

Island Ad-Vantages

THE VIEW FROM ATLANTIC AVENUE

October 29, 2020 – The Maine DMR closed all of Frenchman Bay on the eastern side of Mount Desert Island and extending westerly to include the Cranberry Isles to the harvest of shellfish last week due to the presence of marine biotoxin. This is becoming somewhat predictable over the past decade or so. Historically the most typical biotoxin-related closure events in Maine are for “red tide,” which involves a species of phytoplankton called *Alexandrium*, and they take place in spring and summer. This microscopic organism is classified as a dinoflagellate and produces a toxin that causes paralytic shellfish poison (PSP). Last week’s closure however, is for a toxin called amnesiac shellfish poisoning (ASP) and is related to the bloom of a very different organism. The bloom happening in Frenchman Bay is *Pseudo-nitzschia*, which is a diatom and has been showing up in the Gulf of Maine in recent years. The shellfish included in the closure are bivalves that filter the seawater to collect particulate food and includes clams, mussels, oysters and carnivorous snails. If people consume shellfish that have concentrated ASP, they can get sick and suffer permanent short-term memory loss.

Scientists believe these late fall blooms are related to warmer ocean water temperatures in combination with earlier drought conditions. Under drought conditions, there is less runoff of water from the land, and this changes the amount and types of nutrients that make their way into the near shore water column and this affects which types of phytoplankton bloom. Similar conditions happened in the Gulf of Maine in 2016 and 2017, which also had *Pseudo-nitzschia* blooms and resulted in closures to shellfish harvest in early fall in eastern Maine. DMR monitors all shellfish growing areas for the phytoplankton cells that cause marine biotoxins and closures are made as precautions to protect public health. Because of this monitoring and traceability programs for shellfish, there has never been any documented ASP illnesses in Maine. Rest assured that if you buy shellfish legally at a restaurant or retail outlet, they were probably harvested from open areas and are safe to consume.

Do you have a question about our fisheries? Send it to info@coastalfisheries.org or call 207.367.2708. Learn more about MCCF by visiting us online at www.coastalfisheries.org.

FISHERIES LOG

Prices to Harvesters in Stonington

Lobsters (shedders): \$4.05/lb.

Bait (herring): \$82/bu.

Fuel (diesel): \$2.09/gal.