

THE 2002 FISHERY

Preseason Planning

A public meeting for prospective diggers was held on March 19 at South Bend to discuss the upcoming commercial razor clam season. Representatives from the Department of Health, and WDFW Licensing were in attendance along with fishery managers to provide fishers “one-stop shopping”. License application materials were provided, questions about the season schedule, and concerns about domoic acid were addressed.

To facilitate communication with harvesters, a “hotline” based out of the Region 6 office was again established to provide commercial razor clam fishery and biotoxin sampling information.

Season and Landings

Preseason biotoxin sampling indicated very low levels of domoic acid. Accordingly, the commercial fishery opened Sunday, May 11, 2002. Throughout the season, digging was exceptionally good; a daily average of 5,700 pounds was landed during the first seven days of the season. Total pounds landed for the season was 119,777. The clams were generally large; average length from samples collected during the fishery in June was 5.3 inches.

The price paid for the razor clams ranged from \$1.00 to \$1.25 per pound. The majority of these clams were frozen for use as bait in the commercial Dungeness crab fishery. Nine commercial companies were certified by WDOH and 105 resident licenses were issued by WDFW. Buyers and harvesters were primarily from Pacific and Grays Harbor Counties.

Management actions taken in 2002 were mainly to address marketing concerns. The strong harvest of clams overwhelmed buying capacity at times. To ensure that diggers had sufficient numbers of certified buyers available, the requirement that diggers could only sell to two different buyers was suspended. Many diggers needed this flexibility as some buyers quit purchasing clams. Despite the record harvest, clam abundance did not appear to diminish and some diggers expressed an interest in extending the season. However, most buyers had reached or would soon reach their storage and/or retail capacity and indicated they would no longer continue to purchase razor clams. The season closed as scheduled on June 30, 2002. Response to the closure was positive, and even diggers wanting the extension accepted the need to close.

Biotoxin Sampling

Sampling for biotoxins began in April 2002 in anticipation that the commercial fishery season would start in May (Figure 5). Samples were collected from three different sites on the Willapa Spits. Two of the sites were on unnamed spits; the third was located on Gunpowder Spit. Routine biotoxin sampling was conducted through the season. Low levels of domoic acid throughout the season allowed the fishery to run uninterrupted. In

light of the low levels, the number of sample sites was reduced to one to lower sampling and processing costs.

One “extra” sample was collected on May 11. High concentrations of pseudonitzchia (domoic acid producing phytoplankton species) had been detected during routine sampling of coastal ocean waters prompting concerns that domoic acid levels may have increased. Results from clams collected at the spit confirmed very low levels of domoic acid were present in clam tissue.

Figure 5. Commercial Razor Clam Fishery Biotoxin Results, 2002.

