



September 29, 2023

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Dr. Moore:

Thank you for your letter dated July 24, 2023, requesting information regarding steps involved in and timing of reopening the Georges Bank closed area to the harvest of surfclams and ocean quahogs.

As part of its participation in the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP), FDA classifies shellfish growing areas in Federal waters. Because of the presumed presence of the marine biotoxin that causes paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP), a portion of Georges Bank is currently in closed status. Although potential marine biotoxin impacts remain a concern in this area, FDA has determined that the current provisions in the NSSP Guide for the Control of Molluscan Shellfish (Guide), combined with new provisions that will be added to the Guide this year, are sufficient to address the PSP concern and, therefore, the status of the area can be changed.

As a result, FDA has sent a letter to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) requesting that the closed portion of Georges Bank be reopened. Once the Guide is modified and NMFS has changed Georges Bank's status, FDA intends to place the area in "controlled access" status for the taking of shellstock (see Guide, Section II, Chapter IV.@.04C.(7)). Consequently, harvesters from this area will be required to have a biotoxin management plan in place that utilizes the biotoxin management strategy of "pre-harvest shellfish toxicity screening and lot testing" (see Guide, Section II, Chapter IV.@.04B.(4)(e)). Further, each shellfish harvester will need to contact the NOAA Seafood Inspection Program (SIP) and obtain a NOAA SIP contract, which will define the harvest permit conditions to include a marine biotoxin management plan. As you are aware, the provisions in the Guide are separate from the NMFS surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries management requirements.

A map of Georges Bank defining the area that will be in the controlled access status and require shellfish harvesters to have a marine biotoxin management plan will be accessible both through the NOAA SIP and on the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) website.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration
5001 Campus Drive
College Park, Maryland 20740
www.fda.gov

FDA recognizes the importance of this area to the shellfish industry and stands ready to coordinate with the NMFS to assist with this reopening process. Please contact J. Quentin Forrest at (240) 402-1425 if you have any questions or need further assistance.

Sincerely,

for
Steven W. Bloodgood
Director
Division of Seafood Safety
Center for Food Safety
& Applied Nutrition

Electronic Copies to:

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