



# Red Tide Update

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12/23/2015

The Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources ([#MSCMR](#)) convened for a special session today to receive updates on oyster season and the current red tide event.

In summary, this [red tide](#) event is a historical one. Fueled by warm water and high salinity, it's the largest and most enduring red tide event for our area in recent decades. The organism responsible, *Karenia brevis*, produces a neurotoxin that is harmful to fish, birds and humans. As a result, oyster reefs in Mississippi were preemptively closed on [December 11](#) after only 38.66% of the season quota had been harvested.

A total of 175 water samples have since been collected and 81 have tested positive for *Karenia brevis*. Many of these, including the most recent samples, have been in the range of medium to high levels (100,000 - 1,000,000,000+ cells per liter). Once levels fall below 5,000 cells per liter, oyster samples must undergo a mandatory FDA test to confirm there is no toxin present in the meat. All of this together creates an estimated timeline for oyster reefs to be reopened no sooner than March, but as late as April. In response to the hardship this places on Mississippi fishermen, the Commission acted to authorize staff to develop a work program that will employ them. Questions about the work program, and details of exactly what that will look like are expected to be presented at the January meeting of the MSCMR, and implemented weeks prior to anticipated reopening of the reefs.

Regarding the seafood, we would like to remind everyone that market seafood is regularly tested and safe for consumption. Unlike a low-oxygen jubilee event, it is not safe to eat dead or distressed fish as this algae produces a harmful toxin. However, the filets of healthy fish caught under normal circumstances are safe to eat as is the meat of crabs and shrimp. Do not eat the internal organs as toxins accumulate in those tissues. Mississippi oyster reefs remain closed to harvest. Oysters sold in the market place are being provided by other states not affected by red tide.