Guv, don't cut fishing funds

By JEAN JONES
Staff Writer

COMMERCIAL TWP. — The township committee adopted a resolution Thursday urging Gov. McGreevey not to cut funds affecting the fishery industry, an action that would affect an already economically depressed area, such as Commercial Township.

Committeeman Barney Hollinger wrote the resolution, noting that McGreevey has recommended budget cuts for fiscal year 2004 for the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Stations, which would impact the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory's ability to provide research and support to both the growing aquaculture industry and to commercial and recreational fisheries. Oyster farming is considered an agricultural pursuit.

"The projected (fiscal year 2004) cuts amount to 50.1 percent of all state support to the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory," said Hollinger, who also is a councilman on the Delaware Bay Section of the state Shell Fisheries Council.

The cuts also would eliminate 100 percent of all state funding for aquaculture research and development, would require closing one of the three laboratories run by the Haskin lab in South Jersey and would eliminate 100 percent of the lab's operating budget for facilities in Bivalve and at the Cape Shore lab in Cape May County. The Cape May facility would be closed.

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entirely on July 1.

That would mean the layoff of residents of Commercial Township and other parts of Cumberland and Cape May counties who are employed by the lab and the loss of jobs would have both short- and long-term negative impacts, the resolution pointed out.

A memorandum written by Eric Powell, director of the HSRL, notes that staff reductions would include 56 percent of all salaried technical staff.

And the elimination of state funding also will lose outside funds from other sources. Powell said HSRL currently receives more than $1 million in external grants and contracts, which is a return of $2.61 for every state dollar invested.

Further, the laboratory has brought the oyster industry back from complete closure in the early 1990s to sustainability, Powell says. Curtailment of the oyster stock assessment program, which monitors the condition of the resource, will jeopardize that sustainability. Economic returns on yearly investment for this program average $110 for each $1 invested, much of the return going to the poorest part of the state.

As bad as it is, the proposed budget cuts affecting the lab are only a small part of the across-the-board cuts to all agricultural experiment stations, Powell said.

"We are a microcosm in a very big problem for farming statewide," he said. "We've been told that there already are station plans for laying off more than 100 people at experiment stations statewide."

The impact of such massive budget cuts would extend far beyond the Delaware Bay.

The lab provides the principal science support for the surf clam and ocean quahog industry and has established a five-year return on investments of $125 for each $1 invested, Powell says. It also provides scientific support for the monkfish industry in the Mid-Atlantic, with a return of $200 for each $1 invested.

HSRL is involved in research relating to other finfish, squid, development of a new mackerel fishery in New Jersey, and partners with Delaware and Maryland in shellfish research programs which affect Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay area and Long Island Sound.

Powell makes a rough estimate of $41 return to the state for each state dollar invested in HSRL.

The bottom line, according to Powell, is that the propose budget cuts will severely restrict all research supporting aquacultural development in New Jersey and terminate all development of new aquaculture products. As bad as that sounds, overall, the local impact is a major concern here.

"It's true to say that these cuts disproportionately hurt South Jersey because of the importance of all kinds of farming here," Powell said.
Commercial: Don't cut fishing funds

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The impact of such massive budget cuts would extend far beyond the Delaware Bay.

The lab provides the principal science support for the surf clam and ocean quahog industry and has established a five-year return on investments of $126 for each $1 invested, Powell says. It also provides scientific support for the monkfish industry in the Mid-Atlantic, with a return of $200 for each $1 invested.

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