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# EXAMINING STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF SHELLFISH AQUACULTURE MANAGEMENT IN RHODE ISLAND AND MASSACHUSETTS

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# Overview



- Brief introduction
- Research objectives and methods
- Selected results to illustrate key findings
- Overall conclusions
- Questions

# Introduction



- Shellfish aquaculture industry has grown substantially over the past ten years.
- Provides economic, environmental and social benefits.
- Oysters from New England in particular have become a highly sought after commodity.
- RI and MA have similar coastal settings for aquaculture, but differ in their management systems.

# Research Objectives & Methods



- Two major research questions
  - 1. What are the stakeholder perceptions of benefits and limitations of the current management systems that involve different levels of state and local involvement?
  - 2. What are the similarities and differences in perceptions among stakeholder groups (managers/officials vs. aquaculture farmers; MA vs. RI)?
- Methods
  - Semi-structured in-person interviews
  - Interviews were transcribed and coded into themes.

# Management Structure



- **Rhode Island**

- “The state process, people get confused at the town level sometimes. Sometimes a town will object to something and it won't be substantive but the residents think it is.”—RI State Official

- **Massachusetts**

- “I think there are more benefits having a town regulated system because it's important to get feedback from the citizens and the residents of the town. You can't ignore that and sometimes state regulations do, they don't take that into account or they don't put as much of a priority on it so I think it's definitely important to have that come from the town.”-MA Official

# Rules and Regulations



- **Rhode Island**

- “They’ve been developed over a long period of time, they’ve been modified to be improved, and that’s in my mind that they’ve been improved, not everybody thinks that they’re improved. We have a group of people that work on them to make them better, its not an arbitrary or solitary process, it’s a group process and all of that make it better.”—RI State Official

- **Massachusetts**

- “For me if I were the one responsible for it, I would be not so happy with myself. I think we all have pretty low expectations as far as regulations are concerned so were getting there, there has been some progressive things that we have done over the past 18 months, but there is still a long long way to go before we have effective regulatory schemes.”-MA Oyster Farmer

# Relationships



- **Rhode Island**
  - “It’s interesting but it is frequently frustrating because the general public has very little understanding of aquaculture, it’s a lack of understanding. There’s a huge educational opportunity there that we have been talking about for years and no one has figured out how to fill it yet.”—RI State Official
- **Massachusetts**
  - “There’s definitely more awareness in coastal communities and cities and communities that have sophisticated dining scenes that have shellfish available to them... So in the communities where shellfish are a part of the community I think overwhelmingly it’s pretty positive, save a few grumpy upland land owners here and there.”-MA Oyster Farmer

# Addressing the Growth of the Industry



- I think that the level of manpower, state manpower, dedicated to regulatory enforcement and management of aquaculture is not substantially different than it was fifteen years ago. I think that the number of people dedicated in state service to aquaculture hasn't substantially grown in the past 20 years and yet the industry has grown ten fold at least."—MA State Official
- “The biggest issue now is vibrio, so figuring out a way to mitigate vibrio risk without some sort of seasonal closure regime. “-MA Oyster Farmer
- “Those places all have a unique taste that's popular and the product is really very good and we can't meet the demand for that, so there's opportunity. When that demand is met, the opportunity will change, although people will want to get into it, why do people want to get into it, because they make money.”-RI Official

# Overall Conclusions



- Officials and farmers are generally satisfied with the current management system in RI.
  - ✦ Dissatisfaction among some towns
  - ✦ Shellfish Management Plan helped to clarify regulations and engage stakeholders.
- Management system in MA seems to be lagging behind the growth in the industry, which has led to some dissatisfaction among stakeholders.
- Vibrio will be one of the biggest issues moving forward.

# Questions?



- Thank you!



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