



**Rhode Island Shellfisherman's Association, Inc.**  
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**Testimony of the Rhode Island Shellfisherman's Association before the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee in support of H 8133**

March 31, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair Bennett and Committee Members,

The Rhode Island Shellfisherman's Association (RISA) represents more than 100 member shellfishermen and is "dedicated to the improvement of the working conditions of shellfishermen in RI, to the enhancement and preservation of Narragansett Bay, and the promotion of shellfish products." Our testimony today is in strong support of H 8133 that would establish a modest, long-term revenue source to provide dedicated funding for shellfish transplants to help sustain the shellfish industry. Increasing quahog transplant and seeding programs was a primary recommendation in the final May 2024 report of the Joint Special Legislative Commission to Study and Provide Recommendations on the Issues Relating to the Reduced Catch of Quahogs in Narragansett Bay.

Implementation of H 8133 will provide critically needed funding to address the recommendation and meet one of three goals established in the Joint Quahog Commission's 2024 report. The proposed legislation will assign a very modest assessment fee of one cent (\$0.01) per every ten thousand (10,000) gallons of wastewater treatment facility effluent discharge. For example, the assessment fee would be about \$23,725 annually for the Narragansett Bay Commission's Field's Point facility, the State's largest wastewater effluent discharge at 65 million gallons per day. RISA has analyzed the potential fee totals for other wastewater treatment facilities as shown in our February 4, 2026 report below. In summary, the proposed wastewater discharge fee would provide a minimum of approximately \$64,000 annually and would greatly help to sustain long-term quahog transplant funding resources. Importantly, the proposed bill is not requesting a state budget appropriation, rather it assesses a very modest fee on the wastewater treatment facilities that have negatively impacted the shellfish industry for decades. We hope you will support this legislation. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/ Michael McGiveney  
RISA President

# **Proposal for Long-term Sustainable Shellfish Transplant Funding**

February 4, 2026

## **Problem Issue**

Rhode Island quahog landings have **declined 60%** in the last decade from 764,269 pounds harvested in 2014 to 302,244 pounds in 2024, and annual landing values decreased from \$5.1 million to \$3.5 million during the period (NOAA Fisheries, <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/foss>). In May 2024, the Special Legislative Commission to Study and Provide Recommendations on the Issues Relating to the Reduced Catch of Quahogs in Narragansett Bay (Joint Quahog Commission) issued its final report following several months of presentations and testimony from many experts, including scientists, fisherman, regulators and the public. The Joint Quahog Commission report recommended three important actions: (1) increase quahog transplant and seeding programs; (2) increase nutrient monitoring and targeted research; and (3) establish a permanent quahog advisory commission. To date, no substantive action has occurred to advance and implement the Commission's recommendations.

Over several decades, the Department of Environmental Management and the Narragansett Bay Commission have funded and managed at least two shellfish transplants each Spring in collaboration and coordination with the Rhode Island Shellfisherman's Association (RISA) to relay shellfish from Apponaug, East Greenwich and Warwick Coves and transplant those shellfish into the Greenwich Bay and Bristol Harbor Management Areas. These areas are open only during the winter months (December into April) and serve as critically important shellfish harvest areas for the industry during the harsh winter months. State funding for these transplants has varied each year, with some earlier funding well over \$100,000 per year, but in more recent years has been very limited to under \$40,000. In fact, funding was so limited last year (2025) that there was only one paid transplant. As a result, shellfishermen conducted a second, volunteer transplant to ensure a minimum necessary quahog resource for this winter season. There is presently only \$9000 in funding available for 2026 transplants. Funded shellfish transplants provide a significant benefit to the shellfish industry and local economy, while also enhancing the public shellfish resource. First, participating shellfishermen are paid for harvesting quahogs during designated transplant days. Second, shellfishermen harvest product throughout the winter from the management areas that received quahogs from the earlier Spring transplants. Robustly funded shellfish transplants help sustain the shellfish industry and coastal communities, especially during the winter months, and help the local and state economies!

## **Solution and Options**

Over many decades, shellfish harvest areas in the Upper Bay have been subject to closure restrictions following rainfall events that lead to sewer overflows from the regional wastewater treatment facilities (WWTF) that discharge into the Providence River. While recent ratepayer

investments have funded WWTF improvements (e.g., Narragansett Bay Commission combined sewer overflow (CSO) abatement program) that have measurably improved water quality and reduced the earlier number of annual closures of conditional shellfish areas, these wastewater treatment facilities have inflicted economic harm to the shellfish industry for over four decades! Accordingly, it is rational to assign annual funding of shellfish transplants to these same WWTFs. Last year, DEM Director Terry Gray submitted a proposed new revenue generating program as part of the DEM budget submitted to the Governor’s Office. The intention was to generate new designated annual funding for shellfish transplants by assessing a small fee on wastewater discharges. Unfortunately it was rejected. Nevertheless, such a fee could be enacted into law by the General Assembly during this 2026 session through the passage of legislation.

DEM intended to create a new revenue source to fund shellfish transplants by assessing a small one cent fee per each 10,000 gallons of wastewater effluent discharged from area WWTFs. The amount of funding necessary for robust shellfish transplants has been in the \$100,000 to \$200,000 per year range. The WWTF total annual effluent discharge is determined from DEM wastewater treatment discharge permits. For example, the NBC Field’s Point facility is the largest discharger of wastewater effluent into the Upper Bay at 65 million gallons per day (MGD). Assigning the DEM-proposed rate of one cent per 10,000 gallons to this facility would generate \$65 dollars per day or \$23,725 per year. Combining the wastewater flow from all 11 Rhode Island WWTFs that discharge into the Upper Bay and Greenwich Bay would result in an annual fee revenue of \$63,752. See Table 1 below. Another option is to double the rate to two cents per each 10,000 gallons of wastewater effluent discharged. This would generate \$127,508 per year to be dedicated for shellfish transplants.

**Table 1. Rhode Island WWTFs Discharging to Upper Bay and Greenwich Bay**

| <b>Facility</b>   | <b>Daily Average Discharge MGD<sup>1</sup></b> | <b>Annual Fee @ 1 cent/ 10,000 gallons</b> | <b>Annual Fee @ 2 cents/ 10,000 gallons</b> |
|-------------------|--|--|---|
| Burrillville      | 1.5  | \$548                                      | \$1,096                                     |
| Cranston          | 20.2   | \$7,373                                    | \$14,746                                    |
| East Greenwich    | 1.7  | \$621                                      | \$1,242                                     |
| East Providence   | 14.2   | \$5,183                                    | \$10,366                                    |
| NBC Bucklin Point | 31.0   | \$11,315                                   | \$22,630                                    |
| NBC Field’s Point | 65.0   | \$23,725                                   | \$47,450                                    |
| Smithfield        | 3.5  | \$1,228                                    | \$2,456                                     |
| Warren            | 3.0  | \$1,095                                    | \$2,190                                     |
| Warwick           | 7.7  | \$2,811                                    | \$5,622                                     |
| West Warwick      | 11.0   | \$4,015                                    | \$8,030                                     |
| Woonsocket        | 16.0   | \$5,840                                    | \$11,680                                    |

| Facility     | Daily Average Discharge MGD <sup>1</sup> | Annual Fee @ 1 cent/ 10,000 gallons | Annual Fee @ 2 cents/ 10,000 gallons |
|--------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>TOTAL</b> | 174.5                                    | \$63,752                            | \$127,508                            |

1 - Daily average discharge (MGD) obtained from RIDEM RIPDES permits

Other options include assessing the wastewater discharge fee just to the WWTFs discharging into the Pawtuxet, Providence and Seekonk Rivers, namely: Cranston, East Providence, NBC Bucklin Point, NBC Field’s Point, Warwick and West Warwick. The combined daily discharges from these facilities is 149.1 MGD, which constitutes 85% of all discharges from the 11 WWTFs that discharge into the Upper Bay and Greenwich Bay. Another option is to assess the wastewater discharge fee to only the largest facilities that discharge directly into the Providence and Seekonk Rivers, namely East Providence, NBC Bucklin Point and NBC Field’s Point. The combined total daily discharge of these WWTFs is 110.2 MGD. These facilities have the most significant impact on water quality in the Upper Bay due to their direct discharges and proximity to conditional shellfish harvesting areas. If a discharge fee were to be assessed only to these facilities, the recommended rate would be 3 cents per 10,000 gallons of effluent discharge (\$120,669 annually) to generate sufficient annual funding for shellfish transplants.

In summary, new and sustainable revenue sources are necessary to adequately fund shellfish transplants on an annual basis in support of the shellfish industry as recommended by the Joint Quahog Commission in their May 2024 report. To date, no new funding has been raised to support the shellfish industry. And in fact, there is currently only \$9000 available for shellfish transplants in 2026. Assessing a small fee on wastewater effluent discharges from the major wastewater treatment facilities that directly impact shellfish harvesting in the Upper Bay seems fair and equitable to remediate decades of negative economic impact on the State’s shellfish industry. The Rhode Island Shellfisherman’s Association stands ready to collaborate and coordinate with all interested parties to develop and implement the proposed wastewater effluent discharge fee to generate quahog transplant funding.