Oyster solution argued

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COMMERCIAL TWP. — After more than two hours of discussion, oystermen on Tuesday failed to reach consensus on a proposal to allow consolidation of oyster dredge boat licenses.

There were as many different opinions as the dozen and a half who showed up.

Currently, one license to harvest oysters is issued to each boat and licensed boats must be operable. The proposal would allow more than one license be consolidated on a primary boat so that only that boat would have to be maintained.

"Let's face it. None of us is making money in the oyster industry if we have to maintain four boats," said Jenny King.

Researcher Walter Canzoneri said if something is not done, there are not going to be owned oyster seed beds, as they do today.

What was agreed upon was that a questionnaire will be compiled listing all the feasible options suggested at Tuesday's meeting.

It will be reviewed by the council, then mailed to boat owners. Another meeting will be held to try once more to reach consensus.

"It's not what comes off the seed beds, it's how, and that's what the industry has to decide," said Russell Babb, of the state Shellfisheries office.

Fleetwood said the industry has made a lot of mistakes in the last 30 years. Babb agreed that some of the problems today are from mistakes allowed to happen 20 years ago.

Hollinger said the council should never have let removal of oysters from the seed beds go over 40 percent. Harvesting used to be halted when any of the seed beds fell below 40 percent oysters, as opposed to shells.

Babb said he remembers that while writing one of many letters to be sent out to oystermen he was thinking, "We couldn't make this more complicated."

"I was wrong," he said.