Proceedings of the Third Rhode Island Shellfisheries Conference

Narragansett, Rhode Island
August 18, 1994
Proceedings of the
Third Rhode Island Shellfish Industry Conference

Held at the
University of Rhode Island Bay Campus
Narragansett, Rhode Island
August 18, 1994

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Foreword

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This third Rhode Island Shellfish Industry Conference—now a biannual event—follows up on the conferences held in August of 1990 and 1992. These previous conferences focused on topics of the greatest concern to the shellfishing industry, particularly water quality issues and the management of shellfish stocks in areas of Rhode Island’s coastal waters that are certified for shellfishing. There are three main topics of this conference: the current status of quahog stocks in key fishing areas in Narragansett Bay; the economic and marketing trends for quahogs; and the pitfalls and opportunities of aquaculture as a means of maintaining our state’s share of shellfish markets.

The crisis in Rhode Island’s shellfisheries that was evident in the early 1990s has only deepened. There is evidence that fewer than half of the full-time professional quahoggers that worked the Bay in the 1980s are still in business. The total catch from Narragansett Bay has dropped substantially, and market prices for quahogs have remained at their lowest levels since the 1970s. Although catch per fisherman is not particularly poor, the shellfishermen that choose to remain in the fishery are working longer hours for considerably less pay. As with the previous conferences, our aim is to provide information for fishermen who must make tough decisions about their own economic well-being, as well as to provide information germane to the management of these very important publicly held shellfish resources.

As part of this conference, two studies will be presented that are direct results of suggestions made at the 1992 shellfish industry conference. Najih Lazar, Arthur Ganz, and April Valliere of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management present the results of their 1993 summer study of standing crop quahog populations in Greenwich Bay. Also, Joseph Goncalo and I present our data on the bivalve larval abundances in Greenwich Bay during that same summer. Greenwich Bay recently resumed its status as a prime fishing area once nagging pollution closure problems were resolved. Hopefully, resources can be made available so that studies of this type can be expanded to larger areas of Narragansett Bay.

This volume presents the papers and discussions that took place at the third Rhode Island Shellfish Industry Conference, held at the University of Rhode Island’s Narragansett Bay Campus on August 18, 1994. This conference is successful only because of the input and support of the steering committee and institutional sponsors. I wish to thank the steering committee—Gerald Carvalho, Arthur Ganz, Neal Perry, and Robert Rheault—for their suggestions of topics and speakers. I also wish to thank our institutional cosponsors—the Rhode Island Shellfishermen’s Association, the Rhode Island Shellfish Divers Association, Ocean State Aquaculture Association, Rhode Island Sea Grant, and Rhode Island Cooperative Extension—for their full support of this conference.
Industry Welcome

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning. Before we get into the problems of the shellfishing industry, I would like to briefly describe the association that I am currently presiding over. We have been around since 1978. There have been a number of industry organizations that have formed for a single purpose, and have ceased functioning. We have been plodding along for 16 years now, and I believe that we have accomplished a great many things. We have been called a "one-issue association" at times, but we have a recent 10-page report that outlines many of our accomplishments. I invite all who are interested to see me so that I can provide them with a copy. We try to promote shellfish from Narragansett Bay to anyone who will listen. We go to festivals throughout Rhode Island, we have given talks to children in their classrooms, we have taken people out onto Narragansett Bay, we've held social functions, and we have been active in the political process. Additionally, we have been active in the Greenwich Bay bond issue and cleanup program. We feel that we had a major role in the passing of the $13.5 million Greenwich Bay bond issue. We were also active in the World Prodigy oil spill issue. We have been a part of a great many good things on the Bay, and I see our role as good stewards of the Bay, or working environmentalists.

The problems we have on the Bay are numerous. We have a diminishing shellfish capacity on the Bay, and our dollar value is sinking down to nothing. Right now, I believe the main thrust of this conference will be aquaculture. More than ever before, there is now a tremendous opportunity to get money from the federal government in the form of the various aquaculture bills, and fisheries disaster relief. These funds can be used wisely by incorporating the scientific knowledge that many of the aquaculturists have, along with potential money for transplants to utilize our vast shellfish resources in uncertified waters. Funding for transplants creates "instant money." I do not know of any other shellfish program where a 10 cent investment will create over $2 in harvestable product. We recently had a transplant opening on Greenwich Bay with a goal of 1 million pounds. Working two hours a day for seven days, nearly 750,000 pounds were moved. The value of this product was somewhere between $3 million and $4 million. This is not a bad return. We have the opportunity now to do our aquaculture and do our transplants. If things are worked out properly, amicable solutions can be proposed to accommodate everybody. I believe that the next three or four years will be a very exciting time for the industry, if the opportunity is there and we take it.
Overview of Rhode Island Marine Outreach Programs

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This conference—with participation from the industry and state and federal agencies—exemplifies a typical audience for outreach education at the University of Rhode Island (URI). My role today is to spend a short time telling you about the nature, value, and philosophy of the programs and the people involved in outreach education. I want to impress on you our sincere desire to be of assistance to you to provide information and help. We sincerely believe that we don’t fit the negative connotation of the expression, “We’re from the government, and we’re here to help,” even though a considerable portion of our funding for outreach activities is received from the federal government.

The mandate for marine outreach programs at URI has two origins. The first of these goes back to the Morrill Act of 1862, which created the Land Grant universities. URI is Rhode Island’s Land Grant university, and has been since its origin in 1892. Land Grant colleges were designed to educate the families of the working class, while addressing research needs for the agricultural and industrial sector of an expanding, dynamic country. The outreach programs of the Land Grant universities, such as URI, began early, but became official when the Cooperative Extension was established by the Smith-Lever Act in 1914. Cooperative Extension has remained active in Rhode Island and continues today. However, it no longer serves only farmers and homemakers, but a much broader group of Rhode Island citizens. Some of our marine outreach programs are funded in part by federal Cooperative Extension funds, and we are proud of these outreach activities, and we hope you are as well.

In my generation, another program has came into being: the Sea Grant program. In 1969, URI was named a Sea Grant university, one of the original group of universities with this designation. The Sea Grant program has its own outreach program called the Marine Advisory Service. In some states, the Marine Advisory Service is under the same administration as Cooperative Extension. In Rhode Island, the two programs are administered separately, but have developed a very close working relationship. Federal and state funds from both Cooperative Extension and Marine Advisory pay for salaries and program support, in an atmosphere of cooperation with a single mission. That mission is to provide the most effective marine programs based on the assessed needs of our clientele. You in this audience are part of that clientele.

How does marine outreach education occur at URI through Marine Advisory and Cooperative Extension? As mentioned earlier, we have an obligation to assess the need for a program. We work most effectively when there is an audience in need of information that we have the expertise to provide. Information is most commonly provided through workshops, demonstration projects, fact sheets, and one-to-one contacts. It is the responsibility of outreach personnel to be cognizant of the educational need
and make a decision on how to best deliver the information. The best way to deliver information depends on the nature of the clientele, the nature of the information, and the nature of the need. This workshop is an example of an outreach education effort put on by Marine Advisory and Extension personnel. We will let each of you evaluate how effective we have been.

One feature of the marine outreach programs is that they are based upon research findings. Often this research is carried out right here at the university, often by the very same personnel that conduct the outreach program. Often, the ideas for research projects come directly from the clientele we serve. Other times, information comes from wherever it is available. Modern computer linkages, such as Internet, make information transfer rapid and responsive to need, regardless of its source. We cooperate and share information with all of the other Land Grant and Sea Grant institutions in New England and the Northeast.

A final feature of URI's outreach program is that programming is almost always done cooperatively. For example, our very successful Fishing Vessel Safety program is cooperative with the U.S. Coast Guard; fishing gear design programs in cooperation with the National Marine Fisheries Service; harbormaster training with individual towns and cities; seafood safety education in conjunction with the Rhode Island Seafood Council; shellfish and finfish restoration cooperatively with the Department of Environmental Management (DEM); aquaculture initiatives with industry representation (e.g., the Ocean State Aquaculture Association) and DEM; water quality and environmental education with town councils, DEM, the Coastal Resources Management Council, citizen groups, etc. A glance at the list of speakers and responders at this conference is illustrative of the active cooperation of a multitude of public and private agencies and organizations. We're proud of this cooperation, and it is important that we continue, and seek out all stakeholders on an issue.

Before I relinquish the podium this morning, I want to address one last feature of URI's marine outreach programs. In all of the programs mentioned, there is the potential for differing opinions and for conflict. We know we address a diverse audience, but we must always recognize that we serve clientele with different needs and different perspectives on topics. Because we value the breadth of our audience, we must be diligent in how we participate in policy decisions and public-issues education. We strive to be as bias-free as possible. We feel that we can best serve policymakers and the general public by a strong commitment to objectivity. This is not an easy task, nor is our approach always free of controversy. However, we must not disengage and be "shrinking violets" with respect to issues. When controversies are raging is often the time when objective information is most desperately needed. There is a greater potential for progress and mutual respect when we actively work to resolve conflicts.

Finally, in my role as director of Cooperative Extension at URI, I would be very interested in any comments you may have. On behalf of all of the dedicated marine outreach personnel at URI, I wish to express the desire and hope that we are keeping the needs of all the people of Rhode Island first and foremost in our minds. Thank you.