

D R A F T  
AMENDMENT #4 TO THE  
FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN  
FOR  
SURF CLAMS AND OCEAN QUAHOGS

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Prepared by the  
New England Fishery Management Council  
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National Marine Fisheries Service  
in Cooperation with the  
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This document amends the Surf Clam/Ocean Quahog Fishery Management Plan by increasing the New England area surf clam fishery maximum annual quota from 100,000 bushels to 200,000 bushels based on improved assessment information. The amendment is consistent with the exploitation strategy employed in the Mid-Atlantic resource area. The amendment also specifies the management measures to be implemented by the Regional Director in consultation with the New England Council to control the harvest rate so that it remains in line with the temporal distribution of the traditional New England fishery harvests. The sole reason for controlling the rate of harvest is to avoid an extended closure of the fishery such as the one which occurred in 1983.

The Surf Clam/Ocean Quahog Fishery Management Plan was approved by NOAA on November 21, 1977. Amendment 1 was approved by NOAA on October 1, 1979. Amendment 2 was approved by NOAA on January 1, 1980, and removed the New England resource area from under the existing Mid-Atlantic limited entry program. Amendment 3 was approved by NOAA on November 13, 1981, and authorized the Regional Director to implement a management program tailored to the New England fishery once fifty percent of the quota was harvested.

The original and current objectives of the Surf Clam/Ocean Quahog Fishery Management Plan are:

1. Rebuild the surf clam populations to allow eventual harvest
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approaching the 50 million pound level, which is the estimate of maximum sustainable yield over the range of the resource, based on the average yearly catch from 1960 to 1976.

2. Minimize short-term economic dislocations to the extent possible consistent with objective 1.
3. Prevent the harvest of ocean quahogs from exceeding maximum sustainable yield and direct the fishery toward achieving Optimum Yield.
4. Provide the greatest degrees of freedom and flexibility to all harvesters of these resources consistent with the attainment of the other objectives of this plan.
5. Optimize yield per recruit.
6. Increase understanding of the conditions of the stocks and fishery.

This amendment to the Surf Clam Fishery Management Plan is designed to allow some progress in the direction of achieving objectives 3, 4 and 6, and is consistent with the remaining objectives.

## II. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of this amendment is to increase the New England area surf clam fishery maximum quota from 100,000 bushels to 200,000 bushels and to implement management measures in an attempt to control the harvest rate so that it remains in line with traditional New England fishery practices and to avoid an extended closure of the fishery such as the one which occurred in 1983.

Amendment 3 to the Surf Clam/Ocean Quahog Fishery Management Plan allowed for an annual surf clam quota of 25,000 to 100,000 bushels in the New England area. Amendment 3 also provides that when fifty percent of the New England quota has been caught, the Regional Director, on review of available information and public comment, will determine whether the total catch of surf clams during the remainder of the year will exceed the annual quota. If the Regional Director determines that the quota probably will be exceeded, the Secretary of Commerce may reduce the number of days per week, or establish authorized periods, during which fishing for surf clams is permitted, or he may take no action until the quota is achieved.

In 1983, the New England quota for surf clams was 100,000 bushels. By April 1, 1983, fifty percent of the quota was harvested; and the Regional Director, acting under the authority of Amendment 3 and in consultation with the New England Council, reduced fishing time to 12 hours per week in an attempt to control fishery harvests. According to logbook records and the