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**IMPORTATION OF SHELLFISH
FROM OUTSIDE THE
COASTAL WATERS OF VIRGINIA**

**Recommendations to the
Virginia Marine Resources Commission**

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IMPORTATION OF SHELLFISH FROM OUTSIDE THE COASTAL WATERS OF VIRGINIA

Importation of shellfish is defined as bringing to, and placement in, the coastal waters of Virginia live shellfish (including blue crabs) from locations external to the boundaries of Virginia. Importation of shellfish involves risk. Risks of greatest concern are the spreading of shellfish pathogens and the introduction of exotic marine and estuarine species which may be attached to, or shipped with, shellstock.

Concerns over the introduction of shellfish pathogens and exotic species associated with *Crassostrea virginica* shellstock imported from the Gulf of Mexico waters are increased by the unknown but potential public health consequences. Information concerning the potential of imported oysters to introduce virulent strains of this pathogen to Virginia shellfish waters or the fate of *Vibrio vulnificus* in oysters held in wet storage or long term "relaying" on bottom for marketing is insufficient at this time. Consequently, shellstock oysters from the Gulf of Mexico are not recommended to be on the list of approved species for importation. Therefore, the importation of shellstock oysters from the Gulf of Mexico and adjacent coastal waters for introduction into the waters of the Commonwealth would not be allowed except with case-by-case permission as outlined in 28.2-825.

According to the Code of Virginia, Section 28.2-825, importation with the intent of placing fish, shellfish or crustacea into the waters of the Commonwealth is illegal unless one of two conditions are met. Firstly, the animals in question must originate from locations on the Marine Resources Commission's list of approved states and waters and are on the Marine Resources Commission's list of approved species. In other words, there may be a list of approved species, states, bodies of water and other criteria which would allow importation. It is assumed that this list would be permissive, that is, if all conditions are met, importation could proceed without prior permission. Alternatively, any intended importation that would not comply with the criteria and species on the approved list would require permission from the Commissioner of Marine Resources as described in 28.2-825 on a case-by-case basis.

A most conservative regulatory approach would prohibit importation of shellfish other than hatchery seed certified as to absence of known shellfish pathogens. However, that approach does not recognize nor accommodate commercial interests and could have negative economic ramifications for the oyster industry and the soft shell crab industry. The practice of importing pre-molt crabs is apparently more widespread than previously thought, involving importations from New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

The proposed criteria require for all shellfish, except pre-molt blue crabs, certification as to absence of known shellfish pathogens. Thus, no restrictions are proposed for importation of pre-molt blue crabs: the risks associated with the disease

organism *Hematodinium*, whose expression is generally confined to higher salinities, is accepted. The proposed criteria also denotes acceptance of the risks associated with potential introduction of non-indigenous marine and estuarine species which may be attached to, or shipped with shellfish and pre-molt crabs. At present, the level of risk is unevaluated. Such evaluations would be very costly and time-consuming.

It is assumed, as environmental conditions change and our knowledge base improves concerning shellfish pathogens, human pathogens carried by shellfish and the potential risks of exotic species introduction, the approved list and criteria for importation is subject to change.

APPROVED SPECIES AND CRITERIA FOR IMPORTATION

SPECIES	COASTAL AREA OR STATES	CRITERIA FOR IMPORTATION	COMMENTS
<u>Mercenaria mercenaria</u> hard clam, quahaug, quahog			
Market clams for relaying (greater than 25mm SH*)	All	Absence of known shellfish pathogens ¹	Documentation of quantity imported
Hatchery seed (less than 25mm SH*)	All	Absence of known shellfish pathogens ¹	Documentation of quantity imported
<u>Crassostrea virginica</u> american oyster			
Oyster Shellstock (greater than 25mm SH*)	New England, Mid-Atlantic ² , South Atlantic	Absence of known shellfish pathogens ¹	Documentation of quantity imported
Hatchery seed (less than 25mm SH*)	All	Absence of known shellfish pathogens ¹	Documentation of quantity imported
<u>Argopecten irradians</u> bay scallop			
hatchery seed (less than 25mm SH*)	All	Absence of known shellfish pathogens ¹	Documentation of quantity imported
<u>Spisula solidissima</u> surf clam			
hatchery seed (less than 25mm SL**)	All	Absence of known shellfish pathogens ¹	Documentation of quantity imported
<u>Mya arenaria</u> soft shell clam			
hatchery seed (less than 25mm SL**)	All	Absence of known shellfish pathogens ¹	Documentation of quantity imported
<u>Callinectes sapidus</u> pre-molt blue crabs			
	NJ, DE, MD, NC, SC, GA	None, importation allowed	Documentation of quantity imported and resulting soft crab production

¹All shellfish shipments, upon entry into the Commonwealth of Virginia for introduction into the waters of the Commonwealth must be accompanied by a certified statement from a recognized shellfish pathologist as to the absence of known shellfish pathogens. A sample of 60 individuals from the population in question should be examined by histology and fluid thioglycollate for each importation.

²Importation from Maryland permitted.

*Shell Height; measured from hinge to bill.

**Shell Length; longest dimension measured.