

MACO Stakeholder Engagement Update

We received a range of stakeholder recommendations during and subsequent to the May Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum and they generally fall under three themes: ocean indicators; ocean habitat, species and ocean change; and resilience and shoreline management.

As an intergovernmental coordination group, MACO can provide a forum for tracking, learning and discussing issues and, where capacity allows, working collaboratively to enhance regional coordination and alignment of management programs. MACO is not a substitute for the regulatory or management programs that reside with member entities, which have the responsibility and expertise, and are in a better position to effectively address implementation of those programs.

Ocean Indicators:

It was recommended by stakeholders that MACO should consider developing ocean ecosystem indicators building on prior work of the Regional Ocean Partnership (ROP) working with MARCO to develop an indicator dashboard. The development of Mid-Atlantic ecosystem indicators was endorsed in the 2016 Mid-Atlantic Ocean Action Plan's Healthy Ocean Ecosystem Action #5.

The MACO Steering Committee has endorsed establishing a small ocean indicators scoping group to consider next steps including identification of similar ongoing efforts in the region to ensure that this would not be duplicative, consideration of the option of building upon available indicator information, and what can be done given resource limitations and the need for new/additional resources to develop indicators and maintain indicator data.

Ocean Habitat, Species and Ocean Change:

Numerous stakeholder comments recognized the importance of developing an improved understanding of data and information reflecting changing ocean conditions, including ocean habitats and species. Many of these proposals (outlined below) relate to data development or communications management issues that are more squarely within the authorities of specific MACO entities with particular expertise.

Some relevant work is being considered by the Ocean Mapping Data Team (OMDT) and MARCO Portal Team utilizing MARCO's FY19 and FY20 Regional Ocean Partnership (ROP) funding. FY19 funds are being used to improve fisheries data in coordination with RODA, and FY20 funds are being used to update existing marine life data on the Portal; integrate NOAA avian shifts data; develop marine mammal species shifts products for right and humpback whales; and develop additional marine life products to support decision-making for species that are predominant in wind energy lease areas.

The MARCO Portal Team and the Ocean Mapping Data Team (OMDT), which includes federal agency representatives, already work closely with federal agencies and others to identify relevant data and information and leverage, access, develop and incorporate habitat, species, and oceanographic data into the Portal.

In addition, Virginia CZM Program funds are being used to develop a decision support tool that will allow users to view marine life, habitat and oceanographic data layers in the context of wind energy. MACAN is scoping how it wants to address submerged historic cultural resource issues.

Specific proposals related to ocean habitat, species and ocean change:

- Outline an approach to managing shifting stocks.

- Convene experts to develop an appropriate time scale for planning and management of a habitat that moves.
- Build on prior regional efforts to identify critical ocean wildlife habitats.
- Continue to update data and tools to identify areas of core abundance of species and changes over time.
- Put the graphics of past and present fish populations at the same scale in the Mid-Atlantic Portal.
- Connect the ocean observing and species survey communities with each other to ensure that habitat products (on the Portal) represent the expertise of both.
- Determine where the inconsistencies in ocean habitat protection regulations are across Mid-Atlantic states.
- Include submerged historic cultural resources as artificial reefs and habitat
- Mid-Atlantic Portal's decadal climate data layers with annual average layers moving forward can show trends over time.
- Develop public outreach visuals and materials to explain why climate-driven ocean changes impact everyone living near or far from the ocean.

MACO will continue to coordinate with the OMDT and MARCO Portal Team to track these issues and identify opportunities to respond by improving data, information and communications as resources allow.

Resilience and Shoreline Management:

Several commenters called for development of coastal resilience management plans or studies related to beach replenishment and the impact of sea level rise on coastal marshes. However, MACO's work is not focused on the shoreline but, rather from the waterline out to the regional ocean. Coastal resilience, shoreline management and stormwater planning are more properly the purview of other entities.

MACO recognizes that there is not always a bright line between coastal and ocean issues, and the ocean-climate system is interconnected. MACO will continue to track issues related to ocean resilience including consideration of sand and sediment management, climate-driven ocean and sea level rise impacts, ocean observations. These considerations may give rise to the need/opportunity to scope future MACO collaboration, and we encourage further input.

As noted above, MACO encourages input on needs for enhanced regional ocean collaboration efforts and will continue to provide a forum for education and discussion of relevant issues. Additional information about MACO's ongoing outreach efforts, webinars and Work Group activities can be found [here](#). If you want more information, contact us at; info@midatlanticocean.org.