

## PROPOSAL FOR MODIFICATION OF PERSONAL-USE BAY CLAM REGULATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

The staff reported to the Commission on October 8, 1976, that over one-half of the littleneck and cockle clams taken by bay clam diggers were of a small size and this resulted in poor utilization of the clam resource by thousands of diggers. In addition, catch per digger for these species has decreased since 1971. The staff recommended a size limit of 1-1/2 inches on littleneck clams and 2-1/2 inches on cockle clams. The Commission requested that the staff determine an appropriate reduction in the bag limit for bay clams as an alternative to size limits. The Oregon State Police felt that two size limits for bay clams would be confusing to the public and would be difficult to enforce.

### DISCUSSION

Analysis of catch data indicates that a reduction in the bag limit to 20 littleneck and cockle clams would reduce the take of all clams by about 25%. This would be about half as effective in reducing the take of littleneck and cockle clams as would the proposed size limits.

Allowing sorting of littleneck and cockle clams would further reduce the take of small clams. Present regulations require that all clams taken must be retained regardless of size or condition. If diggers were permitted to sort and release unwanted small littleneck and cockle clams during the digging many, probably most, of the small clams would not be retained, just as would have been permitted with a size limit. Butter clams should be included to simplify species identification although few small butter clams are taken. Sorting of these hard-shelled, hardy species should result in little handling mortality.

Softshell clams are abundant in our major estuaries but are not dug much as long as other species of clams are available. We could provide incentive for more diggers to seek softshell clams by continuing the present bag limit of 36 softshell clams in addition to the proposed bag limit of 20 littleneck and cockle clams. This action would not change the situation in the two bays (Siuslaw and Umpqua) where softshell clams are of major importance.

The gaper clam bag limit of 12 should be retained as part of the cockle-butter-littleneck clam limit. Gaper clams are eagerly sought by many people and their large size makes a 12 clam bag adequate for diggers.

Regulations now require separate identification of gaper clams. The proposed bag limits would also require identification of softshell clams. Most of the softshell digging areas are removed enough from other clam areas so that identification should not be a problem.

We also propose to include miscellaneous clams, mostly *Macomas*, as part of the 36 limit for softshell clams. This would simplify the regulations for those species that are very abundant but little used.

A reduced bay clam bag limit instead of size limits has two major advantages: (1) diggers would not have to measure clams, and (2) less checking time would be required for the Oregon State Police.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The staff recommends the following changes in personal-use bay clam regulations. This wording would be used in the 1977 synopsis.

SUGGESTED REVISIONS IN THE PERSONAL-USE REGULATIONS FOR  
BAY CLAMS

CLAMS:

BAG LIMITS:

COCKLE, BUTTER, AND LITTLENECK CLAMS: Daily limit 20 of any size singly or in the aggregate; 40 in possession or in 7 consecutive days. Sorting for size in the immediate digging area allowed except that broken clams must be retained.

GAPER CLAMS (Blue, Empire, or Horseneck): Daily limit first 12 taken regardless of size or condition; 24 in possession or in 7 consecutive days. To be included with the 20 daily and 40 possession bag limits for cockle, butter, and littleneck clams.

SOFTSHELL CLAMS AND OTHERS (Includes bentnose clams): Daily limit first 36 taken regardless of size or condition; 72 in possession or in 7 consecutive days.