

Clam Industry Task Force Meeting – March 18, 2009

Notice of Meeting

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Aquaculture, announces a meeting of the Clam Industry Task Force.

Date: Wednesday, March 18, 2009

Time: 10:00 am to 1:00 pm

Place: DACS Division of Aquaculture
Fifth Floor Conference Room
1203 Governor's Square Blvd.
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

Please submit agenda items to Mark Berrigan by March 2, 2009.

The draft meeting minutes from the September 2008 meeting and the agenda for the March 2009 meeting will be mailed out on March 9, 2009.

Meeting Agenda

AGENDA **Clam Industry Task Force Meeting**

Date: March 18, 2009
Time: 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Location: Division of Aquaculture Conference Room
1203 Governor's Square Blvd., Fifth Floor
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

- I. Welcome / Introductions
- II. Approval of Minutes
- III. Approval of Agenda
- IV. 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
- V. Clam Industry Issues
 - Lease Re-location Proposal for Corrigans Reef HDLA

- VI. Reported Wild Clam Set in the Indian River
Joint Session with the Oyster /Seafood Task Force
Industry Representation for ISSC
Working Waterfront Legislation
FWCC Rule Amendments / Special Activity Licenses
Hurricane / Tropical Storm SHA management
- VI. Public Comment
- VII. Next Meeting (Place, Date, Time, Topics)
- VIII. Adjourn Clam Industry Task Force Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Minutes As Approved
Clam Industry Task Force Meeting
1203 Governor’s Square Blvd., 5th Floor
Tallahassee, Florida
March 18, 2009

I. Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order and chairperson, Rose Cantwell, welcomed the task force members and guests and presided over the agenda and discussions. The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m.

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	

Members Absent

Rick Viele	Charles D. Sembler	Bill Leeming
Mike Hodges		

Ex Officio

Leslie Sturmer	Sherman James (Ag-Law)	David Heil
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Guests

Victor Garrido	Alan Peirce	Kal Knickerbocker
Tammie Heeb	Jeffery Floyd	Sherman Wilhelm
Bob Johnson	Victor Garrido	Phyllis McCranie
Barry Hurt		

II. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of the September 24, 2008 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 March 18, 2009 was accepted without objection.

IV. Regional Updates

Updates of regional activities were presented by regional representatives. Bill Lartz discussed two new wholesale dealers in the Northwest Region. Mr. Lartz reported that sales were good. Rose Cantwell (Cedar Key) reported on upcoming festivals and events including "Clamerica" which will be a huge event and a great opportunity for sales and positive industry publicity. Sales in the region have been slow but are expected to improve during the Summer and Fall. Tony Heeb reported that sales were also slow in Southwest Florida but that conditions and growth was good. Tony also mentioned that industry was helping to move product from Dan Leonard's leases. Tom McCrudden reported that salinity conditions in Southeast Florida have improved significantly and that there was good seed availability. Tom also requested that the IFAS newsletter which includes a list of clam seed suppliers be modified to eliminate dealers who do not live in Florida or at least list the out of state suppliers separately. Leslie Sturmer stated that she was obligated to list any company that requested to be on the list but she also agreed to separate the Florida suppliers and out of state suppliers.

Extension Updates

Leslie Sturmer provided information on the upcoming "Romancing the Clam" event to be held on March 23, 2009 in Savannah. Eight chefs will be preparing clams and Florida Product will be used exclusively. Leslie also mentioned that a BMP workshop will be held in Cedar Key on Friday at 2:00 p.m. Leslie also led a discussion of the recently released report on the Economic Impact of Florida's Clam industry. The report documents significant growth in the industries economic impact, and this information should be very useful to the industry.

DACS Updates

1. Division of Marketing: Phyllis McCranie also provided documentation of the Bureau of Seafood and Aquaculture Marketing's recent marketing and promotional efforts. Phyllis also mentioned the department's participation in an upcoming "Clamerica 2009" event, and an Aquaculture Review Council funded project entitled "Discover Florida Aquaculture" which produced an informational video, a website, and a booklet on Florida Aquaculture.
2. Division of Aquaculture: David Heil discussed budget reductions resulting from the recent Legislative Special Session and additional budget reductions that could result from the 2009 Regular Session which began in March. Revenue collections continue to fall below projections and all agencies are now faced with making tough decisions regarding personnel and services that can be provided. David also explained that additional mid year cuts were also very possible if revenues continue to fall.

In terms of workforce reductions, the division lost one full time Lab Tech position in Apalachicola (which will be replaced with an OPS position if funds are available) and it is very possible that we will lose a vacant Processing Plant Inspector in Cedar Key, and two vacant ESII positions in Apalachicola and Punta Gorda. While the division is proceeding with the hiring process as rapidly as possible, the agency wide direction is to eliminate vacant positions before instituting layoffs. David also mentioned that the division was developing contingency plans for the loss of each of these positions.

Tony Heeb expressed concern that budget reductions could impact the ability of FDACS and FWCC to provide needed services especially during a red tide. David replied that the agencies would do everything possible to serve commercial interests but also mentioned the possibility of instituting temporary, emergency closures of low priority areas due to a lack of agency resources. There is also a possibility that FDACS could reclassify several areas as “recreational only” areas, and reduce the management requirements; however, there are consequences of any of these options. Sue Colson encouraged the department should move positions and/or personnel around to ensure that the water testing, lab, and processing plant inspection programs are not impacted. Dan Solano reinforced this by clearly stating that if additional cuts are required, the division needs to reduce administrative personnel, rather than field positions that are provided services that are required for compliance with the federal program.

David also reported the Rule Chapter 18-21 F.A.C. revisions will be published in the FAW next Friday. DEP has already indicated that they will request a hearing to discuss issues related to facilities on docks that FDACS intends to cover with a “Consent of Use Agreement” rather than a “lease”. Sherman Wilhelm and David Heil encouraged the industry to participate in the hearing which is scheduled for 1:00 pm on April 28th.

3. Division of Law Enforcement: Sherman James reported that a boat has been ordered and should be delivered soon. Several members commented that the presence of law enforcement is reducing theft problems. Leslie Sturmer stated that industry is still having trouble reaching Mr. James because of cell phone issues. Jeffery Floyd and Bob Johnson indicated that industry can call the 800 number for assistance any time. When the boat is delivered, Sherman will be conducting patrols on each of the key shellfish production areas. Industry members were encouraged to call Sherman for assistance as needed. Ricky Cooke offered to ride along with Mr. James to help him learn how to navigate many of the difficult areas around Cedar Key.

V. Clam Industry Issues

Chris Topping proposed relocating leases from the Corrigan’s HDLA to a new area that would be more productive and easier to mark. The proposed area near Cedar Point has more than 100 contiguous acres but it comprises portions of two shellfish harvesting areas. David Heil indicated that, for management purposes, the Cedar Point HDLA would have to be divided to allow independent management of the portions in each separate HDLA. David added that the department would probably consider an acre for acre exchange for those Corrigan’s leaseholders that wanted to relocate, but that none of this can be done until the revisions to rule 18-21 F.A.C. are completed.

Task force members also discussed a wild clam set that has been reported in a very small area in the Mosquito Lagoon. David also provided information about the Brevard Co. Clam License which was created in the Laws of Florida and currently allows the sale of up to 400 licenses.

Task Force members expressed some concern regarding how a significant wild set could impact market prices and the economics of clam aquaculture.

VI. Joint Session with the Franklin County Oyster and Seafood Industry Task Force.

David Heil provided background information regarding the need to nominate someone to replace Dan Leonard as the Region 4 Industry Member on the ISSC Executive Board for the remainder of the term (approximately 5 months). This is a very important nomination because this board forms and directs policy for the ISSC. David also introduced Kevin Begos (Executive Director of the Franklin County Oyster & Seafood Industry Task Force) and provided that Florida's current ISSC Region 4 industry members have nominated Mr. Begos. Kevin introduced himself, provided information about his involvement with the Franklin County Oyster and Seafood Task Force, and expressed interest in serving for the remainder of the term as the Region 4 industry representative. Mr. Begos indicated that he would equally represent the interest of oyster and clam producers in the region. Several members of the Clam Task Force provided supporting comments for Mr. Begos' nomination, and requested that he stay in close communication with the Clam Task Force. Sue and Leslie agreed that the alternate position (currently filled by Tommy Ward) should probably be filled with a clam industry representative to provide a balance of representation.

Leslie Sturmer provided that the "Working Waterfront" legislation (Senate Bill 1468) by Senator Dean will provide very important tax relief to seafood and aquaculture facilities located in waterfront areas. Concerns have been raised that the bill may need changes to clarify that coastal, land based aquaculture facilities are included. Alan Peirce provided that Senator Dean clearly intends for the bill to cover these facilities and is very interested in knowing if industry believes changes to the bill are needed to clarify this intent. Leslie agreed to work with the Kathy Vogel to pursue any needed amendments to the bill.

David provided information regarding proposed rule amendments that could require a Special Activity License to stock clams or oysters on leases. Task force members agreed that this would be duplicative regulation and that a complete exemption is needed for aquaculture.

Alan Peirce discussed the Divisions Draft Tropical Storm and Hurricane Plan which is designed to provide improved statewide consistency regarding how shellfish harvesting areas will be managed during tropical storm warnings. Alan explained that the Department currently institutes a "temporary emergency closure" of all areas affected by a hurricane warning, but we have responded inconsistently to tropical storm warnings. Some offices have handled tropical storm warnings exactly like hurricane warnings, while others have allowed areas to remain in "open" status until management thresholds have been exceeded. Task Force members discussed the differences and recommended that the Department keep areas open during tropical storm warnings until management thresholds are actually exceeded. David provided that this option involves some additional risk of product recalls and provided such scenarios where that could happen.

VII. Public Comment

No additional topics were introduced via public comment.

VIII. Next Meeting

The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for June 3, 2009 and will be held at the Division of Aquaculture office in Bartow.

IX. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 1:15 pm.