

20 September 2023

LTC (R) John Murray
17 Mathew Drive
Johnston, RI 02919

SUBJECT: Legislative Commission Exploring Depletion of Quahog Stocks

Dear Representative Solomon and Commission Members,

I'll paraphrase a quote heard during your initial meeting on 9/19/2023; *"I remember digging 2,000 pieces [little necks] a day like clockwork."* I would suggest here in lies part of the problem – "over fishing". Any hypothesis relating to the cause of declining quahog numbers must consider the notion that long term over fishing in Narragansett Bay is a contributing factor.

While water temperatures, the absence of nitrogen and its impacts on phytoplankton, as well as other issues may be exacerbating the problem, the commission must consider impacts of over fishing. If you don't include an honest, in-depth, and analytical review of annual harvest rates by area, I'm doubtful the commission will achieve your intended goals.

I believe a viable assumption is that declining quahog numbers have not just developed over the short term, as might be suggested, but more likely evolved over decades beginning in area 9 and moving north as additional areas became diggable due to improved water quality. The issue is now only coming to light because once prolific commercial areas of the Bay, specifically areas 1A & 1B, are no longer producing quahogs as they once did just a few years ago. I would also suggest that quahog regeneration rates are simply unable to keep pace with the unrelenting harvesting pressure that is occurring.

I grew up on Warwick cove as a boy. I'm a commercial shell fisherman (quahog/welk) and have been doing so off and on since around 1978. I dug the Barrington Beach opening in the 1980s. An area that was once a quahog bonanza, is now a bust. I've experienced the decline of commercial quahog harvests in the West Middle Passage (area 9), as well as more recently in both areas 1A and 1B. I would caution that the same can, and will, happen in area E if it is not firmly managed.

Ultimately my hope is that my grandchildren will have the very same opportunities I did to harvest shellfish and other species on Narragansett Bay.

Best Wishes for your Commission's Success,

// Original Signed //

John E. Murray
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