on whether aquaculture should be recognized as agriculture, to clarify ownership and rights to harvest. “These animals are grazing and growing, and need to be included by the FDA,” said Perry Raso, owner of Matunuck Oyster Farm. He also noted a need for clarification on existing regulations.

“We want to know what the interests and priorities are for the individual and for the industry as a whole,” said Jennifer McCann, director of extension for Rhode Island Sea Grant, explaining that while much more clarity is needed, this meeting is just the starting point.

Additional concerns arose with regard to water quality and closed water regulations, differences between ponds and offshore space for both aquaculture and wild harvest, user conflicts, genetic diversity of stock and disease resistance, ecological and economic impacts of aquaculture, and changes caused by increasing water temperatures and sea level.

There is a lot to be considered with many issues cutting across both commercial and recreational harvest, and restoration efforts. Additional meetings focused on these topics will be held Jan. 22 and 24, with summaries of top priorities being made available **online**.

Article originally appeared on (<http://www.ecori.org/>).

See website for complete article licensing information.

