

# Shellfish Advisory Panel

October 15, 2025; 4:30PM

URI Bay Campus Large Conference Room/

Virtual public meeting - Zoom webinar

## MEETING SUMMARY

RIMFC members: K. Eagan (Chair)

DEM: A. Gerber-Williams, P. Barrett, D. Borkman, P. Duhamel, J. Livermore, J. Lake;

SAP members: B. Bica, D. Erkan, J. Gardner, D. Ghigliotty, J. Grant, J. McDonald, M. McGiveney, G. Schey, R. Tellier, E. Troiano;

Scientific Advisor: Dr. Rice

Public: J. Boyd, L. Soranno, T. Blank, B. Goetsch, J. Booth, R. Rheault, B. Boehringer, 1 additional attendee in person and 4 attendees online.

Link to meeting recording: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pg\\_V0-uOvxc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pg_V0-uOvxc)

### 1. Aquaculture Applications

#### a. Aquaculture: 2025-06-013 Thomas Blank.

*T. Blank* presented his proposal to reconfigure and consolidate his existing aquaculture lease by combining two adjacent parcels into a single site composed entirely of floating gear. He explained that the realignment would maintain his currently permitted capacity of 300 floating cages, without increasing lease area, but would better conform to surrounding farms and improve navigational safety. *B. Goetsch* summarized that the revised plan was developed in response to neighbor concerns from shoreline property owners south of the lease footprint, who expressed mixed views about the orientation of gear in front of their property. Mr. Blank subsequently worked with CRMC staff, the town and RIDEM to rotate the layout approximately 90 degrees, which better aligns with existing farms in the area. The relinquished site area will return to the public trust.

*B. Goetsch* described the broader North Kingstown/Fox Island aquaculture area, noting that CRMC and the Town had previously agreed—through public workshops and local coordination—to limit future aquaculture expansion west of a line running from Fox Island due south to Green Point. That line delineates the extent of acceptable aquaculture development; any area east of that boundary would remain closed to new lease applications under current policy. This informal agreement arose from a series of public discussions and mapping exercises conducted by former

CRMC staff (including Dave Butel) and Town representatives in the early 2000s. The line and corresponding map remain on file within CRMC's project documentation.

***Motion made by J. Gardner to recommend to the Marine Fisheries Council that the aquaculture activities proposed in the application is consistent with competing uses engaged in the exploitation of marine fisheries.***

**2<sup>nd</sup> by M. McGiveney; abstain by D. Erkan, The motion passed 8 – 0 – 1.**

**b. Aquaculture: 2025-06-048 Bradley Boehringer**

*B. Boehringer* presented his application to expand his existing lease in Dutch Harbor, Jamestown by 3.5-acres to accommodate a new floating gear system (flip farm lines) requiring additional space while reducing visual impacts for coastal homeowners. The proposed layout extends further offshore to maintain safe recreational use near shore. He noted that a shellfish survey conducted by Matt Griffin recovered minimal shellfish within the area (six clams from twelve pulls) and no eelgrass or other submerged aquatic vegetation. *J. Gardner* while supportive of the applicant's efforts to adopt new gear types and improve visual compatibility, raised concerns regarding the density and layout of the proposed lines. he noted that 17 longlines within the proposed footprint (approximately 700 feet by 200 feet) would leave only about 11 feet between each line, questioning whether such close spacing would withstand high wind and wave conditions typical of Dutch Harbor. *D. Ghigliotty* voiced a broader concern about the appropriation of public trust waters for areas not yet in productive use. He stated that several leaseholders statewide had received approvals for expanded acreage but had not fully utilized that space for aquaculture operations, effectively excluding wild harvesters and other users from those waters while producing little or no yield. He characterized this as inconsistent with the intent of the "free and common fishery," noting that public waters should not be tied up indefinitely by partially developed leases. He emphasized that while the applicant's intent to modernize gear was commendable, the expansion as proposed could result in substantial portions of the site remaining idle during transition to the new system. He urged CRMC to ensure that lease expansions correspond to demonstrated operational need and that mechanisms remain in place to reclaim unused space if not brought into production within a reasonable timeframe. *B. Boehringer* acknowledged that the transition would occur in phases, beginning with a portion of the lease and gradually expanding as existing cage gear is retired. During this period, some of the authorized area might appear underutilized, but it would be part of a planned, active conversion process. He emphasized that his goal is to enhance operational efficiency and reduce shoreline visual impact, noting that the new gear floats low in the water, aligns neatly, and has been well received by neighboring property owners who previously expressed concerns about the visibility of traditional floating cages. *B. Goetsch* stated that approved leases must add gear to the lease within the first year and that they have three years to use the entire lease area otherwise they must relinquish the unused area back to the state.

***Motion made by B. Bica to recommend to the Marine Fisheries Council that the aquaculture activities proposed in the application is consistent with competing uses engaged in the exploitation of marine fisheries.***

**2<sup>nd</sup> by E. Troiano; abstain by D. Erkan, J. Gardner, D. Ghigliotty, J. Grant, M. McGivney, G. Schey, The motion passed 3 – 1 – 6.**

## **2. Shellfish Harvest Season for Greenwich Bay (sub-areas 1 & 2) Shellfish Management Areas**

*A. Gerber-Williams* presented the default and proposed winter harvest schedules for Greenwich Bay Subareas 1 and 2. The panel discussed adding one more additional day to the proposed schedule.

***Motion made by D. Ghigliotty to recommend to the Marine Fisheries Council to adopt the following schedule for Greenwich Bay Sub-Areas 1 & 2 for December 2025:***

**Open 8:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. on December 10, 12, 15, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 26, 29, 30.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> by B. Bica; abstain by D. Erkan, The motion passed 9 – 0 – 1.**

## **3. Shellfish Harvest Season for Bissel Cove/Fox Island Shellfish Management Areas**

*A. Gerber-Williams* presented the default winter harvest schedule. No motion was made thus the areas will retain their default seasonal opening as described in current regulations.

## **4. Shellfish Harvest Season for Bristol Harbor Shellfish Management Area**

*A. Gerber-Williams* presented the default winter harvest schedule. No motion was made thus the areas will retain their default seasonal opening as described in current regulations.

## **5. Council Policy Update – Advisory Panel and Aquaculture**

*P. Duhamel* provided an overview of proposed revisions to the Marine Fisheries Council Advisory Panel Policy. The revisions aim to formalize existing practices for the Shellfish Advisory Panel (SAP), including: clarifying quorum requirements (majority of members), establishing a Vice Chair position, defining term limits (three years, renewable), and improving attendance and communication expectations. Discussion among panel members focused on maintaining balanced representation between aquaculture and wild harvest interests, ensuring consistent participation, and preserving institutional knowledge.

*J. Gardner and M. McGivney* expressed concern that requiring reapplication every three years could lead to unnecessary turnover and the loss of institutional knowledge accumulated by long-serving members. *M. McGivney* recalled that historically, advisory meetings continued even when a quorum was not met, and the minutes reflected that status for Council awareness. He suggested retaining flexibility to meet and deliberate informally if quorum is not achieved. *P. Duhamel* confirmed that under the revised draft, quorum is based on the total number of appointed members (currently 6 to 15), and official votes cannot occur without it. *B. Bica* and *K. Eagan* noted that meeting cancellations due to lack of quorum had been

problematic in past years, wasting effort and travel for industry members. They supported clearer attendance rules and the ability to dismiss inactive members. *J. Gardner* emphasized the importance of representation from both aquaculture and wild harvest sectors, citing that aquaculture had grown substantially but remained underrepresented with only one active member. They suggested that the policy should guarantee proportional representation of user groups. *K. Eagan* clarified that the Council intentionally allows flexibility in appointments to ensure a balance between experience and emerging perspectives, but that the Council—not the Division—ultimately decides membership composition. *P. Duhamel* responded to concerns about reappointment and turnover. They explained that the intent of term limits is to formalize participation, not to remove active members. Members who wish to continue serving can easily reapply and will be prioritized for reappointment if they remain active and engaged. The policy would also provide a mechanism to remove consistently inactive members after three unexcused absences, ensuring equitable participation opportunities.

Members further discussed the proposal to have the Chair drawn from the SAP membership rather than automatically being a RI Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC) member. Some panelists, including *J. Gardner* and *D. Ghigliotti*, expressed concern that this change could reduce direct representation of shellfish issues at the Council level. The Division clarified that the SAP Chair would still attend Council meetings to present recommendations and minutes, maintaining representation even if not serving as a Council member.

#### Aquaculture Policy Discussion:

- *Dr. Rice* and *B. Goetsch* referenced statutory language under **RIGL §20-10-1** and **§20-10-5**, which outlines the Council’s authority to review aquaculture applications for consistency with the exploitation of marine fisheries. They reiterated that while the SAP’s mandate is narrow—focused on compatibility of aquaculture with existing fisheries—broader policy questions (such as coastal use conflicts and aquaculture planning) can be raised to the Council for consideration. *D. Erkan* and *D. Ghigliotti* questioned whether the presence or absence of shellfish alone should determine suitability, suggesting that habitat quality and potential use by wild fisheries should also be considered. *B. Goetsch* acknowledged that CRMC’s lease review focuses on habitat suitability, public navigation, and consistency with the “free and common fishery,” and agreed that these broader ecological factors warrant continued discussion. Several members urged that public comments submitted to CRMC be included in SAP materials before meetings to allow for more informed discussion. The Division agreed to incorporate that change moving forward. *Dr. Rice* emphasized the importance of maintaining clear roles: the SAP provides fisheries-use recommendations, CRMC evaluates environmental and navigational impacts, and DEM oversees resource management. *K. Eagan* reminded members that written comments on the draft policy should be submitted to the Division by October 21 for inclusion in the November 5 Council e-packet. The Council is expected to discuss but not vote on the policy at that meeting, leaving room for additional revisions and feedback.

## 6. Any Other Matters

- a. At the request of *M. McGiveney*, the panel agreed that the next SAP meeting would focus on potential modifications to the Providence River winter harvest schedule. The Division confirmed that the meeting would be held on Wednesday, November 12, 2025, to consider adding additional harvest days for the February–April period.

- b. Providence River Dredging and Shellfish Relocation (USACE DMMP Update):  
*A. Gerber-Williams* provided an update on the Providence River Dredged Material Management Plan (DMMP), following ongoing coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

She reported that:

- The Corps acknowledged comments from RISA, DEM, and others regarding the high density of shellfish resources near the Edgewood Shoals CAD cell site;
- The Corps committed to performing relocation of hard clams from the Port Edgewood Basin and adjacent areas prior to dredging;
- The revised cost estimates now include funding contingencies to ensure adequate resources for full relocation and testing;
- Shellfish testing for metals and disease will be conducted once project funding is finalized.

*J. Boyd* and others emphasized the need to initiate testing well in advance of the 2026 dredge season to identify suitable transplant areas within open management zones. Several members suggested that DEM explore using existing transplant program funds as a bridge until federal funds are released. DEM staff agreed to consider that option and provide an update at the next meeting.

*J. Boyd* would like to further table his additional matters for the upcoming SAP on November 12, 2025.

## **7. Adjourn**

Adjourned at 7:25 PM.

*Minutes prepared by Anna Gerber-Williams, the Division of Marine Fisheries*