More than one oyster dredge license sought

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COMMERCIAL TWP. — A proposal is being made to officially allow for the consolidation of more than one oyster dredge license per boat for Delaware Bay.

While quotas have been lowered, reducing income, the cost of maintaining vessels has continued to rise.

Licensing previously has been to the boat, not the owner, with one license per boat.

The proposal allows vessel owners to consolidate more than one license per boat and to fish the quotas for the additional licenses. This would reduce the number of vessels to be maintained.

It is not anticipated to cause the loss of jobs, since crews generally move from one boat to another.

The proposal would allow:

- The permanent transfer of an additional license to a primary vessel.
- The tonnage of the vessels would be combined.
- The state would measure the deck carrying capacity of the transferred license and this will determine the planting capacity of the primary vessel.
- The primary vessel will pay the full tonnage fee.
- Only vessels residing in New Jersey for at least nine months of the year will be eligible.
- Quotas will be issued based on the licenses carried by the primary vessel.
- Transfers must be from a validly licensed vessel.
- The plan will be reviewed at five-year intervals to allow more transfers. All transfers would be approved by the Delaware Bay council.

“The goal is to regulate practices which already are being followed. We instituted terms and conclusions after we went to direct marketing,” said Jim Joseph, chief of the Bureau of Shellfisheries. “We want to incorporate this into the oyster management regulations.”

A summary of the proposal was presented to the Delaware Bay Section of the Shell Fisheries Council on Monday. There will be further consideration at the Dec. 7 meeting.

“There is nothing new or earth-shattering,” Joseph said. “We have given the preliminary stuff to law enforcement for their review. We expect to move it forward to the state register in late winter.”

Until recent years, no harvest for direct marketing was allowed from the state-owned oyster seed beds, but the traditional planting to leased grounds in the lower bay for further growth no longer was feasible because of high mortality from two parasites — MSX and Dermo.

“We have seen the stocks of oysters dwindle and quotas becoming smaller each year. If we are to stay in the market place using this method, we must have the opportunity to be fully prepared for all eventualities,” the proposal states.

Dr. Eric Powell, director of the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory, announced that the next Stock Assessment Workshop will be held Feb. 7 to 9 and asked for a representative of the council and a representative at large to participate.

Russell Babb, of the Shellfisheries Office reported a harvest this season of almost 59,000 bushels, with 1,100 vessel days worked.