

Clam Industry Task Force Meeting – June 3, 2009

Notice of Meeting

The Clam Industry Task Force announces a public meeting to which all persons are invited.

DATE AND TIME: Wednesday, June 3, 2009, 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

PLACE: Conference Call: (888)808-6959; Conference Code: 4884033

GENERAL SUBJECT MATTER TO BE CONSIDERED: To discuss issues affecting the Florida clam industry.

A copy of the agenda may be obtained by contacting: Anne Cerwin at (850)488-4033.

Agenda

AGENDA **Clam Industry Task Force Meeting**

Date: June 3, 2009
Time: 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Location: FDACS- Division of Aquaculture
Conference Call Number (888) 808 6959
Conference Code 4884033#

- I. Welcome / Introductions
- II. Approval of Minutes
- III. Approval of Agenda
- IV. Appoint Working Group Representative from SW Region
- V. Regional Updates
 - Franklin County
 - Levy County
 - Southwest Florida
 - Southeast FloridaExtension Updates
DACS Updates
 - Division of Marketing
 - Division of Aquaculture
 - FY 2009/10 Budget
 - Planning / Positions
 - Rule Chapter 18-21 F.A.C.
 - Division of Law Enforcement

- VI. Clam Industry Issues
 - FWCC Letters regarding Uniform Waterway Markers
 - FWCC SAL for Releases and Impacts on Clam Farming
 - Importation for Foreign Clams (Marketing)
 - Working Waterfront Legislation
- VII. Public Comment
- VIII. Next Meeting (Place, Date, Time, Topics)
- IX. Adjourn Clam Industry Task Force Meeting

Minutes

Draft Minutes

Clam Industry Task Force Meeting / Conference Call
 1203 Governor's Square Blvd., 5th Floor
 Tallahassee, Florida
 June 3, 2009

I. Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting, which was conducted by conference call, was called to order at 11:00 a.m. by Mark Berrigan who welcomed the task force members and guests and presided over the agenda and discussions.

Members and guests introduced themselves. The following persons were in attendance:

Members Present

Ricky Cooke	Bill Lartz	Chris Topping
Dan Solano	Sue Colson	Rose Cantwell
Tom McCrudden	Tony Heeb	Mike Hodges

Members Absent

Rick Viele	Charles D. Sembler	Bill Leeming
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Ex Officio

Leslie Sturmer	Sherman James (Ag-Law)	David Heil
Mark Berrigan	Alan Peirce	Sherman Wilhelm

Guests

Julie McPeake	Kal Knickerbocker	Ramsey Parham
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Tammie Heeb
Steve Woodford

Paul Balthrop
Stephen Geiger

II. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of the March 18, 2009 Clam Industry Task Force meeting was approved and accepted without amendments.

III. Approval of Agenda

The agenda for the Clam Industry Task Force Meeting on June 3, 2009 was accepted without objection.

IV. Appoint Working Group Representative from SW Region

Tony Heeb made a motion to nominate Barry Hurt to serve on the Task Force as a representative of the SW Region. After some discussion regarding the number of representatives that have been established to represent each area and the nomination and approval process, the motion received a second and was approved unanimously.

V. Regional Updates

Bill Lartz reported that there are approximately 12 active clam leaseholders in the Alligator Harbor Aquaculture Use Area in Franklin County. Growing conditions are excellent, sales are a little slow, and there have been no theft issues reported recently.

Rose Cantwell reported that in Levy County there is an abundance of clam seed which has resulted in downward price pressure. She also said that the Cedar Key Aquaculture Association participated in the Cedar Key Art festival and is making preparations for "Clamerica" celebration of July 4th 2009. Clam sales have been slow, and Ricky Cooke reported that this is due to the economic slowdown. He added that sales amount to liquidating product with little profit and that there is no indication that markets will improve over the short term. Mr. Cooke also reported that the cooperative production and marketing efforts being used in Virginia (ex. Cherrystone model business structure) is working very well for growers in that state and Florida clam growers should look closely at that model. Leslie Sturmer reported that while seed production has been very high, seed mortality due to the cold winter was also high. Chris Topping reported that he recently participated in the Suwannee River Folk Festival and made a presentation on Florida's Clam Industry in an effort to create more public awareness and demand.

Tony Heeb mentioned Curt Hemmel requested that the Task Force consider the need for regulations to require receipts to always show the origin of seed stocks, so that buyers know where the seed is actually coming from (in-state and out-of-state). Mark Berrigan stated that everything is already in place to track seed from its point of origin, since the aquaculture certification and the lease agreement already require this information. Leslie added that this will be difficult to enforce and assistance from the industry will be needed

to identify sellers which misrepresent the origin of seed stock. There was agreement that growers and hatchery producers need to be re-educated about the required documentation for seed stocks.

Tony Heeb also reported that clams and seed are doing well in Southwest Florida although sales are slow. Mark Berrigan and Tony Heeb also briefly discussed a request to move some leases in Collier County to a more productive area. Mr. Berrigan added that if this is something that industry wants to pursue, then growers need to bring forward a detailed and unified proposal for consideration.

Tom McCrudden reported that clam sales are also slow in Southeast Florida. Steve Woodford added that there is a significant surplus of seed that is causing downward price pressure.

Extension Updates

Leslie Sturmer reported that the “Romancing the Clam” event held on March 23, 2009 in Savannah was very successful. Chefs prepared Florida clams and regional dishes. The event also included a raw bar and a sensory panel to compare products from different areas. A video of the event is being produced and will be available to growers for use in product promotion and marketing. She suggested that the Task Force invite Steve Otwell to present the results of the sensory evaluation. Ms. Sturmer also informed Task Force members that the Florida Farm Bureau is seeking two clam producers to serve on their Aquaculture Advisory Committee. She also reported that she is working with Harbor Branch to resolve the obstacles and barriers to production of the Sunray Venus Clam and has submitted a Sea Grant Proposal to continue that work. Ms. Sturmer suggested conducting another industry workshop in conjunction with the next Clam Industry Task Force Meeting.

DACS Updates

1. Division of Marketing:

Ramsey Parham provided an update of recent clam marketing activities and reported that the Division of Marketing will be participating in the “Clamerica” event to be held in Cedar Key in July. Paul Balthrop added information about the Boston Seafood Show where a Florida Company demonstrated and promoted frozen clam and oyster products. He also reported some preliminary statistics on the volume and price of clams imported into the U.S. Mr. Balthrop agreed to summarize his findings and make those available to the Task Force.

2. Division of Aquaculture:

Sherman Wilhelm reported that the Division’s budget was reduced by the legislature with regard to OPS and OCO, but that no additional positions were lost. There will be no money for ARC projects this year, and the Division is still preparing to deliver the Federal Feed Reimbursement Grant Funding when that becomes available. Mr. Wilhelm added that the Division also submitted proposals for NOAA Recovery Act (stimulus funds) support for a variety of activities including oyster resource development and coastal cleanup. Selection of projects for NOAA-funding is behind schedule, but should be completed in the next few weeks.

Regarding FDACS positions, Sue Colson asked if the Task Force could evaluate the Division’s reorganization plan with regard to the Processing Plant Inspection Section. Alan Peirce stated that the Division has developed a good plan that is designed to increase efficiency with no loss of inspection or consulting services to the industry. The Division is planning to conduct an efficiency study, and the Task Force is welcome to provide suggestions and comments at any time.

Mark Berrigan summarized progress on the rulemaking process to amend Chapter 18-21, F.A.C. Mr. Wilhelm had presented the proposed rule amendments to the Cabinet aides that morning and all indications were that the rule adoption process would move forward for consideration by the Board of Trustees. Mr. Berrigan thanked task force and industry representatives for their positive participation in the administrative hearing on April 28, 2009.

3. Division of Law Enforcement: Sherman James reported that the new boat has been delivered and there have been no significant theft problems reported recently.

VI. Clam Industry Issues

The Issue regarding the importation of foreign clams was taken up during the agency updates section of the agenda. Competition from foreign imports was identified as a serious issue for Florida producers and the industry requested information from the Bureau of Seafood and Aquaculture prior to the task force meeting. As mentioned above, Paul Balthrop provided a brief summary of frozen clam imports, and identified Viet Nam as a primary supplier. Mr. Balthrop agreed to continue a more detailed evaluation of imported clams and report his findings to the task force. The task force also requested that Dr. David Heil provide insight regarding the potential for testing imported products.

Leslie Sturmer discussed a recent FWCC letter that was sent to selected lease holders regarding uniform waterway marking requirements. Sherman Wilhelm agreed to address this issue with FWCC again. Ms. Sturmer agreed to provide copies of the letters to assist Mr. Wilhelm.

Kal Knickerbocker reported that a FWCC proposal that could require leaseholders to possess a Special Activity License is still out there and it is important that industry and FDACS keep a close eye on any related rule development. FWCC has expressed their intent to exempt shellfish leaseholders, but the revised rule with the exemption language has not yet been made available.

Leslie Sturmer provided that the “Working Waterfront” legislation (Senate Bill 1468) sponsored by Senator Dean died during the legislative process. The bill is very important because it includes the necessary enabling provisions that are needed to fully implement previously passed working waterfront legislation. The bill will provide important tax relief to the clam industry and other businesses in coastal areas. While the bill did not pass this year, Senator Dean intends to introduce similar legislation during the next Legislative Session.

VII. Public Comment

No additional topics were introduced via public comment.

VIII. Next Meeting

The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for September in Cedar Key. Leslie Sturmer agreed to identify the available dates and provide those to Task Force members to schedule the meeting.

IX. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 1:32 pm.