



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**

Summary Report of the 2008 Commercial Fishery  
for Razor Clams (*Siliqua patula*)

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Lorna L. Wargo  
48 Devonshire Road  
Montesano, WA 98563

October 2008

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Fishery Objectives and Preseason Planning .....	3
Biotoxin Sampling .....	4
Fishing Season .....	4
Licenses .....	5
Fishery Landings.....	5
Large Clams Harvested .....	7
Commercial Sales and Trends.....	8
Management Conclusions.....	8

### List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Commercial Razor Clam Fishery Biotoxin Results, 2008 .....	4
Table 2. Commercial Clam: Harvest Totals, Value, Season Length, and Licenses .....	6
Figure 1. Residence of Commercial Razor Clam Diggers by County .....	5
Figure 2. Daily Pounds of Clams Dug per Person (CPUE) and Tide Elevation .....	7

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE (WDFW)  
SUMMARY OF THE 2008 COMMERCIAL FISHERY  
FOR RAZOR CLAMS (*Siliqua patula*)

**Fishery Objectives and Preseason Planning**

A public meeting was held in March for commercial diggers and razor clams buyers at Raymond High School. The major discussion topic was when to schedule the 2008 fishery. The majority of diggers and dealers support a mid-May start. A contingent prefers an early start as possible, while another group would rather begin later in May or June to benefit from better summer weather.

Three factors largely determine the start date: the end of the recreational razor clam season, biotoxin levels, and tides. By practice, the commercial fishery opens only after the end of the recreational fishery. Separating the two makes it more difficult for sport diggers to illegally dig, possess or sell commercial quantities of clams, and simplifies recovering clams in the event of a Department of Health product recall. Due to the absence of any significant biotoxin events, the commercial fishery has enjoyed a couple of years with predictable and stable schedules.

For the last four seasons boundary poles have been installed at the north end of Leadbetter Point to provide a clear delineation between it and the spits. In recent years, shifting sand has been filling in a channel of water that had separated the spits from the north end of Leadbetter Point. At low tide the southernmost spit and the northern end of Leadbetter Point essentially became continuous, and could be easily crossed. Since regulations for the commercial razor clam fishery permit digging only on “detached” (i.e. islands) spits, a line of posts made from rebar and PVC pipe was set up to keep diggers from crossing over to Leadbetter Point. Although scouring made the channel more evident, the posts were installed again in 2008 to eliminate any uncertainty.



Finally, to conduct the commercial fishery at the Willapa spits, which are state-owned aquatic lands, WDFW is required to obtain an Aquatic Lands Right of Entry Agreement from the Department of Natural Resources. The fishery was conducted under a right of entry permit obtained in May 2006 and valid through May 2009.

### **Biotoxin Sampling**

Razor clams were collected for biotoxin testing from one site on the spits beginning in late April. Washington Department of Health protocols require two sets of samples to test below 20 parts per million before the fishery can be opened. Monitoring of biotoxin levels continues once the fishery is underway, with clams collected from dealers every seven to 10 days (fishery samples). Prior to and during the 2008 season, biotoxin levels were extremely low (Table 1).

Table 1. Commercial Razor Clam Fishery Biotoxin Results, 2008.

	Pre-season			Fishery Samples
	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	
21-Apr	<1	-	-	-
04-May	<1	-	-	-
12-May				<1
19-May				<1
27-May				1
04-Jun				1
17-Jun				<1
25-Jun				<1

### **Fishing Season**

The 2008 season opened May 8 and proceeded as scheduled through July 7; digging conditions and clam abundance were good throughout the period.

A request to extending the 2008 season was received and considered but not granted despite seemingly good numbers of clams. To extend the season several criteria must be met: 1) clam abundance appears strong using the best available indicators; 2) there is sufficient buying capacity; 3) dealers willing to purchase clams are dispersed around Willapa Bay.

The spits are too dynamic to accommodate any consistent sampling regime, so population information from the adjacent ocean beaches is used when available. For a lack of an alternative, it is assumed that the clam population on the spits mirrors the clam populations on these beaches. Early estimates from Long Beach, the only available data this year in June, indicated an upswing in the population of clams that would be accessible to the fishery by spring 2009. And though some diggers suggested that areas on the spits were “dug out” as the season neared the end of June, others

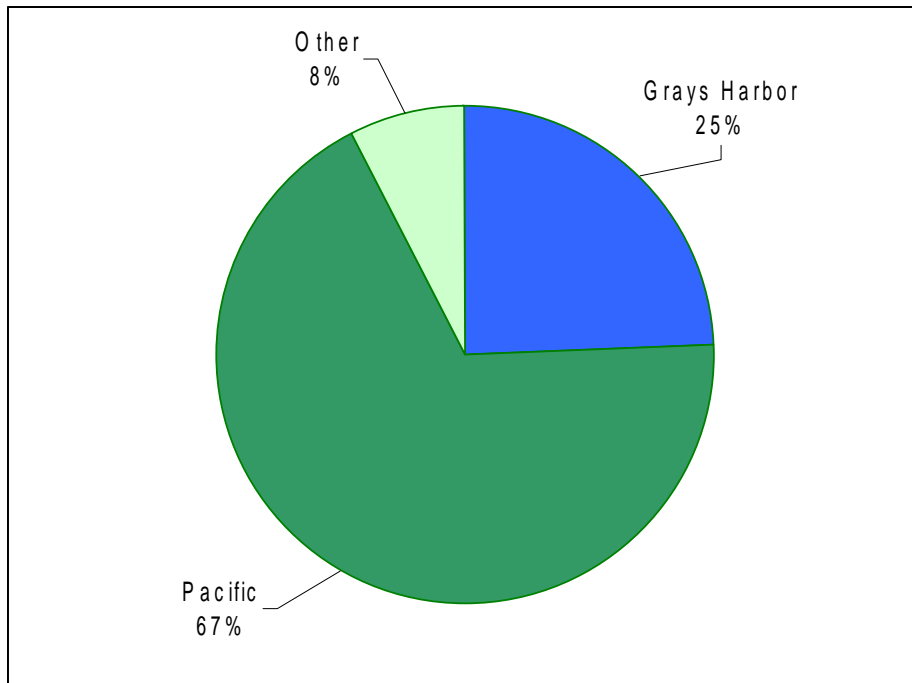
claimed that no such decline was apparent where they were digging. Despite the sketchy nature of the information, it did suggest plenty of clams were there for harvest and would be followed by strong numbers the following spring.

When dealers were polled, however, only two indicated an interest in a longer season and one of those wanted the season to end as scheduled and then be re-opened at a somewhat later date to allow them time to sell inventory on-hand. The one willing dealer could not commit to handling all the clams harvested during an extension, and was also located at a significant distance from most diggers. Unless a dealer is willing or able to set up multiple buying stations, and be able to purchase all the clams harvested, there is too great a risk that harvested clams would not get sold or would get sold to unauthorized buyers.

### Licenses

A total of 143 licenses were issued in 2008, of these 108 were actively fished. As in past years, diggers were predominantly residents of Pacific (67%) and Grays Harbor (25%) counties (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Residence of Commercial Razor Clam Diggers by County



### Fishery Landings

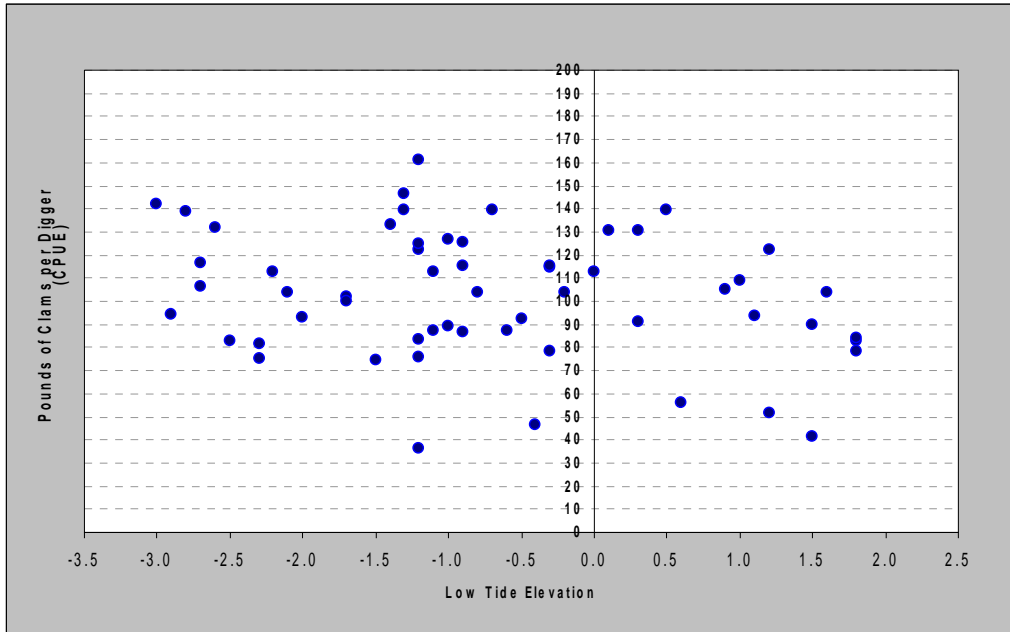
In total, the fishery landed a record 205,634 pounds of razor clams during the 61-day season (Table 1). The total direct value to diggers (ex-vessel value) was \$355,705. Clams were landed 57 days of the season; on average 33 diggers each landed about

108 pounds of clams per day. Discounting other factors such as weather or surf conditions, generally any tide less than +1.0 foot offers comparably good digging opportunity (Figure 2). Catch per unit of effort (CPUE: in this case the total number of clams dug in one day divided by the number of diggers) was highest on tides that were between -1.2 feet and +0.5 feet.

Table 1. Commercial Clam: Harvest Totals, Value, Season Length and Licenses Figure.

Year	Ex-			Number		Non-resident Licenses	License Revenue	License Fees	
	Pounds Landed	Vessel Value	Days	Diggers	Licenses			Resident	Non-Resident
90	26,553	\$48,073	36	-	290	6	\$14,800	\$50	\$100
91	26,630	\$44,106	42	-	267	8	\$13,750	\$50	\$100
92	DOMOIC ACID CLOSURE								
93	DOMOIC ACID CLOSURE								
94	46,854	\$59,487	40	-	95	3	\$12,500	\$130	\$180
95	88,290	\$109,364	38	-	127	0	\$16,510	"	"
96	25,188	\$29,295	37	-	110	1	\$14,350	"	"
97	2,849	\$3,579	21	-	28	3	\$3,790	"	"
98	4,485	\$6,558	24	-	40	0	\$5,200	"	"
99	DOMOIC ACID CLOSURE								
00	69,595	\$84,106	51	-	79	0	\$10,270	"	"
01	75,744	\$77,439	47	62	97	0	\$12,610	"	"
02	119,777	\$118,349	46	97	105	0	\$13,650	"	"
03	17,474	\$21,169	18	40	44	0	\$5,720	"	"
04	183,327	\$269,139	68	112	114	0	\$14,820	"	"
05	102,939	\$154,746	41	112	115	3	\$15,490	"	"
06	134,661	\$199,469	64	103	110	0	\$14,300	"	"
07	140,616	\$211,118	55	119	122	1	\$16,040	"	"
08	205,634	\$355,705	61	108	143	0	\$18,590	"	"

**Figure 2. Daily Pounds of Clams Dug per Person (CPUE) and Tide Elevation**



### Large Clams Harvested

Of interest this year was the number of exceptionally large razor clams harvested from the spits. Some of the largest razor clams on record have been observed in the catch. One razor clam taken from this area had a shell length of 6.81 inches (172.94 mm) and weighed a whopping 0.9 pound. Another clam, pictured below, measured 6.75 inches (171.44 mm) in length and 3.06 inches (77.84 mm) in width. For comparison, the dollar bill is 6.125 inches (155.58 mm). The previous largest razor clam recorded in Washington is thought to be a 6.62-inch clam taken a number of years ago in a Quinault Indian Nation fishery on the Mocrocks beach.



## **Commercial Sales and Trends**

Commercial dealers must be certified by the Washington Department of Health to purchase razor clams; the certification is specific to razor clams and renewed annually. Typically, five to six companies register to buy razor clams each year. Most dealers are established wholesale seafood businesses in Pacific and Grays Harbor counties that operate year-round in various fisheries. These companies purchase the majority of clams. However, some dealers are simply individuals that have obtained the required licenses and certification to purchase razor clams only. Typically, these dealers are commercial Dungeness crab fishers buying razor clams for bait.

Dungeness crab fishers favor razors clams as bait because they are a natural food source of crabs and also hold up well. But, no longer are the majority of the razor clams harvested in the commercial fishery frozen and sold for crab bait. Two wholesale dealers estimated in 2008 that about 60% percent of the clams they purchased were sold to regional buyers for human consumption in markets locally, in British Columbia and overseas. These clams were worth about three times more compared to clams bought and held for bait.

## **Management Conclusions**

In recent years, dealers have been able to take advantage of stable seasons and strong production to develop retail markets locally and overseas. Working with dealers, staff determined two factors were key to market development: A spring/summer season and a generally consistent season start. These factors have directed season development and are balanced with tides, weather and the needs of the recreational fishery. In addition to the direct benefits related to the harvest of clams, the timing of the fishery provides an important economic bridge between crab and salmon seasons for both dealers and diggers. Within the constraints posed by population abundance and biotoxin levels, management of the fishery will continue to promote season predictability to support marketing opportunities and to provide a reliable source of bait for the Dungeness crab fishery.