

Findings and Decision – Experimental Application of Searise Fisheries Limited for AO#5001

1. Overview:

On October 18, 2017, the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (NSDFA) received an application from Searise Fisheries Limited for an experimental Aquaculture Licence and Lease #5001 (AQ#5001), as described below:

Table 1. Description of Experimental Aquaculture Licence and Lease #5001

Type: Marine	Size: 14.24 Ha
Number: AQ#5001	Cultivation Method: Bottom cultivation with gear
Applicant: Searise Fisheries Limited	Species: Soft-shell clam
Location: Three Fathom Harbour, Halifax County	Proposed Term: One year with annual renewals up to a maximum of five years

2. History

AQ#5001 is a new issuance of an Experimental Aquaculture Licence and Lease.

3. Procedure

3.1 Performance Review

A review of the information submitted by the operator in support of their application for an experimental licence and lease was completed. The review recommended that the site be issued based on technical and biological assessment. This review was completed on March 2, 2021.

3.2 Network Review

AQ#5001 was sent for review on June 12, 2019 to the following agencies: Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Transport Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Nova Scotia Department of Environment, Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forestry, Nova Scotia Department of Municipal Affairs and Nova Scotia Office of Aboriginal Affairs.

3.3 Public Comment Period

Notice of the application for the experimental licence and lease for the 30-day public comment period was published on NSDFA's website (<http://novascotia.ca/fish/aquaculture/public-information/>) for the period of January 29, 2021 to February 26, 2021. Notice of the application was also published in the Royal Gazette Part I on February 3, 10, 17 and 24, 2021.

3.4 Submissions

Zero submissions were received by NSDFA during the 30-day public comment period.

4. Factors to be considered

AQ#5001 is an application for an experimental Soft-shell clam aquaculture operation in East Three Fathom Harbour, Halifax County. The applicant, Searise Fisheries Ltd., currently operates a Soft-shell clam processing facility and has been involved in the Soft-shell clam industry for a number of years. The intent of the experimental Soft-shell clam aquaculture operation is to demonstrate the viability of cultivating wild sourced Soft-shell clam seed through environmental and stock manipulation. The specific experimental objective is to revive and re-establish the clam population in the area which is deplete of clams. The re-establishment of a clam population is expected to promote the natural aeration of the sediment and maintain this conditioning. The proponent intends to collect seed to disburse on the experimental lease. A spat collection permit issued by DFO will be obtained in order to collect seed outside of the experimental lease. Benthic spat collectors (e.g., miners moss) will also be deployed on the experimental lease to determine the viability of collecting seed. Should the experiment prove successful, increased Soft-shell clam production should prove beneficial to both the local and Provincial economy and result in increased employment.

AQ#5001 is located in waters which are currently classified as *Restricted* by the *Canadian Shellfish Sanitation Program (CSSP)*. The *Restricted* classification requires the operator to harvest product under strict protocols. Soft-shell clams cannot be harvested and sold for human consumption for the duration of the experimental licence and lease unless all Provincial, Federal, and Municipal permits are in place. An example of this would be a Canadian Food Inspection Agency approved depuration plan that utilizes an approved depuration facility. The nature of AQ#5001 being located in *Restricted* waters limits the impact of AQ#5001 to commercial and recreational harvesters, as such harvesters would not currently be able to access product from this area.

The planned operation of AQ#5001 does not suggest any negative impacts on the sustainability of wild salmon or other wildlife. There were no potential ecological concerns identified in the application with respect to negative impacts on other fisheries. An archeological site of a shipwreck was identified to be located to the north of AQ#5001; however, its proximity was not noted as a concern and the operator is advised to contact the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage should any archeological artifacts be found on the site.

The proposed cultivation method for AQ#5001 is Bottom shellfish cultivation with gear. Benthic spat collector mats will be deployed during the summer months for the purposes of setting clam larvae. The operator of AQ#5001 must ensure that all gear remains within the geographic boundaries of the site. Section 55 of the Licence and Lease Regulations requires an aquaculture licence holder to mark each of their sites in a manner determined by the Minister and keep each site marked during the term of their licence. The licence and lease holder must also comply with the *Canadian Navigable Waters Act* and the agreed upon site markings. The Farm Operations section of the Farm Management Plan for AQ#5001 will require the operator to indicate how they will operate AQ#5001 in accordance with industry best practices with respect to maintaining the site in good order, the removal of decommissioned farm supplies and equipment, and the retrieval of gear or debris that has broken loose.

AQ#5001 is located in East Three Fathom Harbour, Halifax County. The nearest aquaculture sites to AQ#5001 are located over thirty kilometers away near Sober Island, Halifax County. AQ#5001 is located in the nearshore environment, immediately adjacent to the shoreline. As AQ#5001 involves the cultivation of shellfish with use of gear on bottom, the potential impacts to navigation and ingress and egress from adjacent shorelines are mitigated. Other users shall retain the ability to traverse within the boundaries of AQ#5001, provided they do so in a manner that does not negatively impact the aquaculture operation.

5. Decision

Based on the considerations above, Experimental Aquaculture Licence #5001 and Aquaculture Lease #5001 is hereby issued to Searise Fisheries Limited. The issued documents shall be prepared in accordance with the standard operating documents of NSDFA, and shall be made publicly available subject to the provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

6. Conditions

The operator shall adhere to the site marking requirements according to their Notice of Works issued by Transport Canada under the *Canadian Navigable Waters Act*, reference number NPP # 2019-200074.



Robert Ceschiutti
Aquaculture Administrator
Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture

July 28, 2021

Date