



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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January 6, 2023

Marine Fisheries Advisory

DMF to Hold Virtual Scoping Meeting with Shellfish Dealers on Expanding Bulk Tagging Allowances for Harvesters

For 2023, the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) is considering a pilot program to authorize any shellfish aquaculturist to bulk tag market bound shellfish. Currently, only shellfish aquaculturists who are also wholesale dealers (“grower-dealers”) may bulk tag market bound shellfish taken from their licensed aquaculture grant site to their wholesale dealer facility. Prior to developing the framework to initiate such a program, DMF is inviting all shellfish dealers who purchase or intend to purchase cultured product directly from shellfish aquaculturists to participate in a virtual scoping meeting. The meeting is scheduled for 6PM on January 19, 2023 and will be held via Zoom. Please use this [link](#) to register for this scoping meeting and obtain login information.

If DMF were to adopt this bulk tagging pilot program, much of the responsibility for maintaining lot integrity and traceability would fall on the seafood dealer receiving the product from the commercial shellfish aquaculturist. Accordingly, input from the seafood dealer sector is critical to informing decision making on the pilot program. This virtual meeting will provide an opportunity for seafood dealers to hear from DMF—as well as officials from the Department of Public Health’s Food Protection Program and the Massachusetts Environmental Police—regarding how such a pilot program may be structured, implemented, and enforced, and for seafood dealers to provide feedback to these state agencies.

The National Shellfish Sanitation Program’s Model Ordinance requires the tagging of shellstock throughout commerce to allow for the product to be traceable from harvester to consumer. In the event of a shellfish related illness, tagging plays a critical role in determining the origin of the product and aiding in potential recalls. In order for shellfish to be sold into interstate commerce, shellfish producing states must adopt a shellfish management program that conforms to these federal requirements. At present, DMF requires all commercial shellfish harvesters to tag each individual container of market bound shellfish, with an exception for grower-dealers. Bulk tagging is a practice whereby a harvester may affix a single shellfish tag to a lot (e.g., tote, wrapped pallet) of market bound shellfish, rather than each individual container.

Some commercial harvesters have expressed a strong and persistent interest in bulk tagging, as it allows their operations to become more cost and time efficient by reducing the frequency of

tagging. However, there remain concerns that bulk tagging may weaken the efficacy of the shellfish tagging program by increasing the likelihood untagged shellfish enter commerce or that shellfish become co-mingled. Accordingly, the Massachusetts' Shellfish Advisory Panel has requested DMF explore potential opportunities to expand bulk shellfish tagging allowances for commercial shellfish harvesters. At this time, DMF is considering a bulk tagging pilot program for shellfish aquaculturists only and is not considering a similar program for wild harvesters.

For more information about this stakeholder meetings, please contact Jared Silva (jared.silva@mass.gov; 508-742-9737)