



Small Boats. Big Ideas.



Cape Cod Fisheries Trust Brokers Exempted Fishing Permit to Land Surfclams Fishermen Regain Access to Traditional Cape Fishery

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(Chatham, Mass...August 15, 2013) The [Northeast Regional Office of the NOAA Fisheries Service](#) has just granted an Exempted Fishing Permit to the [Cape Cod Fisheries Trust](#), which will allow the use of alternative landing containers and tag protocols to support a high-quality, niche market for Atlantic surfclams (*Spisula solidissima*) harvested by day-boat vessels on Cape Cod.

Surfclams, locally known as sea clams, provided a significant chunk of income for Cape Cod fishermen back in the day. The Trust is helping make that a reality again. In 2012, in response to requests from the fleet, the Trust bought 31,136 bushels of surfclam quota to lease to local fishermen.

“I urged Paul Parker from the Trust to buy up the surfclam quota when it came on the market,” says **Tim Linnell, owner of the Chatham fishing vessel, Perry’s Pride II**. “I remember my dad fishing for surfclams when I was a kid, but by the end of the 90s, there was hardly any quota left on the Cape. This purchase is letting us get back on the clam grounds and will add income to local fishing businesses during a time when we really need it.”

It quickly became apparent that operating in the fishery using the standard 32-bushel cages presented significant safety hazards for some of the boats in the fleet and prevented them from accessing local, high-end boutique markets. To address these concerns, the local fleet, the Trust, and the Northeast Regional Office of the fisheries service worked together to develop an exempted fishing permit that would allow fishermen to experiment with different ways of landing surfclams in smaller, one-bushel increments.

“We can’t thank NOAA Fisheries Service enough for finding a way to help Cape Cod fishermen diversify back into a historical fishery here,” says **Trust director, Paul Parker**.

Surfclams landed under this permit will be low-volume and high-quality, and should provide access to new market opportunities, such as live and sushi-grade clams.

“With this permit, I’m able to bring in live, purged clams and sell them to Chinatown buyers and sushi dealers at a good price,” says **fisherman Scott Nolan of Eastham**. “I am getting better money for a top quality product.”

More Details:

The Trust is providing access to cheap (subsidized) quota and the fisheries service is allowing fishermen a more feasible way to operate. Combined, these initiatives are

supporting Cape Cod fishermen's efforts to diversify and strengthen their businesses and eventually purchase quota of their own.

The Cape Cod Fisheries Trust is a collaborative program between the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance and the [Community Development Partnership](#) in which the Trust buys quota and leases it to local small-boat fishermen.

The surfclam fishery originated in Cape Cod in the 1870s, where they were harvested for food and bait. In 1990, the Atlantic surfclam became the first federally-managed species to shift to an Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) system. Following the ITQ introduction, quota was consolidated into a handful of dedicated surfclam vessels. No federal quota has been owned on Cape Cod since 2000.

Current surf clam regulations require that all clams be landed in a 60 square foot cage. This poses an obstacle to smaller boats as the 3 by 4 by 5 foot metal cage cannot be safely stored in the hold or on deck. Small boat fishermen address this issue by storing the clams as they fish and then offloading into cages at the dock. The handling, both on board or at the dock, and the compression of bottom clams by the weight of those above in the cage can lead to shells breaking. The product landed is of a lower quality, and fishermen lose money. Therefore, the fishery currently stands as high volume, low quality.

Vessels have now been approved by the fisheries service to test alternatives to the large industry-standard cages and 32-bushel cage tags in the hopes of re-creating the day-boat Atlantic surfclam fishery for smaller vessels based out of Cape Cod. The experiment's protocols will let fishermen with smaller boats land fewer surfclams at a time and store them in smaller containers, which will reduce breakage and open the market to a low volume, high quality product. The lower volume can be made up for by the higher price. The permit allows fishermen to work with buyers to land their product by converting standard 32-bushel cages into smaller increments (one bushel bag, one bushel tote or 16-bushel fish vat) or by weight.

The program will ensure safety at sea and during offloading, decrease wasted quota and catch, bolster market price and product quality, create opportunities for new markets and improve fisheries diversification of small boats on Cape Cod to foster resilience.

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