

Section 300.11. Aquaculture

A. Definition

1. For the purpose of the Coastal Resources Management Council, marine aquaculture is defined as the culture of salt tolerant aquatic species under natural or artificial conditions in tidal waters and coastal ponds including but not limited to: fish farming utilizing pens, tanks, or impoundments; the culture of shellfish on the sea floor, in cages, or suspended from structures in the water; and the culturing of aquatic plants.

NOTE: land-based marine aquaculture operations (i.e., above mean high water) are also regulated under Section 300.3 of the RICRMP.

2. For the purpose of the Coastal Resources Management Council freshwater aquaculture is defined as the culture of aquatic species under natural or artificial conditions in freshwater ponds, tanks, raceways or other freshwater impoundments located within the coastal zone or in inland locations throughout the state.

3. Transient or mobile aquaculture gear is defined as cages containing cultured species which are periodically moved about within a specified area so as to reduce user conflicts. This gear is typically in the form of wire cages which are either individually marked with a surface buoy or strung together in trawls with end buoys to identify the location of gear.

B. Policies

1. The CRMC recognizes that commercial aquaculture is a viable means for supplementing the yields of marine fish and shellfish food products, and shall support commercial aquaculture in those locations where it can be accommodated among other uses of Rhode Island waters.

2. The Council may grant aquaculture activities by permit only. The CRMC may grant aquaculture applicants exclusive use of the submerged lands and water column, including the surface of the water, when the Council finds such exclusive use is necessary to the effective conduct of the permitted aquaculture activities. Except to the extent necessary to permit the effective development of the species of animal

or plant life being cultivated by the permittee, the public shall be provided with means of reasonable ingress and egress to and from the area subject to an aquaculture lease for traditional water activities such as boating, swimming, and fishing. All plant and animal species listed for culture in an aquaculture lease are the personal property of the permittee.

3. At the discretion of the Council, leaseholders may be required to temporarily remove their aquaculture facilities when they are not being used to conduct research or to harvest an aquatic species of plant or animal for a substantial period of time. The Council may permit inactive facilities to remain if it determines that the temporary removal of these facilities would place an undue burden on the leaseholder.

4. The Council may require the removal of any aquaculture facility that is in an obvious state of disrepair or has become a navigation or safety hazard.

5. Upon application to renew an existing aquaculture Assent, the Executive Director may administratively renew said Assent for a period not to exceed that period set forth in Title 20 Chapter 10 of the General Laws for each renewable period, provided the applicant is in conformance with the terms and conditions of the Assent, the aquaculture lease, and with the Coastal Resources Management Program (RICRMP) in effect at the time of renewal provided, further, that there are no amendments to the Assent or lease. Report of such action by the Executive Director shall be made in writing to the full Council at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Council.

6. In the event that a CRMC approved aquaculture operation is determined by the Council to not be actively "farmed" for a period of one year, the assent and lease shall be deemed null and void and the site shall be returned to the State's free and common fishery.

7. The Council may grant an aquaculture Assent for a period not to exceed that period set forth in Title 20 Chapter 10 of the General Laws.

8. It is the Council's policy to prohibit private aquaculture activities in not-approved areas as defined by the National Shellfish Sanitation Program that contain significant shellfish stocks

potentially available for relay into approved areas for the free and common fishery.

(a) This prohibition shall not apply to activities like spat collection, or to the cultivation of scallops, or to private aquaculture operations conducted within the confines of a marina perimeter limit (as set forth in 300.4), or to projects which are designed, with Council approval, to enhance and restore the public resource.

(b) Aquaculture projects other than shellfish aquaculture proposed for not-approved areas may be granted by the Council provided the applicant provides sufficient evidence that no harm to public health or safety will result. In the case of shellfish aquaculture, such activities shall be prohibited unless the applicant provides written statements from the directors of the departments of environmental management and health certifying that the proposed activity is consistent with the requirements of the National Shellfish Sanitation Program.

(c) Where a private shellfish aquaculture applicant expressly releases ownership of any and all shellfish stock existing in a permitted area, the Council may grant a lease in addition to a permit.

C. Prerequisites

1. Prior to issuing a permit for aquaculture, the Council shall obtain and consider written recommendations from the director of the Department of Environmental Management and the chairman of the Marine Fisheries Council, as required by Chapter 20.10 of the state's General Laws. The director of the Department of Environmental Management shall review the application to determine that the proposed aquaculture activity will not adversely affect (a) marine life adjacent to the proposed area and the waters of the state, and (b) the continued vitality of indigenous fisheries. The chairman of the Marine Fisheries Council shall review the application to determine that it is consistent with competing uses involved with the exploitation of marine fisheries.

2. A Special Permit for Aquaculture for the possession, importation, and transportation of species used in any aquaculture operation shall be obtained from the director of the Department of Environmental Management. The DEM Special Permit for Aquaculture may be processed concurrently, but must be obtained prior to the issuance of a CRMC Assent.

3. Prior to submitting a formal Category B application for aquaculture activities within tidal waters, applicants must first submit a Preliminary Determination application for the proposed project in accordance with existing CRMC procedures. A formal application may be submitted only after the receipt of the completed Preliminary Determination report.

4. Applicants for aquaculture operations within tidal waters must submit with their application(s) all required information as specified in the most recent version of the CRMC aquaculture checklist.

5. In those cases where alterations to freshwater wetlands may occur, applicants for freshwater and land-based aquaculture operations must first obtain a permit from the DEM Division of Agriculture or DEM Freshwater Wetlands prior to applying with the Council.

6. Applicants for freshwater and land-based aquaculture structures and/or improvements must obtain local building official approval and zoning approval, where necessary, prior to submitting an application to the CRMC.

7. Applicants for land-based aquaculture operations which result in discharges to waters of the state shall be required to obtain a Rhode Island Pollution Discharge Elimination System (RIPDES) permit.

8. Applicants for aquaculture operations conducted at marinas using technologies such as an upweller unit may be reviewed as a Category A activity provided that the operation is conducted within a Council-approved marina perimeter, and that RIDEM has issued a Special Permit for Aquaculture for such an activity. Further, at the time of application, the applicant must provide proof that such seed product - prior to exceeding the size of the RIDEM seed definition - will be transferred to: a permitted aquaculture facility operating in approved

waters; a scientific or educational institution; or, a government agency.

D. Additional Category B Requirements

1. Applicants proposing to undertake any aquaculture endeavor shall (a) describe the location and size of the area proposed; (b) identify the species to be managed or cultivated within the permitted area and over which the applicant shall have exclusive right; (c) describe the method or manner of management or cultivation to be utilized, including whether the activities proposed are experimental, commercial, or for personal use; (d) provide such other information as may be necessary for the Council to determine: (1) the compatibility of the proposal with other existing and potential uses of the area and areas contiguous to it, including navigation, recreation, and fisheries; (2) the degree of exclusivity required for aquacultural activities on the proposed site; (3) the safety and security of equipment, including appropriate marking of the equipment and/or lease area; (4) the projected per unit area yield of harvestable product; (5) the cumulative impact of a particular aquaculture proposal in an area, in addition to other aquaculture operations already in place; (6) the capability of the applicant to carry out the proposed activities; and (7) the impact of the proposed activities on the scenic qualities of the area.

E. Prohibitions

1. Fish pen aquaculture operations are prohibited in all coastal ponds.

2. Private aquaculture leases are prohibited in uncertified waters (i.e., restricted areas as defined by the National Shellfish Sanitation Program) which contain significant shellfish stocks available for relay into certified public waters for the free and common fishery.

F. Standards

1. Marine Aquaculture

a. In the event of revocation, termination or expiration of any lease or Assent, the lessee or Assent holder is responsible for restoring the area to pre-existing conditions within ninety (90) days from the date of permit revocation, termination, or expiration. This shall include the

removal of all structures, rafts, floats, markers, buoys, anchors, and other equipment brought to the site. Failure to comply with the Council's order to restore the site may result in the forfeiture of the permit bond posted by the lessee.

b. Any person who maliciously and willfully destroys, vandalizes, or otherwise disrupts aquaculture activities permitted by the Council shall be in violation of an order of the Council and liable to all fines and penalties under law.

c. All permittees shall mark off the areas under permit by appropriate buoys or stakes, as determined by the CRMC, so as not to interfere unnecessarily with navigation and other traditional uses of the water surface. All authorized limitations upon the use by the public of areas subject to the permit shall be posted by the permittee.

d. The Council may require the leaseholder for an aquaculture facility to post a performance bond in order to ensure the cleanup and removal of said facility upon either the termination or expiration of the lease.

e. The Executive Director may approve the transfer of a lease from the lessee to another party provided the aquaculture operation remains the same, including size, species, gear, and methods of culturing. The full Council must approve any transfers that involve a deviation from the existing assented aquaculture operation.

f. Experimental permits. (1) The Executive Director may issue an experimental aquaculture permit for operations which are expressly for the purpose of developing and testing new gear or techniques for aquaculture production. Applicants may be approved for three separate sites, with up to an area of one-thousand (1,000) square feet for each site. Experimental sites shall not be within 500 feet of one another. Areas in excess of this may be approved by the full Council. Experimental aquaculture Assents shall be valid for a period not to exceed three (3) years. A lease may be required and the sale of any aquaculture product is not allowed. Report of such action by the Executive Director shall be made in writing to the full Council at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Council. (2) Experimental aquaculture operations wholly contained within the confines of a council-approved marina perimeter area excluded from

the 500 foot separation standard, as contained above, any may maintain a total of 3,000 square feet in any configuration for such operations.

g. Commercial viability permit. (1) The Executive Director may issue a commercial viability aquaculture permit for operations which are expressly for the purpose of determining if a particular site is suitable for commercial aquaculture. The applicant may have one site, limited to a thousand (1000) square feet. Commercial viability permits shall be valid for a period not to exceed three (3) years. Permits for a commercial viability shall be subject to a two (2) step process: 1) Issuance of a one-time administrative permit for the period of eighteen (18) months; followed by a one-time council-approved permit for an additional eighteen (18) months. A lease may be required. Report of such action by the Executive Director shall be made in writing to the full Council at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Council. (2) Any continuation of the operation by the applicant beyond this permit length shall require a separate application which will be considered and reviewed by the Council as a Category B application and is subject to all applicable aquaculture policies and regulations. (3) The permittee may, on a one time basis, sell those products approved within the permit. Upon termination of the operation, or at the end of the three (3) year permit period, whichever comes first, the permittee must terminate the operation. The Executive Director may require the permittee to post a performance bond in order to ensure the cleanup and removal of said facility. Detailed economic reports shall be required for all commercial viability permittees.

h. Education/research permit. The Executive Director may issue a education/research aquaculture permit for operations which expressly for the purpose of using aquaculture for education or research. A lease may be required. Applicants may be approved for three separate sites, with up to an area of one-thousand (1,000) square feet for each site. Education/research sites shall not be within 500 feet of one another. Areas in excess of this may only be approved by the full Council. Educational/research aquaculture assents shall be valid for a period not to exceed three (3) years. A lease may be required and sale of any aquacultured product is not allowed report of such action by the Executive Director shall be made in writing to the full Council at the

next regularly scheduled meeting of the Council. The Executive Director may grant extensions to these permits. Each extension shall not exceed three (3) years. Educational/research aquaculture operations wholly contained within the confines of a council-approved marina perimeter are excluded from the 500 foot separation standard, as contained above, and may maintain a total of 3,000 square feet in any configuration for such operations.

i. All transient aquaculture gear shall be operated within defined areas as established by the tidal water aquaculture management plan. Transient gear lease fees shall be based on the minimum area necessary to operate the proposed number of cages.

j. Aquaculture operations shall be located at sites and operated in such a manner as to not obstruct public access to and from tidal waters.

2. Freshwater Aquaculture

a. The Council shall require a permit for all freshwater and land-based aquaculture operations located within the coastal zone or in inland locations throughout the state.

b. Permits for land-based aquaculture operations shall be granted by the CRMC for a term not to exceed 50 years.

c. Where required, all species utilized for culture within land-based aquaculture operations must be approved by the DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife. The aforementioned approval must be obtained prior to the Council issuing its assent, however, it may be concurrently processed with the Council's review.