

W. J. Link
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SHELLFISH INVESTIGATION
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THE 1973 RAZOR CLAM FISHERY

by
Terry Link

Fish Commission of Oregon
Management & Research Division

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INTRODUCTION

Razor clam diggers were sampled from March through September on Clatsop beaches for number and age composition of the clams harvested and the distribution and number of diggers. Data from beaches south of Tillamook Head was collected as time permitted. Samples of razor clams from Clatsop beaches were collected for the Oregon State Health Division for shellfish toxicity analysis. A release of 3,200 clams was made for growth and mortality rate comparisons with data from 1952-1954.

SPORT FISHERY

The 1973 season produced 725,000 clams dug on 76,000 digger trips to Clatsop beaches. Compared to the 1972 season (Figure 1), a 10.2% increase in digger trips and a 13.3% increase in the number of clams dug was observed. The two-mile long Seaside beach accounted for 57.8% of the digger trips and 65.6% of the clams dug. Table 1 lists the harvest, catch rates and number of digger trips by statistical area. Clam wastage was estimated by using the 1966-70 average of 18.0%.

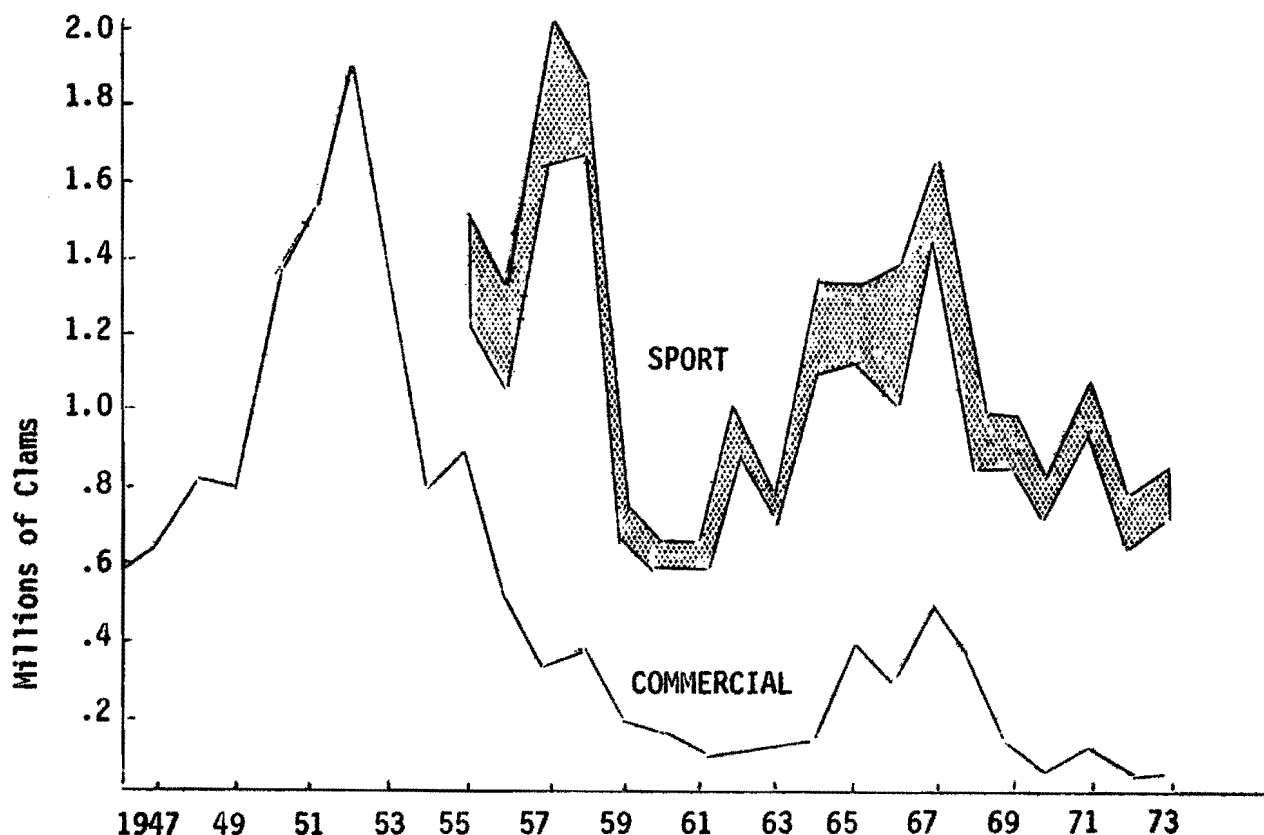


Figure 1. Annual Number of Clams Dug from 1946 to Present, Shaded Area Indicates Number of Clams Wasted

Table 1. Sport Harvest of Razor Clams and Number of Diggers by Area from Clatsop Beaches, March to September, 1973

Area Number*	Miles of Beach	Number of Diggers	Clams/ Digger Trip	Number of Clams Dug	Number of Clams Wasted	Harvest Total
1	3.6	11,052	9.3	102,976	22,604	125,580
2	6.2	9,441	7.0	66,527	14,603	81,130
3	5.0	5,380	4.9	26,432	5,802	32,234
4	1.2	6,318	8.4	53,025	11,640	64,665
5	2.0	44,054	10.8	475,723	104,427	580,150
Total	18.0	76,245	9.5	724,683	159,076	883,759

- *1 - Columbia River to Fort Stevens Park Road
- 2 - Fort Stevens Park Road to Sunset Beach Road
- 3 - Sunset Beach Road to Gearhart Beach Road
- 4 - Gearhart Beach Road to Necanicum River
- 5 - Necanicum River to Tillamook Head

Except for the slight increase in three and four year old clams, which were plentiful on outside bars, the 1973 age composition varied little from that of the previous five years as seen in Figure 2. The 1973 set didn't show until late July and August. A large late fall set was observed in Areas 1, 4 and 5. Adverse weather conditions limited the fall and early winter fishery to only a few tides.

COMMERCIAL FISHERY

In 1973, 16,030 pounds (89,207 clams) were dug by 111 commercial diggers. Area 5 produced 67.7% of the total harvest. Area 1 boat bars produced good catches in May and June.

Commercial diggers were notified in September that the shellfish harvester's permit (ORS 622.080) would still be needed to sell clams for human consumption but there would be no fee.

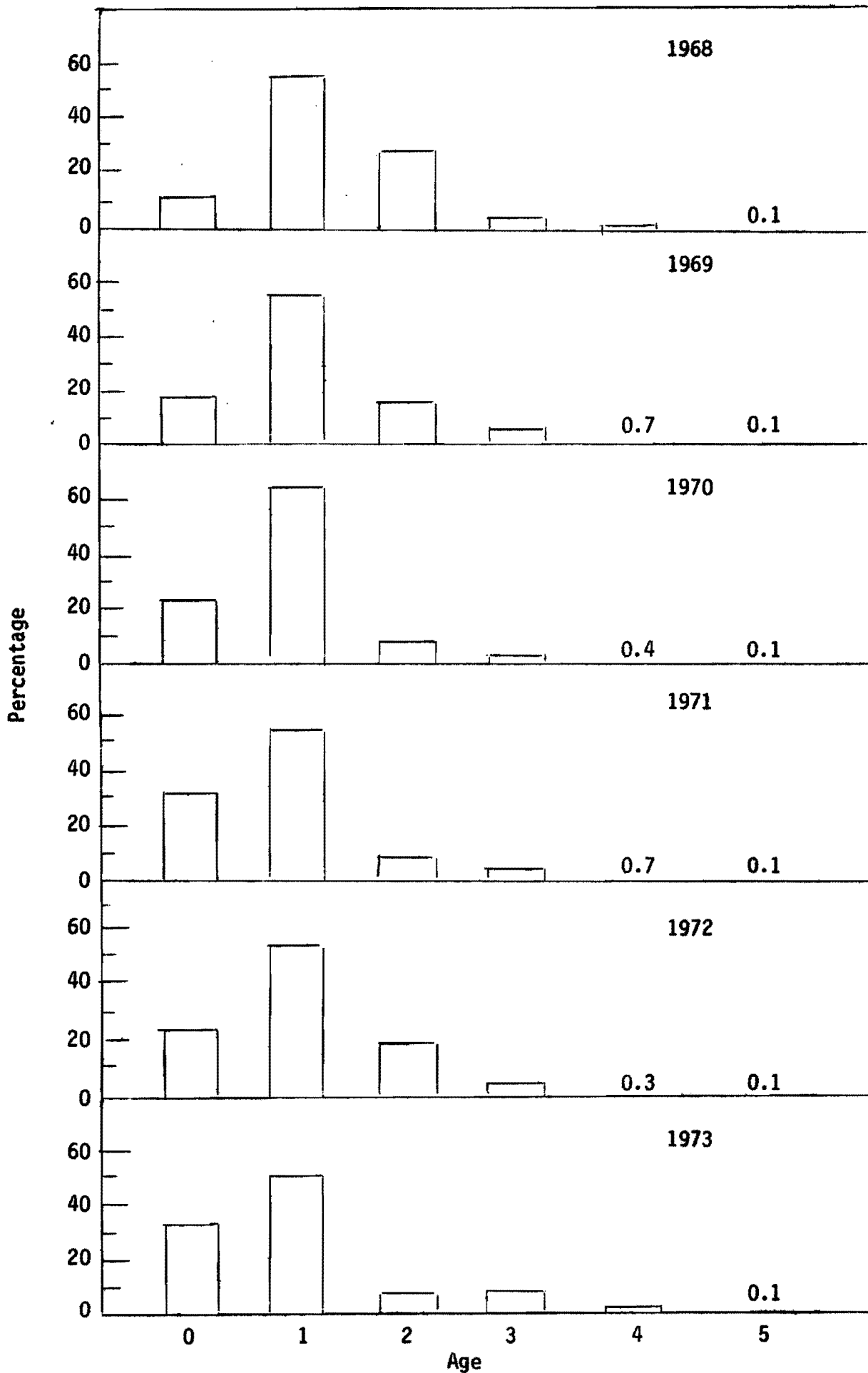


Figure 2. Percentage Age Composition of Sport Razor Clams from Clatsop Beaches, 1968-73.

The reduction in minimum length from 4-1/4 to 3-3/4 inches has had little affect on the fishery. Age composition did not change but clams of a given age class were dug at a smaller size, as indicated by the increase in the average number of clams per pound from 4.1 (previous 5 year average) to 5.6 in 1974.

PARALYTIC SHELLFISH POISONING ALERT

On June 19, 1973 the Oregon State Health Division reported a high toxin level of *Gonyaulax catenella* in shellfish. The commercial harvest of razor clams was prohibited on all Oregon beaches and the general public was warned of the potential health hazard. Razor clam samples from Clatsop beaches contained 110 micrograms of toxin but were considered safe if cleaned well. The ban on razor clam digging was lifted June 26, 1973.

The general public continued to be wary of razor clams through the rest of the summer. Processors lowered the price to 70¢ a pound in the shell to commercial diggers due to lack of sales. The last record of high levels of shellfish toxicity in Oregon was reported in 1957.

RAZOR CLAM PRODUCTION SOUTH OF TILLAMOOK HEAD

Beaches south of Tillamook Head were sampled as time permitted. The number of clams sampled and catch per digger are listed in Table 2 for those areas sampled. Good digging was observed on South Beach (Newport) and Bastendorff Beach (Coos Bay). Information on razor clam availability was provided to the city of Tillamook and Cannon Beach for beaches in their areas.

Table 2. Razor Clam Catch Data from Beaches South of Tillamook Head, 1973

	No. of Diggers	No. of Clams	Clams/Digger	Age Composition in Percentage						
				0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Indian Beach	13	155	11.9	4.9	32.7	36.3	21.2	4.9	0.0	0.0
Cannon Beach	3	0	0.0							
Arch Cape	2	0	0.0							
Cove Beach	16	105	6.6	0.0	7.6	8.6	21.0	36.2	22.8	3.8
Short Sand	2	41	20.5	73.2	24.4	2.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
South Beach	377	3,617	9.6	3.1	32.2	13.0	38.5	8.7	4.5	0.0
Yachats	15	86	5.7	3.5	96.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bastendorff	1	18	18.0	2.3	83.5	7.1	6.3	0.0	0.8	0.0