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RI Coastal Resources Management Council

...to preserve, protect, develop, and restore coastal resources for all Rhode Islanders

Regarding CRMC Application #2017-12-086 (Raso)

February 16, 2018

To-date, there have been a collection of items published in the Narragansett Times (one story that was edited but with a still-misleading headline, one opinion column, and three letters to the editor) that have been inaccurate, misleading and have led the public to believe things about a certain aquaculture application before the CRMC that simply are not true.

The article, "Shellfish Advisory Panel approves Raso application," and the idea that CRMC has approved anything about the Raso application for Segar Cove is false. The process for aquaculture applications is long and thorough and this application still has a number of federal and state regulatory steps before it before it reaches the CRMC Council in a public hearing.

Once all of the information is gathered, CRMC staff will write a report to synthesize that information and a recommendation will be made to the CRMC Council in the report. Once CRMC staff reports are complete, applications go into the queue for a public hearing. At the public hearing, the council reviews the report, hears testimony from the applicant, objectors, and supporters. The council then votes to either approve, approve with modification, or deny the application. The CRMC is likely a few months from scheduling a public hearing on this application from Mr. Raso, for the reasons stated above.

By publishing not only misleading news stories, but incorrect opinion pieces and unfounded letters to the editor (which are based on incorrect information provided to the public), the Narragansett Times does its readership a great disservice, and shows its bias, which is unfortunate.

Aquaculture is one of the most-regulated activities in RI's coastal waters. The RI Marine Fisheries Council, which serves in advisory role to the CRMC permitting process, is copied on every aquaculture public notice. All aquaculture applications are noticed to the town in which it is proposed (notices go to the town planner's office – they then share with the waterfront advisory

commission, harbor master and town conservation commission or each town's equivalent); DEM staff (Div. of Fish & Wildlife, Office of Water Resources, Office of the Director, Office of Law Enforcement); Dept. of Health; USCG, USACE (they share it with NOAA Fisheries or NMFS, EPA, others at DEM); NOAA Fisheries, RISAA, RISA, individual commercial shellfisherman who asked to be on the mailing list; all commercial fishing associations in RI; STB (multiple people); academia who have asked to be on mailing list; individuals who have asked to be on an aquaculture mailing list, as well as aquaculturists; the Ocean State Aquaculture Association; and East Coast Shellfish Growers' Association. It is the opposite of perfunctory.

The facts of the matter of Mr. Perry Raso's application before the CRMC are that the Council has not yet decided on it, and any reporting to the contrary is false. The public notice was not done in a subversive way, which both the Times and now the public claim. The CRMC, as the state's manager of all aquaculture, is the only entity that can approve or deny Mr. Raso's application. And, finally, the Times' continued misleading and inaccurate coverage of this issue only serve to continue and intensify a mistrust between state government, the media it entrusts to report the truth, and the public that deserves to learn it.

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