



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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RED TIDE TRIGGERS N. E. SHELLFISH FISHERY FAILURE DETERMINATION

U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez today announced a formal determination that the Massachusetts shellfish fishery is in a commercial failure triggered by a massive red tide bloom in the New England region.

The determination came in response to a June 10 letter from Governor Mitt Romney requesting disaster assistance for the hard hit Massachusetts shellfish industry. The action was made through a provision of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and covers the molluscan shellfish fishery in state waters and Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahogs in federal waters.

“We are taking action now because of the serious economic effects of this red tide disaster,” Secretary Gutierrez said. In his letter, he indicated that it is not known how long the fishery resource disaster might continue or what the longer-term economic and social effects might be.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) took emergency action on Tuesday to close a portion of federal waters off the coasts of New Hampshire and Massachusetts to the harvest of all species of shellfish, with the exception of scallop meats, due to the spread of toxic algal blooms (red tide).

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requested NOAA Fisheries Service take the immediate action on the fishery closure because the severity of the illness associated with Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) that can result from eating contaminated shellfish. PSPS is considered to be a serious health threat. Red tide algae bloom produces marine biotoxins that cause PSP. The algae blooms create a neurotoxin that accumulates in filter-feeding shellfish and other parts of the marine food web.

The Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Division had already halted the harvesting of all shellfish within state waters along the Massachusetts coast from the New Hampshire border to the Island of Martha’s Vineyard.

NOAA has been working with the state to monitor the harmful algal blooms and has awarded grants to Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) to support emergency response efforts to the largest red tide in New England since 1972. In the past decade, NOAA Fisheries Service has contributed \$11 million in funding to support research in New England to foster several significant advances in monitoring harmful algal blooms.

“Harmful algal blooms are a serious human health threat and are economically damaging to communities,” said retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. “Monitoring efforts assist states in maintaining a safe and plentiful seafood supply by allowing targeted closures.”

NOAA officials emphasize that commercially available seafood is safe to eat, and that residents and visitors to the region should follow the guidelines offered by local officials.

NOAA’s Ecology and Oceanography of Harmful Algal Blooms (ECOHAB) and Monitoring and Event Response to Harmful Algal Blooms (MERHAB) have been supporting a research effort in each region as causes of the blooms vary by ecological conditions and algal species.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through research to better understand weather and climate-related events and to manage wisely the nation's coastal and marine resources.

On The Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

National Ocean Service: <http://www.oceanservice.noaa.gov/>

NOS Center for Sponsored Coastal Ocean Research:

<http://www.cop.noaa.gov/welcome.html>

Information about closures, Massachusetts: <http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dmf/>

http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/public_health/closures/pspclosures.htm