Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture
Aquaculture Division, Licensing & Leasing Unit
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Decision – Application to Administrator

Application Summary:

Application Reference Number:	REF#511
Aquaculture Site Number:	AQ#1378
Application Class:	Class II
Application Type:	Amendment
Abstract:	Application to amend licence and lease no. 1378 to add bottom cultivation with gear method and suspended cultivation method
Applicant Name:	Chris Strickland and Shelley Strickland
Date Received by Department:	August 28, 2023
Location:	Merigomish Harbour
County:	Pictou
Site Type:	Marine
Operation Type:	Commercial

Current Licence / Lease Information:

Site Size (in hectares):	12.24
Method(s) of Cultivation:	Bottom without gear
Species:	American oyster, Bay quahog, Bay scallop
Term of Licence:	March 2, 2024, to March 1, 2034
Term of Lease:	March 2, 2024, to March 1, 2044

Decision:

Decision Issued:	Approved with Modification
Signature and Date:	[redacted] October 19, 2026
	Bruce Hancock, Aquaculture Administrator

Definitions:

The following are terms, acronyms and definitions that may appear in this document:
Act means the Nova Scotia Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act
Department means the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture
Regulations means the Nova Scotia Aquaculture Licence and Lease Regulations

Site History:

Aquaculture licence no. 1378 was first issued by the province on May 14, 2014, to Chris & Shelley Strickland for a 10-year term from March 1, 2014, to March 1, 2024, for bottom without gear cultivation of American oyster, Bay quahog and Bay scallop on a 12.24-hectare site located in Merigomish Harbour, Pictou County. On March 22, 2024, the licence and lease were renewed. The new licence term is March 2, 2024, to March 1, 2034, and the new lease term is March 2, 2024, to March 1, 2044.

Outcomes of Compliance Review:

Pursuant to Section 33 of the Regulations, the Administrator (or an appointed employee) must conduct a compliance review of the applicant in accordance with Sections 86 and 87 of the Regulations.

The review considered the compliance history of the applicants in relation to aquaculture licensing and leasing and aquaculture operations. A Compliance Information Request had previously been submitted to the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources – Conservation Officer Services in relation to aquaculture site no. 1378. No compliance issues were identified through that review. The Justice database reviews completed for the applicants did not identify charges or convictions relevant to the aquaculture compliance review.

Accordingly, no significant compliance concerns were identified that would adversely affect consideration of this application.

Outcomes of Performance Review:

Pursuant to Section 34 of the Regulations, the Administrator (or an appointed employee) must conduct a performance review of the associated aquaculture site in accordance with Sections 89 and 90 of the Regulations.

Records reviewed for the site demonstrate continued use for shellfish aquaculture, primarily for the cultivation of American oyster, with Bay quahog production also reported. Production records reviewed for the site cover the period from 2014 to 2024 and indicate varying production levels over that period. The site is located within waters classified as approved for shellfish harvest under the Canadian Shellfish Sanitation Program.

No issues related to farm operations were identified through the performance review. The available information indicates that shellfish have been cultivated at the site over a number of years without reported shellfish losses and that the oceanographic and biophysical conditions have supported American oyster cultivation. No issues were identified in relation to Aquatic Animal Health programs.

The performance review did not identify concerns that would prevent further consideration of the proposed amendment.

Consultations on Application to Administrator:

Pursuant to Clause 32(a) of the Regulations, the Administrator must undertake consultations with any of the following as required under the laws of the Province or of Canada with respect to the application:

- A department or agency of the Government of Nova Scotia
- A department or agency of the Government of Canada

As such, consultations were undertaken with the following departments or agencies:

Government of Nova Scotia:

- Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture
- Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism & Heritage (CCTH)
- Department of Environment & Climate Change (ECC)
- Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Office of L'nu Affairs (OLA)

Government of Canada

- Fisheries & Oceans Canada (DFO)
- Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)
- Transport Canada (TC)
- Environment & Climate Change Canada (ECCC)
- Canadian Wildlife Services (CWS)

Public Submissions on Application to Administrator:

Pursuant to Clause 32(c) of the Regulations, the Administrator must undertake consultations with the public, in the manner provided in Section 43 of the Regulations.

Pursuant to Section 43 of the Regulations, notice of the application was published on the Department's website and in the Royal Gazette Part I, inviting the public to submit written comments on the application to the Administrator within a 30-day period, from January 14, 2026, to February 13, 2026.

One (1) submission was received by the Department during the 30-day public comment period. The one (1) submission received met the requirements set out in subsection 43(4) of the Regulations (see below for exceptions) and have been included with this document (refer to **Supplement 1: Written Public Submissions**).

Factors to be Considered:

Under Section 17(1) of the Regulations, in making decisions related to marine aquaculture sites, the Administrator must take into consideration the optimum use of marine resources, as determined by taking into consideration the following factors only:

a) The contribution of the proposed operation to community and Provincial economic development;
b) Fishery activities in the public waters surrounding the proposed aquacultural operation;
c) The oceanographic and biophysical characteristics of the public waters surrounding the proposed aquacultural operation;
d) The other users of the public waters surrounding the proposed aquacultural operation;
e) The public right of navigation;
f) The number and productivity of other aquaculture sites in the public waters surrounding the proposed aquacultural operation.

All of the above factors have been taken into consideration prior to making the decision on this application. The following is a summary of the outcomes of the Departmental review and any consultation undertaken

(where indicated above). This summary is not intended to be an exhaustive account of the results following review and consultation.

The contribution of the proposed operation to community and Provincial economic development

The application proposes to expand the cultivation methods authorized at an existing 12.24-hectare shellfish aquaculture site by adding bottom cultivation with gear and suspended cultivation. The applicant proposes to continue cultivating American oyster, Bay quahog and Bay scallop, with American oyster being the primary species for production.

The Development Plan identifies existing local infrastructure and services that may support the operation, including nearby processing capacity, equipment and services associated with Shandaph Oysters, as well as the proposed use of other local suppliers. The applicant also anticipates employment associated with the expanded operation. The Department's technical review found the proposed production levels and gear amounts reasonable for the size of the lease and found the applicant's proposed use of local services and suppliers capable of contributing to the local economy.

Having considered the information provided by the applicant and the Department's technical review, the Administrator is satisfied that the proposed amendment has the potential to contribute positively to community and Provincial economic development.

Fishery activities in the public waters surrounding the proposed aquacultural operation

The applicant indicates that the addition of bottom and suspended gear is not expected to adversely affect fishing activities in the public waters surrounding the lease. The applicant also identifies regular maintenance, appropriate selection of ropes and other equipment, and storm preparation as measures intended to reduce the potential for aquaculture gear to affect surrounding waters.

The Department's technical review did not identify an unacceptable risk to fisheries activities. Fisheries and Oceans Canada noted that Indigenous communities have authorized food, social and ceremonial fisheries with access to tidal waters in Nova Scotia, including access applicable to Merigomish Harbour, and specifically identified Pictou Landing First Nation's access in the harbour. The technical review concluded that this access should not be impacted by the lease area.

Having considered the available information, the Administrator is satisfied that the amendment can be undertaken without an unacceptable adverse effect on fisheries activities in the public waters surrounding the aquaculture operation.

The oceanographic and biophysical characteristics of the public waters surrounding the proposed aquacultural operation

Aquaculture site no. 1378 is an existing shellfish site. The information reviewed demonstrates that portions of the lease are shallow and subject to winter ice conditions. The applicant has therefore proposed locating suspended cultivation infrastructure in deeper portions of the lease and using mitigation measures to address the potential effects of ice. The Development Plan identifies zones where water depth is intended to permit suspended gear to be overwintered beneath the ice and shallower zones where bottom cultivation methods may be used.

The Department's technical review identified the shallow water and winter ice conditions as matters requiring consideration. Following additional information from the applicant concerning the location of suspended lines and mitigation measures, the technical review concluded that the proposed general site design was reasonable in relation to the oceanographic and benthic environment. The review also found that the proposed use of screw anchors was not expected to result in major benthic impacts.

The site's performance history provides additional information concerning its suitability for shellfish production. Shellfish cultivation has occurred over the period reviewed without reported shellfish losses, and the performance review found the conditions suitable for American oyster cultivation.

Having considered the site characteristics, operational history, proposed site design and mitigation measures, the Administrator is satisfied that the oceanographic and biophysical characteristics of the public waters are suitable for the proposed operation.

The other users of the public waters surrounding the proposed aquacultural operation

The Administrator considered the potential effects of the amendment on other users of the public waters surrounding the operation. The applicant states that the lease does not impede the deep navigation channels in the area and that small watercraft are able to pass through the lease. The Department's technical review similarly concluded that the addition of gear was expected to have minimal impacts on other users, provided the site is appropriately marked.

The Administrator also considered the written submission received during the public comment period. The submission was made by an owner of waterfront property adjacent to the eastern portion of the lease and raised a specific concern regarding continued water access between that property and the surrounding public waters. The submission states that the waters in front of the property currently provide an important route for small vessels to reach open water and expresses concern that the proposed placement of aquaculture gear could constrain that access.

The Administrator considers this concern relevant to the effect of the proposed operation on other users of the public waters. Although aquaculture site no. 1378 is an existing lease, its current authorization is for bottom cultivation without gear. The amendment would introduce bottom cultivation with gear and suspended cultivation and would therefore result in additional physical infrastructure within the lease.

The Administrator also considered that the Development Plan provides flexibility in the final positioning and configuration of aquaculture gear within the lease. The applicant states that the illustrated configuration is not an exact model, that the actual layout may vary, and that space is available for navigation within the lease and between and around cultivation lines.

On balance, the Administrator is satisfied that the proposed cultivation methods can coexist with other users of the public waters provided that the final configuration of aquaculture gear maintains an unobstructed water-access corridor between the shoreline adjacent to the eastern portion of the lease and the public waters beyond the aquaculture gear. This requirement is addressed through a modification to the approval.

The public right of navigation

The Administrator considered the potential effect of the proposed amendment on the public right of navigation. The applicant states that the aquaculture lease does not impede the deep navigation channels in the area and that space would remain available within and around the proposed cultivation lines.

The application requires consideration under the federal navigation protection process because suspended cultivation is proposed. The Department's technical review identifies the requirement for Navigation Protection Program approval.

In addition, the Administrator considered the concern raised during public consultation that placement of aquaculture gear in the eastern portion of the lease could restrict the passage of small watercraft between adjacent waterfront property and open water. The public submission indicates that the existing route is used to access the property by water and that the remaining open water could be constrained following placement of the proposed gear.

Having considered the nature and location of the proposed gear, the existing navigation channels, the information provided by the applicant and the concern raised during public consultation, the Administrator is satisfied that the amendment can be undertaken in a manner compatible with the public right of navigation provided that an unobstructed water-access corridor is incorporated into the final gear configuration in the eastern portion of the lease. This requirement is addressed through a modification to the approval.

The number and productivity of other aquaculture sites in the public waters surrounding the proposed aquacultural operation

The applicant identified other aquaculture operations in Merigomish Harbour and described an existing working relationship with Shandaph Oysters involving information sharing, equipment, processing capacity and oyster seed. The applicant anticipates that the proposed amendment will increase its ability to produce shellfish and may complement other aquaculture activity within the harbour.

The Department's technical review found no expected adverse change in interactions with other aquaculture operations as a result of the proposed amendment. The review also concluded that the amendment would support additional production at an existing site and had not identified an impediment to further aquaculture development in the area.

Having considered the number and productivity of other aquaculture sites in the surrounding public waters, the Administrator is satisfied that the proposed amendment is compatible with existing aquaculture activity and the orderly development of aquaculture within the area.

Decision:

Based on the factors considered above, and having considered the optimum use of marine resources in reaching this determination, the application to amend aquaculture licence and lease no. 1378 to add bottom cultivation with gear and suspended cultivation is hereby approved, subject to the modifications set out below.

Modifications:

1. Water-access corridor

The licence holder shall ensure that the placement and configuration of aquaculture gear maintains an unobstructed water-access corridor between the shoreline adjacent to the eastern portion of the lease and the public waters beyond the aquaculture gear. The corridor shall be located and configured to the satisfaction of the Administrator and shall remain unobstructed throughout the term of the licence and lease.

2. Gear within the corridor

No aquaculture gear or infrastructure that would obstruct or impede the passage of watercraft, including suspended cultivation gear, cultivation lines, floats, anchors, ropes or bottom cultivation gear, shall be placed or maintained within the water-access corridor accepted by the Administrator.

3. Final gear configuration

Before installing gear within the eastern portion of the lease, the licence holder shall submit to the Administrator a final gear configuration that clearly identifies the location and extent of the proposed water-access corridor and the location of all aquaculture gear and infrastructure adjacent to it. No gear shall be installed within that portion of the lease unless and until the Administrator has determined that the proposed corridor is sufficient to maintain unobstructed passage between the adjacent shoreline and the public waters beyond the aquaculture gear and has accepted the final gear configuration.

4. Other approvals

The Administrator’s acceptance of the final gear configuration does not replace or limit any applicable federal approval or requirement concerning navigation. The placement and operation of aquaculture gear shall remain subject to all such approvals and requirements.

Implementation:

The licence and lease documents shall be prepared in accordance with the Department's standard operating documents. The decision shall be deemed implemented once the licence and lease documents have been signed by all parties. The licence and lease shall be made publicly available subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, once the decision has been implemented.

Supplement 1: Written Public Submissions

Written Public Submissions via online form (1 page)

The Department does not endorse, and is not responsible for, the content of the included submissions, including, but not limited to, the accuracy, reliability, or currency of the information contained wherein.

Wherever they may occur, text within public submissions will have been redacted by the Department for the purpose of protecting personal information, including but not limited to, names, addresses, and contact information, with the exception of the following:

- The name and community of the individual submitting the written public comment
- The name of the applicant and any authorized contacts, as listed on the application form
- Names and contact information of politicians
- Names and contact information of municipal, provincial, and federal employees
- Names of aquaculture licence holders
- Names of authors of published works

The Department also reserves the right not to post submissions or to redact certain details from submissions, in accordance with the Terms of Use for government websites, web applications or web communications (copy of terms available at https://beta.novascotia.ca/terms).

Online Written Public Comment Submission

Submission ID #:	6fd1ae52
Submission Date (MM/DD/YYYY):	02/09/2026 23:19:09
Reference to Application:	REF#511 (AQ#1378)
First Name:	Nick
Last Name:	Olding
Community:	Pictou county

Written Comment on Application:

Application Reference Number: REF#511 (AQ#1378) We, Nick Olding and Ron Olding, are the owners of the waterfront property immediately adjacent to the proposed amendment area shown in the notification map, located to the east of the proposed lease. We are submitting this comment to express concerns related to the public right of navigation and the use of surrounding public waters by other users, as outlined within the regulated factors for consideration. While there is currently an existing lease in this area, the gear presently in use does not obstruct access to our shoreline or interfere with safe navigation. The proposed amendment, however, introduces gear that would occupy a much larger footprint and would be positioned in a way that could obstruct access for any type of watercraft attempting to safely reach our property or navigate through the area. The proposed shellfish lease amendment would occupy a significant portion of the public waters directly in front of, and between, our property and open navigable waters. This area is currently used for small vessel access, including boating and recreational activities, and serves as an important navigational corridor from the shoreline to open water. The placement and configuration of the proposed lease would significantly restrict safe access to our property. This includes limiting access for small craft and creating an obstruction that interferes with our ability, as the landowners, to safely reach our shoreline. In reference to Section 4.3 – Site Design, areas B3, B4, and A3 appear to significantly obstruct safe and reasonable access to the property. Given the narrowness of the remaining navigable section between B1, B2, A1, A2 (Section 4.3 Site Design Area)— which also provides direct access to Chris Strickland's property/cabin — and the proximity of the lease to neighboring properties, the proposed amendment does not represent an optimum use of the marine resource when considering the needs of other users of the surrounding public waters. As currently proposed, the lease would disproportionately impact navigation and shared access within this area. For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Department carefully consider the impacts on public navigation and the rights of other users of the surrounding waters when reviewing this application. Sincerely, Nick Olding and Ron Olding

Online Written Public Comment Submission

Submission ID #: 6fd1ae52

Personal Contact Information:

[redacted]