

**AMENDMENT #5 TO THE  
FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN  
FOR ATLANTIC SURF CLAM AND OCEAN QUAHOG FISHERIES**

**August 1984**

**Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council**

**in cooperation with the**

**National Marine Fisheries Service**

**and the**

**New England Fishery Management Council**

**Draft adopted by MAFMC: 21 June 1984 and 1 August 1984  
Final adopted by MAFMC: 13 September 1984**

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## II. SUMMARY

This Amendment to the Surf Clam and Ocean Quahog Fishery Management Plan (FMP) is intended to revise the surf clam minimum size limit provision to minimize discarding necessary to comply with the current size limit. The FMP currently contains a 5.5" minimum surf clam size limit in the Mid-Atlantic Area. Amendment #4, when implemented, will extend the size limit to the New England Area. The regulations implementing the FMP set a tolerance on the size limit in that 10% of the cages on board a vessel (at least 1 cage) may be reserved from inspection and no more than 240 clams in the remaining cages may be under 5.5", the effect being a combined tolerance of about 19%. When the size limit provision was developed it was understood that it was necessary to tradeoff against conflicting goals. The 5.5" size was considered optimum in terms of the value of the product although maximum yield per recruit (YPR) is 4.75". Clams in any bed generally are mixed in size, so that even the most competent fishermen will catch smaller clams. Therefore, a tolerance was considered necessary to minimize discarding. Discarding was considered wasteful since a considerable portion (perhaps 50-60%) of the discarded clams probably die. The current distribution of the stock has led to discard rates of up to 50% to meet the 5.5" size limit with the current tolerance. This level is considered unacceptable.

The management unit is all surf clams (Spisula solidissima) and all ocean quahogs (Arctica islandica) in the Atlantic FCZ. The objectives of the FMP are:

1. Rebuild the surf clam populations to allow eventual harvest 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 economic dislocation to the extent possible consistent with objective 1 and encourage efficiency in the fishery.
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.

The FMP currently states: "No person shall harvest or possess surf clams smaller than 5.5" in length". This Amendment would change that provision to read:

There is a surf clam minimum size limit. After consultation with the Council and opportunity for public comment, the Regional Director shall adjust, by increments no less than 0.25", the surf clam minimum size limit to a value less than 5.5" as necessary, so that discards on average do not exceed 30% of the trip catch. In no event shall the size limit be less than 4.75". When data indicate the clams have grown sufficiently, the limit would be increased, ultimately reaching the 5.5" limit. There is a tolerance of 240 undersized clams per cage but no more than 50 clams per cage under 4.75". If any cage is in violation of the size limit, the entire load is in violation. In adjusting the size limit the Regional Director shall consider current stock assessments, catch reports, and other relevant information concerning the size distribution of the surf clam resource. No person shall harvest or possess surf clams smaller than the minimum size limit.

The Amendment also adds the requirement that all surf clam cages must be tagged before leaving the vessel and that tags may not be removed until cages are emptied at the processing plant. Also, the Amendment adds the provision that all surf clams landed on an authorized FCZ fishing day are assumed to have been caught in the FCZ and are subject to the Federal size limit.

### III. TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. TITLE PAGE .....	1
II. SUMMARY .....	2
III. TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	3
IV. INTRODUCTION .....	4
V. DESCRIPTION OF STOCK .....	7
VI. DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT .....	12
VII. FISHERY MANAGEMENT JURISDICTION, LAWS, AND POLICIES .....	13
VIII. DESCRIPTION OF FISHING ACTIVITIES .....	13
IX. DESCRIPTION OF ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FISHERY .....	18
X. DESCRIPTION OF BUSINESSES, MARKETS, AND ORGANIZATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE FISHERY .....	21
XI. DESCRIPTION OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FRAMEWORK OF DOMESTIC FISHERMEN AND THEIR COMMUNITIES .....	21
XII. DETERMINATION OF OPTIMUM YIELD .....	21
XIII. MEASURES, REQUIREMENTS, CONDITIONS OR RESTRICTIONS SPECIFIED TO ATTAIN MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES .....	26
XIV. SPECIFICATION AND SOURCE OF PERTINENT FISHERY DATA .....	27
XV. RELATIONSHIP OF THE PLAN TO EXISTING APPLICABLE LAWS AND POLICIES .....	27
XVI. COUNCIL REVIEW AND MONITORING OF THE PLAN .....	30
XVII. REFERENCES .....	30
XVIII. TABLES AND FIGURES .....	31

### APPENDICES

I. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (yellow paper) .....	EA 1
II. REGULATORY IMPACT REVIEW (green paper) .....	RIR 1
III. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC HEARINGS AND WRITTEN COMMENTS (white paper) .....	APP III 1
IV. PROPOSED REGULATIONS (blue paper) .....	PR 1
V. ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS (white paper) .....	APP V 1