Massachusetts Ocean Partnership

Partners Meeting: Aquaculture Statement, Boston, MA

10 February 2009

Dr. Joseph K. Buttner
Northeastern Massachusetts Aquaculture Center and
Department of Biology
Salem State College
Salem, MA 01970
jbuttner@salemstate.edu, 978-542-6703

The Ocean Management Planning initiative was established as a charge contained in Chapter 114 of the Acts of 2008 by the Massachusetts Senate and House of Representatives. As an integral product of the Act "the Massachusetts Ocean Partnership (MOP) is a broadly representative, independent public-private partnership created specifically to advance ecosystem-based integrated multi-use management of the Commonwealth's coastal ocean waters." MOP has planned and scheduled a series of stakeholder meetings as forums to identify and explore potential uses of the Commonwealth's coastal waters. One potentially appropriate use is aquaculture. As observed by the Massachusetts Aquaculture Association at the 7 February 2009 meeting, "potential beneficial outcomes from OMP would include: clarification and establishment of aquaculture's role in ocean management. Aquaculture gaining an equal footing as other users in the management plan." The MAA also noted that potential conflicts, unnecessarily restrictive access or bureaucracy, and missed opportunities could be "alleviated by inviting aquaculture to a seat at the table in the planning and review processes."

Aquaculture as practiced in Massachusetts represents a "green" and growing industry, the aquatic equivalent of terrestrial agriculture and integral to our food security.. Most aquaculture currently pursued in coastal waters of Massachusetts targets bivalve mollusks as private, public and public/private endeavors. Efforts may be characterized as commercial, restoration and/or enhancement. Net effect of all pursuits is the production of high quality food for local markets. As bivalves ingest microscopic organisms and organic debris, they remove excessive nutrients from our coastal waters and sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as bicarbonates dissolved in ocean waters are incorporated into shells. Beyond the ecological benefits, aquaculture perpetuates a working water front and fishing tradition; creating jobs and generating revenue while perpetuating important Massachusetts and New England traditions. According to the just released U.S. Census of Agriculture 2007, aquaculturists have made our state the seventh largest producer of mollusks nationally, worth $11.2 million to growers.

Aquaculture of bivalve mollusks and potentially other species (e.g., finfish, algae, crustaceans) represents a legitimate and important option in coastal waters of Massachusetts. If carefully located and wisely managed, aquaculture can not only prove sustainable, it can improve water quality and ensure a local, dependable supply of safe, high quality seafood while generating and keeping jobs here in Massachusetts. We sincerely hope that you concur with our assessment and afford aquaculture the opportunity to blossom and realize its potential in Massachusetts' waters.