



# *The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

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## **MASSACHUSETTS RE-OPENS PRODUCTIVE SHELLFISH AREAS** **AFFECTED BY RED TIDE ON SOUTH SHORE AND CAPE COD**

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs Secretary Ellen Roy Herzfelder today announced that the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) has lifted restrictions on the harvesting of some shellfish species in certain shellfish growing areas in the towns of Duxbury, Plymouth, Kingston, Bourne, Wareham, Wellfleet, and Chatham.

“I am pleased to announce that these areas will be open to shellfishing and aquaculture operations over the Independence Day holiday weekend,” said Secretary Herzfelder. “While most of Massachusetts coastal waters remain closed to shellfishing due to red tide, the bloom has receded and lab testing has indicated these particular areas are now safe to open for the harvest of certain shellfish.”

Testing conducted by the Division of Marine Fisheries has demonstrated that certain shellfish species in the newly opened areas are safe for consumption. The DMF notified town officials today and is coordinating the openings in shellfish areas with the town shellfish constables and the Massachusetts Environmental Police. **The harvest of surf clams, ocean quahogs, and carnivorous snails remains prohibited in the newly opened areas.**

“This action is a great boon to recreational diggers who can take this opportunity to harvest shellfish over the holiday weekend and for commercial shellfishermen and aquaculture operators in those towns who will now have most of the summer to harvest and sell shellfish,” said David Peters, Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game. “It is important for recreational and commercial shellfish harvesters to check with local authorities before digging, especially during times like these when some areas are safe to harvest, while others remain off limits.”

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The DMF is responsible for testing and classifying all shellfish growing areas in Massachusetts, and works closely with coastal cities and towns, who post areas as open or closed and are largely responsible for enforcement of shellfish laws through town shellfish constables. The Massachusetts Environmental Police also patrol shellfish flats in the Commonwealth and will be actively patrolling both open and closed shellfish areas to make sure that diggers are obeying the law.

“This is a limited opening, with the harvest of surf clams, ocean quahogs, and carnivorous snails still prohibited even in these newly opened areas,” said Paul Diodati, Director of the Division of Marine Fisheries. “It is not unusual for our agency to classify some areas as open while others remain closed, nor is it uncommon for certain species to remain off limits to harvest. The public can remain confident that shellfish sold in markets and restaurants is safe for consumption, as these businesses are inspected regularly by the Department of Public Health and the Environmental Police and must purchase their product from licensed commercial diggers who are aware of the stringent laws.”

The areas opened on Friday, July 1<sup>st</sup> represent only a small percentage of the total areas that are still closed due to the red tide. However, those areas that were opened are especially productive. For example, the area around Monomoy Island in Chatham accounts for close to 50 percent of the value of soft-shelled clams harvested in Massachusetts each year. Wellfleet Harbor is responsible for about half of the state’s aquaculture harvest, mostly oysters and quahogs, and is an important wild shellfish area as well. Duxbury Harbor is a valuable aquaculture area, and the area in Bourne is a popular recreational fishery.

While it is difficult to forecast further openings, the DMF expects that more areas will become open to harvest next week, mostly on the South Shore and on Cape Cod. Areas on the North Shore may remain closed longer as higher levels of toxin still exist in sampled shellfish. The DMF is dedicating all available resources to the biotoxin monitoring effort.

**Officials want to remind all shellfish diggers that shellfish should never be harvested from closed areas as consumption of contaminated shellfish can cause serious illness or even death.** Red tide is a toxic algae that accumulates in shellfish and causes paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) when consumed by humans. After ingestion, this toxin immediately affects the nervous system, with symptoms usually occurring within 30 minutes. Initial reactions are tingling of the lips and tongue, which spreads to the face, neck, fingertips and toes. Headache, dizziness and nausea follow. Severity depends on the amount of toxin consumed. These symptoms may be mistaken for drunken conditions and are further aggravated by alcohol consumption. In severe cases, muscular paralysis and respiratory difficulty may occur within five to 12 hours.

**Detailed, official notices and a map showing all of the closed areas and the particulars about the new openings are available on the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries WEB site at:**

**[http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dmf/programsandprojects/psp\\_notice.htm#shelsani](http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dmf/programsandprojects/psp_notice.htm#shelsani)**

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