Shell fishing, dredging licenses being reviewed

By JEAN JONES
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COMMERCIAL TWP — Two regulatory issues are being reviewed by the Delaware Bay Section of the Shell Fisheries Council — revisions to Title 50, which regulates shell fishing, and the consolidation of dredging licenses.

The Title 50 review is being conducted by the Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Agriculture.

Jim Joseph, chief of the Bureau of Shellfisheries, reported to the local council on Tuesday that the Aquaculture Advisory Council had discussed further changes to Title 50 on April 22 and proposes several Aquaculture Development Zones, four in Delaware Bay.

Two would be in tidal zones and two in deeper waters. Final determination of these zones has not been completed, he said.

"DEP and Agriculture have accepted 80 to 90 percent of the recommendations of the committee," he said. "The Aquaculture Advisory Committee didn't endorse them because the final draft hadn't been discussed by the Delaware Bay Council. Eight recommendations were made to the advisory council, seven affecting Delaware Bay. They decided they should move forward and DEP and Agriculture should meet again on those eight items."

Jennie King protested that the shellfish industry shouldn't come under DEP. It should be under Agriculture. Councilman Barney Hollinger said the only way that can change is to go through the legislative process.

Joseph said there will be more opportunities in the review process for comment and written comment will be accepted.

"All this is, is a draft," Hollinger said. "We will have to find a legislator to sponsor it and it will be rewritten in bill form."

The council agreed to reserve final approval of the changes until DEP and Agriculture have agreed on the final eight items.

Another issue is whether consolidation of oyster boat licenses should be permitted. Currently, licenses are assigned to boats, not owners. With the harvest quotas drastically reduced in recent years, owners of multiple boats are forced to pay for licenses for boats that are not being used. The change would allow a license to be used for more than one vessel.

A special meeting was set for May 23, at 7 p.m., at the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory, at Bivalve. License consolidation will be the only item on the agenda.