

# The Martha's Vineyard Times

## Editorial : A sad outcome

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Aquinnah's decision to end its lease to Wampanoag Aquinnah Shellfish Hatchery Inc. marks a disappointing milestone for an Indian aquaculture project of great promise, begun in 2002. The goal was to cultivate oysters for sale to markets across the country. The Tribe built a shellfish hatchery and anchored rafts of floating black plastic mesh grow bags in Menemsha Pond.

The outcome has been a discouraging failure, and a mess besides, despite the efforts of the town and its taxpayers to support the hatchery. Aquinnah, in addition to offering an inexpensive ground lease, abated taxes to riparian owners along the pond shore, whose enjoyment of their rights to the pond was diminished. In exchange, Aquinnah residents got undeserved bills to pay and a big clean-up job to do.

"We do our absolute best to fulfill the expectations and responsibility we have to our homeland," Wampanoag tribe administrator Tobias Vanderhoop said last week. "It is certainly not our intention to disrespect our lands in any way. Yes, we can do better, and we have to do better, and it is our intention to work harder." Mr. Vanderhoop is right, of course, and we hope his intentions lead to action.

Under the conditions of the agreement with the town, the tribe's hatchery was to pay an annual license fee of \$125 for a five-year lease on a surveyed five-acre section of Menemsha Pond. The license holder was required to submit quarterly reports for the first three years of the lease, detailing the quantity of shellfish harvested and sold, the rate of growth, and certifying that the shellfish were disease free. The tribe did not pay the fees and did not submit the reports, according to town officials.

The hatchery was also required to keep its gear in good order and in place, which it did not do. Bits of gear, broken off the neglected rafts, spread along the pond shore and out and across Vineyard Sound. Faced with the mess in the summer of 2005, the tribe promised to redouble its cleanup efforts. In 2007, the tribe suspended hatchery operations, and the destruction of the gear and also of some of the oysters the project had reared ensued.

It's a sad outcome for the tribe and for the town. It's also a black mark on the town's oversight of Menemsha Pond, one of its most valuable and pristine resources. If the tribe is able to reorganize, clean up, and reapply for a similar lease, and if the town agrees to make the lease available, strict oversight by the selectmen, the shellfish constable, and the conservation commission will be required to ensure that the outcome will be successful, or if not, that the conclusion of the next edition of the aquaculture project will be timely, careful, complete.

*Editor's Note: In this space last week, a table accompanying the Editorial ought to have been labeled "Town Tax Levies," not "Town Budgets." The Editorial correctly described the contents of the table and the difference between the budget and the levy, but the headline on the table was incorrect. In addition, the quoted material that appeared in the Editorial was incorrectly attributed to Bruce Stone, the West Tisbury town accountant. The words were not Mr. Stone's. They were the report of discussions between Mr. Stone and a Times writer, about the table that Mr. Stone created to describe the change of town tax levies over time. The analysis of the information contained in Mr. Stone's table was the work of the Editorial writer.*

D.A.C.

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