



Red Tide Pilot Program a Qualified Success

A pilot red tide management plan permits selected shellfish processors to accept limited farm-raised hard clam harvest from identified aquaculture lease areas under specified conditions during a red tide closure of the shellfish harvesting area. Hard clams are placed under controlled quarantined at the shellfish processor until meat sample results indicate that they are safe to market or that they must be returned to the lease areas.



The pilot plan has been implemented four times during 2002 in the Gasparilla Sound Shellfish Harvesting area. Three of the four times, sample results indicated no toxicity and hard clams were sent to market. During the fourth event, meat sample results indicated low levels of biotoxin and the hard clams were returned to the lease areas.

Early results indicate that his pilot project can be successful in meeting the goal of allowing limited harvest of aquaculture hard clams during prolonged low level red tide events. The next steps will be to fully evaluate the pilot program, continue testing the program and then begin the process of amending existing Division rules to add the new procedure.

This plan is the result of communication and trust between the Division regulatory responsibilities and the hard clam aquaculture industry. Daniel Leonard with Bull Bay Clam Farm and Region IV Industry Representative to the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference Executive Board was instrumental in conceptualizing, developing and implementing this pilot plan.

For a copy of the pilot red tide management plan or additional information, contact David Heil, 850-488-5471.

Inside this issue:

Authorized User Form Explained	2
FDA Approves Shellfish Program	2
Shellfish Officer Appointed	3
Division Included in Budget Cuts	3
Environ. Toxicologist Hired	3
BMP Notes	3
"Restricted Species" Clarified	4



What is the “Authorized User Acknowledgement Form”?

What does it really mean when a signed and notarized “Aquaculture Certification Authorized User Acknowledgement” form is submitted to the Division?

This is a legal and binding agreement. As a **Leaseholder**, when you sign and notarize this form you have given a third party the right to culture clams on your lease. This right is given to an authorized user from the date of your signature until the following June 30th. This right can only be revoked prior to June 30th if both you, the leaseholder, and the authorized user mutually agree to cancel the agreement and the Division of Aquaculture is notified of this action. Neither sale nor transfer of the lease automatically revoke these terms.

As an **Authorized User**, your notarized signature on this form means that you are allowed to culture clams on a designated lease from the date of your signature until the following June 30th or until you decide to cease culturing at this par-

ticular site, which ever comes first. It is important to be aware that your right to use this lease expires on June 30th and a new Aquaculture Certification Authorized User Acknowledgement form should have already been signed to continue this agreement or, if not, you should have made arrangements to remove your clams from this lease site prior to June 30th. If the agreement is not extended you are not authorized to be working on this lease site.

To the **Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services** this agreement document means that an authorized user has permission from a lease holder to culture clams on the leaseholder’s submerged lands lease site. The Department then issues

the authorized user an Aquaculture Certification Card and Certificate with a unique number assigned to that specific user for use on that specific lease.

As long as you and the products you are culturing/harvesting/selling are identified by the Aquaculture Certification Number, the **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**, or any law enforcement agency, recognizes that you, the authorized user, are a certified aquaculturist producing agriculture products and that you have the right to be working on the water at that specific lease site or selling clams

harvested from the lease identified on the harvest tag.

Be aware of these conditions and obligations prior to entering into this agreement. If you have questions contact Kal Knickerbocker at the Division Office, 850-488-4033, or knicke@doacs.state.fl.us.

FDA Issues Report on Florida’s Shellfish Program

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has completed its rigorous Annual Program Evaluation Report for the Division’s Florida Shellfish Program (October 2001 through September 2002). The shellfish growing area and shellfish patrol programs were found to fully meet the requirements of the National Shellfish Sanitation Program. Shellfish, for the purposes of this program, are defined to include oysters, clams, mussels and scallops (filter feeding molluscs) and not shrimp, crabs or lobsters.

The Apalachicola Laboratory has corrected items FDA found to be nonconforming with the NSSP. The Lab completes approximately 16,000 water quality tests per year to determine whether any of the 38 shellfish management areas encompassing 1.1 million acres of coastal estuarine lands can be open for shellfish harvest. Water samples are collected daily by 12 shellfish specialists that work out of five offices: Apalachicola, Cedar Key, Murdock, Palm Bay and Panama City.

The shellfish processing plan sanitation program has instituted a FDA corrective action plan to assure that the

Division’s four inspectors are fully citing all violations in the plants. Last year approximately 500 inspections were completed in Florida’s 123 shellfish processing plants. The Division has recently equipped inspectors with laptop computers to provide plant management with an immediate report on deficiencies and corrective actions.

The shellfish patrol program is a cooperative effort between the Division of Aquaculture, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and the Department’s Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement. FDA determines whether each shellfish management area has sufficient FWC patrol frequency and 24-hour a day officer availability. FDA also assesses enforcement capability from the dock to plant to buyer. The Commissioner of Agriculture has recently dedicated personnel for this function (see article on page 3).

FDA is currently conducting evaluation activities for this year (October 2002 through September 2003).

Statewide Shellfish Enforcement Officer Named

The Commissioner of Agriculture, Charles H. Bronson, is pleased to announce the appointment of Dianna L. Ullery as a Law Enforcement Investigator responsible for shellfish theft, handling, processing and transportation issues. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) officers will continue to be responsible for patrol and enforcement on the water. The Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement will be responsible for enforcement of sanitary regulations related to landed shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels and scallops) from dock to processing plant to buyer.

Officer Ullery has been working in the Big Bend Region since 1999 and has established an office on Cedar Key in the FWCC Building. She is available to meet with shellfish producers throughout the state and is interested in attending industry meetings to learn more about shellfish production, meet industry members and to provide information concerning her enforcement responsibilities.

Shellfish producers can contact Officer Ullery via a toll-free phone number, 800-342-5869, or through a local phone number, 352-543-0615, or pager 877-353-7374 with pager ID 709-0584, or fax 352-543-6958, or e-mail ulleryd@doacs.state.fl.us.

Governor's Budget Recommends Division Elimination

Governor Jeb Bush announced his state budget recommendations for fiscal year 2003-04 on January 21st that are focused on Florida's key priorities during tough economic times. Amongst numerous recommendations impacting a wide variety of state programs a 10 percent cut in the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' programs was included. Four department programs were identified for elimination: Agricultural Water Policy, Apiary Inspection, Egg Classification and the Division of Aquaculture.

The Division was created in 1999 to carryout specific responsibilities that include: 1) shellfish harvesting, 2) shellfish handling, processing and distribution, 3) shellfish resource development, 4) submerged lands leasing, 5) aquaculture certificates of registration, and 6) aquaculture best management practices. These six responsibilities are described in Chapter 597, Florida Aquaculture Policy Act, Florida Statutes.

Please visit <http://www.ebudget.state.fl.us/> for a complete description of the Governor's budget.

Division Welcomes New Employee



The Division is pleased to announce the employment of Dr. Heidi Atwood as an environmental toxicologist. Dr. Atwood has a Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and a Master of Science and Doctorate in Environmental Toxicology from Clemson University. While at Clemson University she conducted toxicological and aquaculture related research on a variety of marine and freshwater species including southern flounder, black sea bass, cobia, Pacific white shrimp, Nile tilapia, and channel catfish. Her aquaculture related research with marine fish species involved developing culture parameters for production in near freshwater environments while research efforts with shrimp involved evaluating low salinity environments to determine the most cost effective combination of salts optimal for survival and growth. Dr. Atwood's experience includes both recirculating and partitioned aquaculture systems. Heidi is retired from the US Navy where she was trained as a radiation health and safety officer. Her last duty station was Naval Training Center, Orlando, Florida.



BMP Notes

Bivalve Health Documentation

Bivalves imported from out-of-state for aquacultural purposes must be accompanied by documentation from a recognized, licensed veterinarian certifying that the stock does not show clinical signs of any disease pathogen that may pose a threat to natural shellfish populations. Stock must be free of the following pathogens: Quahog Parasite Unknown (QPX) in clams; *Haplosporidium nelsoni* (MSX), and *Perkinsus marinus* (Dermo) in oysters. If future additional pathogens are identified as posing a threat to natural stocks, this list may be updated.

Pathogen testing must take place at the point of origin. If the testing is completed after delivery to your farm, it is a BMP violation and there is a significant risk of compromising the health of your crop.

If you have a question about BMPs, call or send them to Kal Knickerbocker, 850-410-0875 or knickek@doacs.state.fl.us.

FWCC Clarifies “Restricted Species”

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) has approved a new reef fish rule, Chapter 68B-14, Florida Administrative Code, for the purposes of protecting and replenishing Florida’s reef fish by imposing minimum size limits, recreational bag limits, and gear restrictions. Forty-one different amberjacks, groupers, sea basses, snappers and other fish have been listed. The Division requested clarification on the use of the term “restricted” in Commission statutes and rules. The Commission responded with a letter stating that the agency defines “restricted species” in two ways.

The Commission uses the term “restricted” to define nonindigenous fish that may be permitted to be brought into the state. This definition is found in Rule 68A-23.008(2), F.A.C. as “restricted non-native species.” Florida’s aquaculture Best Management Practices reference this definition and rule and require a

letter of authorization and specific management and farm design requirements to commercially culture a variety of non-native fish, crustacean and mollusc species.

The term “restricted species” is also defined by the Commission in Section 370.02(21), Florida Statutes, to mean “any species of saltwater products which the state by law, or the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission by rule, has found it necessary to designate.” Designation as restricted species means that persons harvesting such species for commercial purposes must meet certain minimal income requirements in order to be licensed for such harvest, under Section 370.06, Florida Statutes.

The new Commission rule, Chapter 68B-14, F.A.C., is not intended to apply to reef fish produced by a certified aquaculture producer and as reinforced in Section 370.027, F.S., such fish “are exempt from Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission resource management rules.”

The additional information please contact Kal Knickerbocker, 850-488-4033 or knicke@doacs.state.fl.us.

Division of Aquaculture

The Division of Aquaculture’s primary responsibilities include certifying all legitimate aquaculturists through an annual registration, implementing a program of Aquaculture Best Management Practices to meet the State of Florida’s environmental goals, managing 1.4 million acres of coastal waters for the harvest or culture of wholesome shellfish, implementing the National Shellfish Sanitation Program through periodic inspection of shellfish processing plants and product, and issuing submerged sovereign land leases for aquacultural purposes.

The aquaculture and shellfish industry can acquire assistance through a variety of means. The Division can be contacted by telephone, 850-488-4033 and 488-5471, or fax 850-410-0893. Tallahassee and the seven state offices are open five days a week from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Offices are located in Apalachicola, Bartow, Cedar Key, Murdock, Orlando, Palm Bay and Panama City. Internet users can visit the Division’s web site at <http://www.FloridaAquaculture.com> for industry and program information.

Florida Department of Agriculture and
Consumer Services
Division of Aquaculture
1203 Governor’s Square Blvd., 5th Floor
Tallahassee, FL 32301

PRSRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
FLORIDA DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE &
CONSUMER SERVICES