

Mixed Surfclams and Ocean Quahogs Proposed Amendment for the SCOQ FMP

There is a provision in the SCOQ FMP that does not allow both species of clams to be landed on the same trip. That provision was placed in the plan when surfclams were in short supply and demand was high. At that time there was a concern that Surfclams would be landed on a Quahog trip and not be counted. Today, there is more clam quota in both fisheries than there is demand and therefore, there is no advantage to mislabel the catch. If a company were to consider the risk to reward for mislabeling clam species the penalties are so severe that no one in their right mind would consider it. The mixed clam issues are as follows.

- NMFS clam survey, two summers ago, found that there has been a large set of surfclams in water depths of 120 feet and greater, from VA to Hudson Canyon. 120 feet is where the quahogs population used to start.
- The Quahog area south of Hudson canyon had been fished down, but, 25 to 50 percent of the Quahogs are still there. Now, there is a surfclam set on top of the remaining quahogs.
- The survey dredge is closed up and is able to catch small surfclams and quahogs.
- By the time that surfclams are large enough to harvest they will take up more space in a cage than the quahogs.
- Surfclams are about twice as valuable as quahogs. So catching them in high numbers on an old quahog bed will become necessary.
- When the surfclams are large enough to harvest it is not going to be possible to pick the mixed quahogs out of the catch by hand.
- Industry will need to develop a sorter or grader to separate the two clams t sea.
- It is understood that even with sorting equipment not all of the quahogs will be sorted out of the surfclams catch.
- Southeast of Long Island the situation is reverse, the quahog vessels are now seeing surfclams mixed in their catch.
- The industry suggest a fixed number be allowed in a cage of the other clam species be set i.e. 250 non targeted clams, any number over that number would be a violation.
- The processing plants do not want both species mixed in a cage. Mixed clams cause them large problems.
- The question is what to do with the clams that are not the target species?
 - Running the non-targeted clams overboard is not a best business practice and will lead to unnecessary mortality.
 - Industry would run the clams into separate cages and to be able to land both species on the same trip.
 - Vessel would report the numbers of cages for both species.
 - The cages would be separated by species on the vessel.
 - Each cage would be tagged with the appropriate species tag.
 - There would be two bills of lading, one for each species.
 - Both vessel and plant would report the landings of both.
 - It is possible that the two species could go to different shucking plants. Hand shucking surfclam plants cannot handle ocean quahogs.
 - There are currently only three shucking plants that can process both species.

The clam industry has had eight amendments to the SCOQ FMP since amendment 8, all of which took something rights away from them. The industry itself has not asked for any changes to the regulations since amendment 8 went into effect 27 years ago.

The proposed separation regulation is needed to allow the industry to be viable in the future when these young surfclams reach commercial size. It take a very long time to amend a FMP, and in the industry's option this amendment needs to start now.

It should also be noted that landing multiple species is not a new idea, most finfish catches are many species and most are retained. This is not a precedent setting proposal.

The SCOQ FMP is considered, if not the best, then one of the best managed FMP in the U. S. The MAFMC had great pride in their first management plan because it was a model for the rest of the country. No one could have forecast 40 years ago international climate change, but it is happening. Now the clam industry needs flexibility to better cope with the changes of a warming ocean. The industry has demonstrated that they can manage their fishery within the regulations, now they need the regulons changed to deal with the reality of climate change.

The industry will help in every way possible to move this amendment forward and it can be done quickly because the industry will help getting it done.

This request is made by the following clam companies;

Atlantic Capes, Cape May, New Jersey

LA Monica Find Foods, Millville, New Jersey

Surfside Foods, Port Norris, New Jersey

Truex Enterprise, clam supplier to Sea Watch International, Manahawkin, New Jersey