The Northeast Bivalve Hatchery Health Consortium - A collaborative approach to addressing larval crashes in bivalve hatcheries

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Bivalve shellfish, mainly oysters, but also clams and scallops, are a major aquaculture sector in the United States. Bivalve hatcheries in the United States have been experiencing larval mortalities and periods of slow growth, named here "crashes", that seriously compromise their ability to produce enough seed for a growing bivalve public (restoration) and private (commercial) aquaculture industry. The cause/s of these crashes are still largely unknown, and are likely complex and multifactorial. In order to address these larval crashes, and thanks to support from the USDA Northeast Aquaculture Center and the USDA AFRI Aquaculture Research, members of academia, government, extension, and commercial and research/breeding hatcheries are joining forces to establish the Northeast Bivalve Hatchery Health Consortium. The goals of the NEBHHC are to identify the causes of bivalve hatchery larval crashes in the Northeast US through a collaborative, stakeholder-driven, and proactive approach to sample collection and analysis; and then, using this knowledge, develop strategies and protocols to manage larval crashes in hatcheries. The NEBHHC is proposing to organize a combined scientific session and workshop at the Annual Meeting of the National Shellfisheries Association. The objectives of this session/workshop at NSA are to (1) enlist additional hatcheries, scientists, and extension agents into the NEBHHC (membership is not restricted to the Northeast US); (2) gather feedback from the community to strengthen the sampling process and protocols; and (3) discuss the implications of the results obtained so far. The session will start with an introduction to the rationale, goals, approach of the project. The introduction will be followed up by a scientific session in which the latest science regarding bivalve health in hatcheries and nurseries will be presented. The scientific session will be followed by a hands-on workshop, in which all participants will discuss the proposed sampling process and evaluate the results obtained so far.