

Aquaculture Advisory Council
May 08, 2020
Meeting Minutes- Conference Call Meeting

Members Present: Sec. Douglas Fisher, Mr. Joseph Cimino (Comm. Catherine McCabe), Dr. Dave Bushek, Dr. Douglas Zemeckis, Mr. Mike De Luca (Dr. Robert Goodman), Ms. Lisa Calvo, Mr. Barney Hollinger, Mr. Maury Sheets, Ms. Betsy Haskin, Mr. John Maxwell, Dr. Amanda Wenczel. Bill Avery was on call late (G. Saridakis)

Members Absent: Loel Muetter (Comm. Judith Persichilli), Joseph Constance (Sec. Tahesha Way)

Public in Attendance: Roll call of attendees not taken; names were stated when making comment.

Sec. Fisher called the meeting to order; a quorum was present.

Situation Report: [A call with growers was hosted by Secretary Fisher on March 27, 2020. At that time, the immediate needs of the industry were heard, and several concerns were addressed (e.g., farming considered essential and growers could access their leases even under travel restrictions). At the AAC meeting, growers provided an update.]

L. Calvo: regarding the switch to retail or online sales, Gloucester County has been very cooperative. B. Hollinger: in Cumberland County, received a license the same day. Matt Gregg: long-term zoning issues with Wall twp. and decided to sell through a retail sales vendor already have relationship with from wholesale sales.

Chris Scales: Ocean Twp/Ocean County; found sales to be very slow in April but have noticed an increase in May. Less crew needed to work but finding the direct sales have been the best option and increasing from April through to May.

B. Avery: Season could be pretty good (summer), but it will all depend on the weather. Typically, you want rain because then tourist want to go inside, eat at a restaurant. This year we need good weather for the outside seating.

Sec. Fisher: how does this (slow sales, closed markets, restrictions) impact your product development cycle? B. Hollinger: Have to keep working the shellfish & gear to limit losses. Sec. Fisher: what about when the shellfish are too large? B. Hollinger: The option right now for a high volume of product is to take it to the shucking houses but that is not as profitable. Steve Fleetwood: Northern growers are sending their product down to the shucking houses. Shucking and processing is only one part of it, the logistics of getting it to final sales can be difficult. Shucking houses are offering around \$0.25 per oyster.

Sec. Fisher: Announced the President's Executive Order on Seafood and Aquaculture. The EO includes new programs for U.S. caught and grown products.

L. Calvo: Announced National Sea Grant Office rapid response funding and the need for grower input on the NJ proposal. The funding is up to \$100,000 per state with 75% of the funding to be used for aquaculture. The current ideas surround enhancing restoration efforts with aquaculture product and marketing/diversifying markets.

S. Fleetwood: For restoration, need to keep in mind that some of the shellfish are triploid for aquaculture. Restoration projects in some places only accept diploid.

Aquaculture Development Plan

Discussion on the April 2020 version of the Aquaculture Development Plan 2020 Update.

Council Vacancies: Some Council vacancies are being filled. There is movement to reappoint or fill vacant seats on Councils, but there are still open seats to fill. This is an industry priority.

Permitting: Use of the word “streamline” can be misconstrued, especially by environmental groups. May consider this to mean a lessening of the review process. Suggestions included “one-stop-shop”, “consolidated”, and to review the language in the Presidential Seafood E.O. since it also speaks to more efficient permitting.

Rec #7- Reporting Harvest: Discussion around this recommendation and the need for health purposes versus industry metrics. The confidentiality of numbers was of concern and must be maintained with any program.

Rec. # 13- Sunday Harvest: Need to consider impacts of this change with recreational harvest. Discussion on whether the recommendation was a statutory change to Title 50, or a regulatory change. It was noted to be a regulatory change. There was not a unanimous Council decision on this recommendation.

Lease Utilization: Discussion on lease utilization being under the authority of the Shellfish Council- strengthen the language to say as much. Also concern with how utilization would be measured and maintaining confidentiality. B. Hollinger noted that he was not in favor of Rec. #21 in lease utilization. L. Calvo noted that Maine has been highly successful with measures related to lease utilization and that it would benefit NJ to continue this discussion amongst the AAC and Shellfish Council.

Research Priorities: Discussion related to the scale of research. The needs of the industry should be reviewed periodically to ensure research priorities match on-the-ground situation.

Marketing: S. Fleetwood: marketing is primary concern for the industry. Need to help the industry survive- keep the current numbers in the industry right now (no loss of businesses). Piggy-back on national movement for local product and keep current businesses running. Craig Tomlin: promote seafood as an alternative protein source, especially given the issues currently noted in the meatpacking and processing industry.

Marketing to promote farms, or a place where farms and businesses can sign up to be promoted-like the Jersey Fresh website. This led to discussion of a map currently under development by the NJDEP Marine Fisheries Administration.

Monique Purcell: All these comments are helpful but without addressing the bigger picture, nothing will move forward. The big comments on roles must be addressed before the 2020 Update can be finalized. In the permitting, the recommendations are not changing the authority. It is looking at having one application and one contact between growers and regulatory process. The application then goes through the same review levels and processes, by the appropriate authorities.

In response, there was a note of caution for NJDA interpreting the NJDEP rules & regulations.

Final Comments

Concerns over how harvester training would continue for those who go into the offices for PC use. This item was already under consideration by NJDEP staff.

Changes to markets mean that same day shipping of shellfish has become more important. This is an item that each dealer would need to address directly with NJDOH.

Waiving permitting fees- lease & tidelands- given economic constraints. This is occurring in other states.

Meeting adjourned.