

THE IPSWICH SHELLFISH GROUP: A HISTORY OF ITS PRESENCE IN MAINE.

The Ipswich Shellfish Company was founded in 1935 in Ipswich, Massachusetts as a purveyor of softshell clams. The Maine Shellfish Company was established on Water Street in Ellsworth in 1949 for the purpose of supplying clams to the Ipswich Shellfish Company. In 2005, Maine Shellfish Company acquired the Preble Fish Company in Kennebunk and now services customers in Maine and New Hampshire from both locations.

In 1949 my father moved from Ipswich to Ellsworth to establish the Maine Shellfish Company. I am proud to say that I am second person in my family to manage the Maine Shellfish Company, having joined it in 1982 after having worked there summers during high school and college. I am fortunate that my father risked a move in 1949, otherwise I may not have had the privilege of growing up in the State of Maine.

Over the years the Ipswich Shellfish Group has expanded its services and product offering and now includes facilities in Maryland, Connecticut, and South Carolina as well as Massachusetts and Maine.

ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF THE IPSWICH SHELLFISH GROUP TO THE STATE OF MAINE.

The Ipswich Shellfish Group provides a significant economic benefit to Maine and the Maine seafood industry.

In addition to its purpose as a wholesale seafood distributor serving Maine and parts of New Hampshire. Maine Shellfish Company is a substantial source of Maine seafood products for the Ipswich Shellfish Company and the Ipswich Shellfish Group. Products sourced for the Ipswich Shellfish Group at the Ellsworth location include softshell clams, oysters, mussels, scallops, and halibut, all grown or harvested primarily in Hancock and Washington counties. Additionally Maine Shellfish procures substantial quantities of lobsters for the Ipswich Shellfish Company to sell in the domestic and international shipping trade.

The Ipswich Shellfish Company also purchases seafood products including softshell clams, oysters, and mussels directly from a number of Maine seafood vendors.

Moody's Shellfish Company was founded by Scott Moody in 1999. Since Moody's inception the Ipswich Shellfish Company has been a major and substantial customer of the firm. Moody sources all of his soft shell clams in the State of Maine with buying locations in Scarborough, Harpswell, Phippsburg, Waldoboro, and Thomaston. Much of Moody's product is transported to the Ipswich Shellfish plant to be shucked.

Maine Shellfish Company with locations in Ellsworth employs between 82 and 101 people, depending on the time of year, in order to execute its responsibilities which include sourcing Maine product for the Ipswich Shellfish Group.

THE SOFT SHELL CLAM MARKET

The major market for both shucked clams and clams in the shell, or fryers and steamers, is not in Maine but south of our border in the rest of New England. It is reasonable to assume that the Maine softshell clam industry would be in dire shape without this market. The Department of Marine Resources operates its Water Quality Program to satisfy FDA requirements that must be met before Maine shellfish products can be shipped interstate insuring our resource access to the broader marketplace.

One of the keys to a successful market is the consistency of product availability. Availability of the soft shell clam is subject to the whims of Mother Nature. Excessive rainfall or red tide can severely limit the supply of clams in any or all sections of the coast. These conditions occur most generally during the summer when prices are higher because of demand. Interruption of the harvester's income during these times is most acute. Allowing Maine harvesters to work on closed flats where clams must be depurated before being brought to market would provide some income insurance for some harvesters and moderate market disruptions.

It is my understanding, though DMR's figures would be more accurate, that only about 35 per cent of those flats in the State amenable to depuration are currently being worked. That means that 65 per cent of these potentially productive flats are providing no economic benefit to the residents of the State. It is my further understanding that very little harvesting for depuration is conducted in Downeast Maine where Moody's efforts would be concentrated.

Records indicate that landings of soft shell clams have been declining in recent years though the value of the landings has increased due to rising prices. Introduction of this depurated product would allow consumers of soft shell clams, including restaurants and markets to feel a bit more comfortable about the reliability of supply and certainly provide more financial opportunity for harvesters.

Presently frying clams are being imported from the State of Washington to fill gaps in the shucked or fryer market. It seems unreasonable to allow Maine resources to sit in flats with no economic benefit to Maine residents when the market is asking for product.

SUMMARY

Two experienced seafood companies with strong Maine connections are seeking access to an underutilized resource that will provide economic opportunities for Maine shellfish harvesters that did not previously exist. A protocol has been developed that will insure that a wholesome product is delivered to the marketplace. The bill before you, as presently would extinguish those opportunities for Maine shellfish harvesters.

James Mar Kos
Maine Shellfish Co.