

RHODE ISLAND MARINE FISHERIES COUNCIL
Minutes of Shellfish Advisory Panel
June 20, 2007 4:30 PM
Ft. Wetherill Marine Laboratory
Jamestown, RI

SAP Members Present: J. King (Chair), R. Bercaw, W. Cote, S. DePetrillo, J. Gardner, J. Grant, O. Kelly, P. Kennedy, M. McGiveney, L. Ricciarelli, G. Schey, R. Vaughn

SAP Members Absent: J. Boland (3+), D. Brayton, D. Leavitt (SA), J. Migliore, J. Mullen (A)

DEM Marine Fisheries: D. Erkan, N. Scarduzio

CRMC: D. Alves

Town of Narragansett: D. McLaughlin, H. Cataldo

Public Present: G. Brawley, J. Clemente, J. Gamache, J. Harvey, P. Raso, R. Rheault, D. Roebuck, F. Waterman

- 1) Review of aquaculture lease proposal CRMC File No. 2004-05-024 (SPATCO, LTD – R. Rheault). Site Location: Point Judith Pond, Narragansett

Chairman King clarified that the Shellfish Advisory Panel Meeting would be held like a workshop. SAP members would hear and discuss the merits and issues associated with the Raso, Roebuck, and Rheault lease proposals. No voting would be undertaken. Everything discussed would go to Marine Fisheries Council and recommendations provided to the MFC.

Aquaculture Working Group (AWG). Public can now come and observe meetings at URI Coastal Institute, GSO. AWG is working on master plan for aquaculture with coastal ponds current priority. AWG will not evaluate individual lease proposals.

Alves asked the SAP if there are specific concerns for the leases before them.

Rheault outlined his existing and proposed aquaculture operation. Stated the need for more growing area.

SAP Member Vaughn, after identifying that he and others commercially shellfish in the immediate vicinity of the Rheault and Roebuck leases, stated that the primary purpose of the expansions is to protect oysters that end up outside the lease footprint and to aid surveillance.

Rheault stated that the lease footprint is intended to avoid where people dig shellfish.

It was noted that two members of the Narragansett Harbor Commission were present.

After a question was raised, Rheault explained the change from cage culture to bottom culture. Rheault – “3 years ago we started working on bottom culture. We got a 2-acre cage lease north of this island and we had been growing oysters in cages in 15 years previously. We started with putting oysters on the bottom. (Roebuck) was working for me and saw some of the oysters we planted. We planted 5 acres initially with pretty good survival rates. It allowed us to get rid of some of the cages and hold the smaller oysters in the cages for 1 season before placing them on the bottom. We had better survival after oysters reached 1 to 2 inches in length, and then one more season on the bottom before harvest. We need more area because you need one area for the oysters to grow while you work the other area. You need to go back and forth.”

SAP members discussed the potential for commercial shellfishing within lease footprints when animals are caged. While wild stock is theoretically available for harvest, it is almost impossible to avoid gear. Wild stock within the confines of a bottom culture site obviously could not be harvested. Commercial shellfishing can realistically occur up to the lease borders. Concern raised that bottom culture and larger area required will displace wild-stock shellfishermen. A wild stock shellfisherman that fishes in Point Judith Pond criticized being displaced by the leases from “one of the most productive places in the pond.”

Rheault stated that the clam densities 17 years ago were low, but now have increased in response to shell on the bottom. After having cages tipped over (1000 dollars each) can't afford shellfishermen coming in. Bottom culture was undertaken because we found out that oysters would survive in the mud. Its less expensive for us to grown the oysters because you don't have to deal with cages.

Chairman King stated that he was present at some of the Town hearings and thought it would be set up in a way that you could still shellfish in the area.

SAP Member McGiveney raised concerns about the “abutting of leases”, the overall size of leases, “habitat fragmentation” and considers illegal harvest to be an enforcement issue.

Rheault stated that fishing and boating within the lease footprint is not a problem, but shellfishing is a problem.

Two wild stock shellfisherman (Gamache and Clemente) discussed how areas surrounding the existing leases are fished.

SAP Member DePetrillo asked about future expansions and voiced concerns about abutting of leases.

SAP Member Grant raised concerns for dredging effects on winter flounder.

Rheault stated that future expansion potential is limited and believes that his site enhances flounder habitat.

Rheault was asked if he would allow people to pots on his leases. He stated that he would be willing to allow it. But only on the 2/3 not being worked on. Communication would be necessary.

Erkan explained how the shellfish surveys were conducted (suction sampling dredge) and low densities were observed.

SAP Member Kelly raised concerns about lease effects on eelgrass.

H. Cataldo and D. McGlaughlin from the Town of Narragansett discussed the need for an aquaculture plan The Town of Narragansett does not support any

more aquaculture expansions until some sort of guidelines are in place. They also mentioned the potential for future public resistance.

SAP Member Schey voiced appreciation for Town comments.

SAP Member Gardner discussed his positive relationship with the Town of Westerly.

2) Review of aquaculture lease proposal CRMC File No. 2002-05-034 (Mr. P. Raso)

P. Raso and D. Alves outlined the proposed lease expansion for cage, bag and bottom culture. 3.8 acre existing lease in Potter Pond with proposed expansion of 3.1 acres.

SAP Members identified recreational harvest issues despite low shellfish densities. SAP Member Kelly noted high recreational use. SAP Member Kennedy identified concerns for all three lease proposal for displacement of recreational shellfishing and impacts to the public trust. Both noted the need for an aquaculture plan

Raso noted that he has not observed recreational shellfishing within his proposed expansion area. He also noted a positive relationship with surrounding landowners.

Shellfisherman Gamanche says few shellfish are present in the area.

Erkan noted the State-owned access at East Matunuck results in high recreational use despite low densities of shellfish.

Chairman King again clarified that all comments will be brought to the MFC.

3) Review of aquaculture lease proposal CRMC File No.2002-10-038 (D. Roebuck)
Site Location: Point Judith Pond, Narragansett.

D. Alves and D. Roebuck outlined the proposed bottom culture lease expansion. Roebuck discussed lease efficiency, hiring of shellfishermen for harvest, and biological benefits.

SAP Member McGiveney voiced concerns about rapid expansion and lease proximity.

Concerns for combined lease effects were raised by a shellfishermen present.

Rheault stated that the only group significantly affected is wild harvest shellfishermen.

4) Shellfish openings for 2007 and 2008 in High Banks and Greenwich Bay was continued due to SAP member scheduling conflicts.

Adjourn: 6:05 PM.

Minutes prepared by D. Erkan