

MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL COUNCIL ON THE OCEAN 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



A MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGEMENT BOARD

2020 was a challenging year for many people across the Mid-Atlantic region and beyond. Nevertheless, MARCO and partners found creative ways to adapt to fast changes, stay connected, and continue our work throughout the year. We are proud of the accomplishments we've made and our ability to maintain and strengthen our relationships. For example, with just a few weeks' notice, MARCO adapted what was supposed to be our in-person, second Annual Ocean Forum into a virtual platform, a challenging hurdle to overcome in a world not yet intimately familiar with the nuances of large virtual gatherings. However, convening the forum and other virtual opportunities for information sharing and constructive discussions continue to have tremendous benefits that are propelling regional goals forward in a collaborative, effective way.

In 2020, MARCO experienced numerous achievements, including: engaging over a thousand stakeholders around regional ocean issues, facilitating deeper engagement on longstanding and emerging issues; convened dozens of productive dialogues on critical ocean issues among government entities at various levels; fostered greater understanding of tribal, fisheries, and federal agency goals and concerns to better inform decision making; and generated ever-increasing public interest in ocean data and information, including a 43 percent increase in usage of the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal in the last year alone.

All organizations must adapt to changing circumstances and evolve to address new opportunities and challenges, and MARCO is

no exception. While progress has been made on MARCO's four priority focus areas; climate change adaptation, renewable energy, marine habitats, and water quality, each of these priorities continues to need regional-scale collaboration as new challenges arise.

Even as these original priorities continue to have relevance, the world has changed significantly in the past decade. As a result, new issues have emerged that are important for MARCO to address with a fresh approach. Today's pressing challenges, and opportunities include:

- Post-covid recovery of regional economies and greater attention to fostering more sustainable and inclusive prosperity;
- Acceleration of climate change and increasing urgency around the need to foster ocean and coastal resilience and tap the ocean's role in mitigation;
- Greater recognition of the need to engage more diverse people in ocean and coastal issues, and to create a deeper sense of our shared ocean culture and identity among residents of the region; and
- A deeper understanding of the linkages between ecosystem health and the well-being of human communities and economies.

Looking toward 2021 and beyond, we are excited to engage new diverse partners and to work with the administration on aligned goals to tackle the climate crisis, elevate the value of our blue economy, enhance diversity, equity and inclusivity within MARCO, and convene conversations to develop solutions for competing ocean resources.

Delaware

Kimberly Cole

DE Coastal Programs
DE Department of Natural Resources
and Environmental Control

New Jersey

Kevin Hassell

NJ Coastal Management Program
NJ Department of Environmental
Protection

Virginia

Laura McKay

VA Coastal Zone Management Program
VA Department of Environmental Quality

Maryland

Catherine McCall

Chesapeake and Coastal Services
MD Department of Natural Resources

New York

Kisha Santiago-Martinez*

NY Oceans and Great Lakes Program
NY Department of State

*Management Board Chair



ABOUT MARCO

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) was established in 2009 when the Governors of New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia signed the Mid-Atlantic Governors' Agreement on Ocean Conservation. MARCO works as a partnership to address four regional priorities as a collective voice; climate change adaptation, marine habitats, renewable energy, and water quality.



2020 FUNDING SUPPORTING MARCO'S GOALS

Achieving success and reaching MARCO's goals is made possible thanks to the support of our partners and funders. In 2020 our major funders provided the means necessary for MARCO to continue creating communication products, completing research, and collecting data that improves the way ocean resources are managed in the Mid-Atlantic.



COLLABORATION

MID-ATLANTIC COMMITTEE ON THE OCEAN

The Mid-Atlantic Committee on the Ocean (MACO) is a committee established by MARCO to foster collaboration among states, federal agencies, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), federally recognized tribes, and to engage stakeholders. The purpose of MACO is to enhance the vitality of the region's ocean ecosystem and economy through increased communication and collaboration.

MACO STEERING COMMITTEE

Jessica Coakley

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Darlene Finch

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Darryl Francois

Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

Kevin Hassell*

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

Dr. Kelsey Leonard

Shinnecock Indian Nation

Laura McKay

Virginia Department of Environmental Quality

Michael Snyder

New York Department of State

Roselle (Henn) Stern

Army Corps of Engineers

**Steering Committee Chair*

WORK GROUPS AND COMMITTEES

MARCO and MACO collaborate with governmental agencies, tribal nations, and many other interested stakeholders through a series of specially focused work groups to address MARCO's four regional priorities.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

[2020 Progress Report](#)

NON-CONSUMPTIVE RECREATION WORK GROUP

[2020 Progress Report](#)

MID-ATLANTIC COASTAL ACIDIFICATION NETWORK

[2020 Progress Report](#)

MID-ATLANTIC OFFSHORE WIND REGIONAL COLLABORATION

[2020 Progress Report](#)

MARINE DEBRIS WORK GROUP

[2020 Progress Report](#)

MARITIME COMMERCE AND NAVIGATION SAFETY COMMITTEE

[2020 Progress Report](#)

OCEAN MAPPING DATA TEAM

[2020 Progress Report](#)



MARCO BY THE NUMBERS

8 INTERAGENCY WORK GROUPS AND COMMITTEES

529 PIECES OF BALLOON DEBRIS COLLECTED

5,941 PIECES OF MARINE DEBRIS COLLECTED

887 NEW MAPS ADDED TO THE DATA PORTAL

43 PERCENT INCREASE IN DATA PORTAL USERS

21 DATA PORTAL WEBINARS AND TUTORIALS

18 MARCO WEBINARS

7 SECTORS REPRESENTED AT WEBINARS

1,136 ATTENDEES AT MARCO WEBINARS

404 ATTENDEES AT THE MARCO OCEAN FORUM



MAJOR MARCO PROJECTS COMPLETED IN 2020

SHIFTING SPECIES MAPS

A series of over 600 interactive maps published on the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal illustrated the shifts in core abundance that have taken place over the last five decades by eighteen commercially and recreationally important fish species living along the East Coast. Many show a trend of fish moving further north and further offshore from the 1970s to the present day, with some fish species that showed little presence off the New England coast decades earlier, having since migrated past Cape Cod to the Gulf of Maine.

2ND ANNUAL MID-ATLANTIC OCEAN FORUM

The Second Annual Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum was held on May 19, 2020. The MACO Ocean Forum Planning Team transitioned, within weeks, to adapt from a planned in-person forum in New York City to a digital platform. This massive effort led to a successful forum focused on future ocean management policy, climate, and technology perspectives.

NEW WEBSITE

After months of hard work, MARCO released a refreshed website design to improve accessibility and ease of communications with stakeholders. By improving format functions to adjust to any hand-held device and an easy-to-navigate layout properly, MARCO can now update content in a timely manner and display our mission, goals and accomplishments.

SHARED REGIONAL PRIORITIES

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

The Mid-Atlantic ocean provides commercially, recreationally, and ecologically important resources that support the region's coastal economies and communities. Coastal states in the region are seeking to understand how a changing climate impacts the ocean so they can plan and adapt accordingly.

MARINE HABITATS

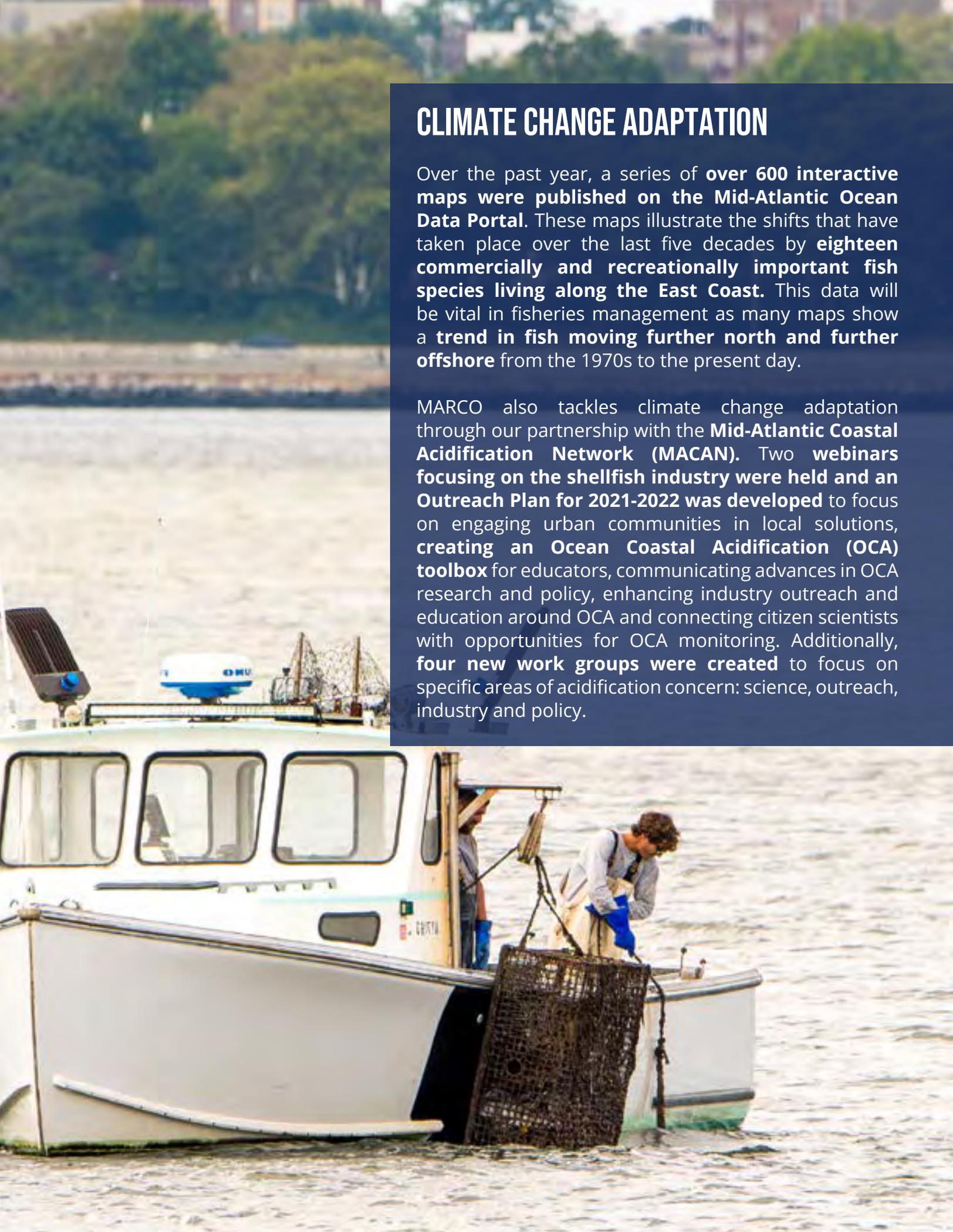
Cold-water corals, deep submarine canyons, and a broad, sandy continental shelf are among the diverse ocean habitats of the Mid-Atlantic region. In addition to being home to wildlife like sea turtles, whales, dolphins, seabirds, fish, crustaceans, corals, and other species, these habitats support commercial and recreational fisheries and other essential economic activities in the region. MARCO is working with partners to map and document the Mid-Atlantic Ocean habitats to maintain sustainable resource use and healthy ecosystems in light of climatic changes and increased human use pressure.

WATER QUALITY

In recent decades, the Mid-Atlantic states have made progress in reducing the degradation of marine waters. Yet, despite federal and state legal and regulatory frameworks which seek to improve water quality in the Mid-Atlantic, problems remain. MARCO is working regionally to address both existing and emerging marine water quality concerns.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

The importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, achieving energy independence, and relieving congested energy transmission routes has elevated renewable energy on U.S. public policy agendas and in the public consciousness. With a gently sloping continental shelf and strong offshore winds, the Mid-Atlantic is well-suited to offshore wind development, which could be a solution for states to meet renewable portfolio standards and goals. As offshore wind development ramps up, states are tasked with considering how this exciting new industry will affect the busy and ecologically productive waters of the Mid-Atlantic.

A white fishing boat is shown on the water. A person wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and blue gloves is leaning over the side of the boat, handling a large, black, rectangular mesh trap. The boat has a blue and white radar dome on top and a blue stripe along its side. The background shows a body of water and a distant shoreline with trees and buildings.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

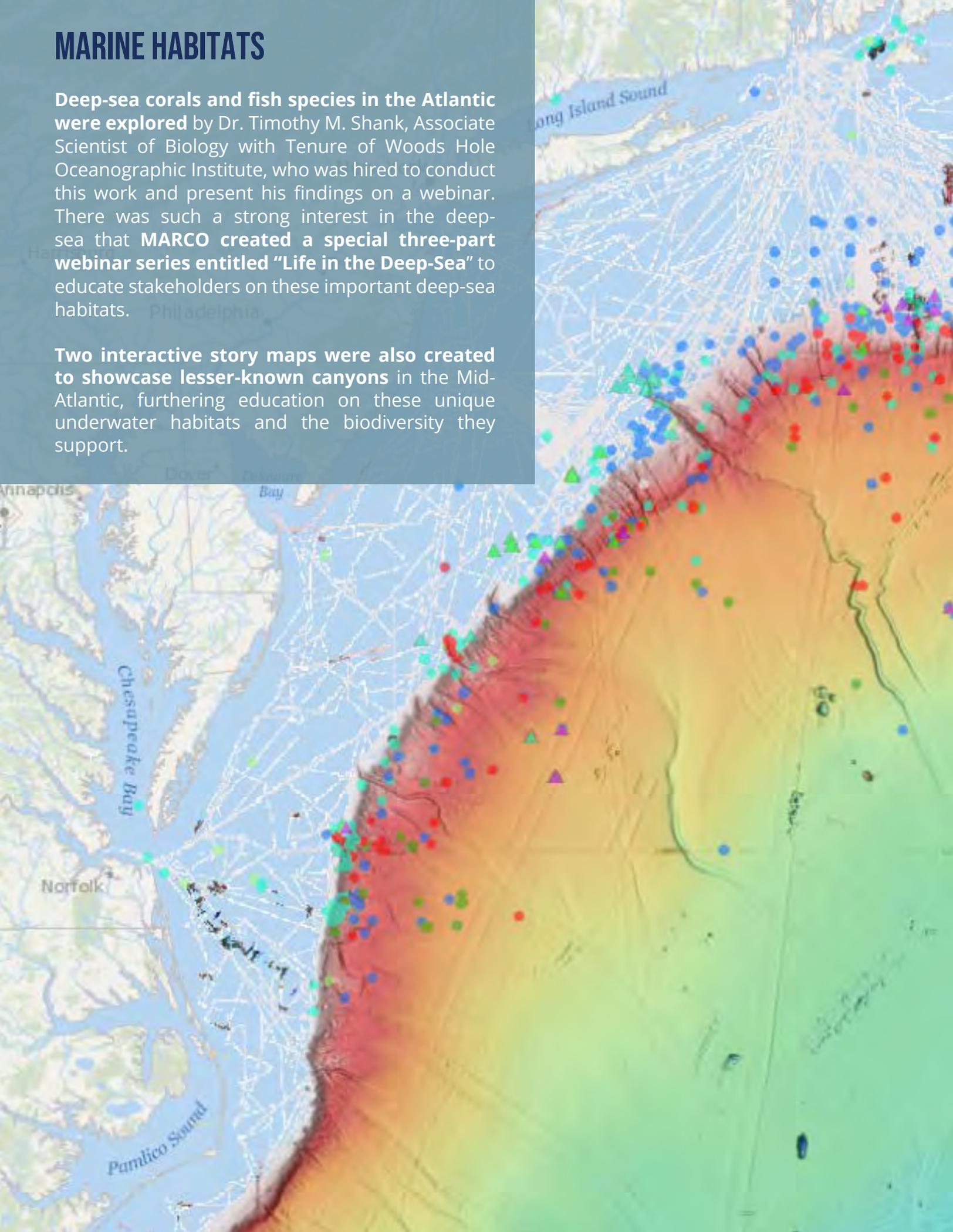
Over the past year, a series of **over 600 interactive maps were published on the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal**. These maps illustrate the shifts that have taken place over the last five decades by **eighteen commercially and recreationally important fish species living along the East Coast**. This data will be vital in fisheries management as many maps show a **trend in fish moving further north and further offshore** from the 1970s to the present day.

MARCO also tackles climate change adaptation through our partnership with the **Mid-Atlantic Coastal Acidification Network (MACAN)**. Two **webinars focusing on the shellfish industry were held** and an **Outreach Plan for 2021-2022 was developed** to focus on engaging urban communities in local solutions, **creating an Ocean Coastal Acidification (OCA) toolbox** for educators, communicating advances in OCA research and policy, enhancing industry outreach and education around OCA and connecting citizen scientists with opportunities for OCA monitoring. Additionally, **four new work groups were created** to focus on specific areas of acidification concern: science, outreach, industry and policy.

MARINE HABITATS

Deep-sea corals and fish species in the Atlantic were explored by Dr. Timothy M. Shank, Associate Scientist of Biology with Tenure of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, who was hired to conduct this work and present his findings on a webinar. There was such a strong interest in the deep-sea that **MARCO created a special three-part webinar series entitled "Life in the Deep-Sea"** to educate stakeholders on these important deep-sea habitats. Philadelphia

Two interactive story maps were also created to showcase lesser-known canyons in the Mid-Atlantic, furthering education on these unique underwater habitats and the biodiversity they support.



A photograph of several offshore wind turbines in a field, with the sky transitioning from blue to orange and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The turbines are blue with green bases. The foreground shows the water's surface with some white foam from waves.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

MACO members of the Offshore Wind Regional Collaborative (OWRC) work regularly with MARCO's Ocean Mapping Data Team to **identify data needs and sources, compile information about best practices, and identify issues that would benefit from closer collaboration** that are not already being addressed by other offshore wind working groups in the region.

The first offshore wind turbines in U.S. federal waters began producing power off the coast of Virginia in 2020 and their locations were charted on the Mid-Atlantic Data Portal. Among the many other additions to the Portal's renewable energy theme were **maps showing the Virginia project's power cable alignment and region-wide electric power transmission lines and substation locations along the coast.**

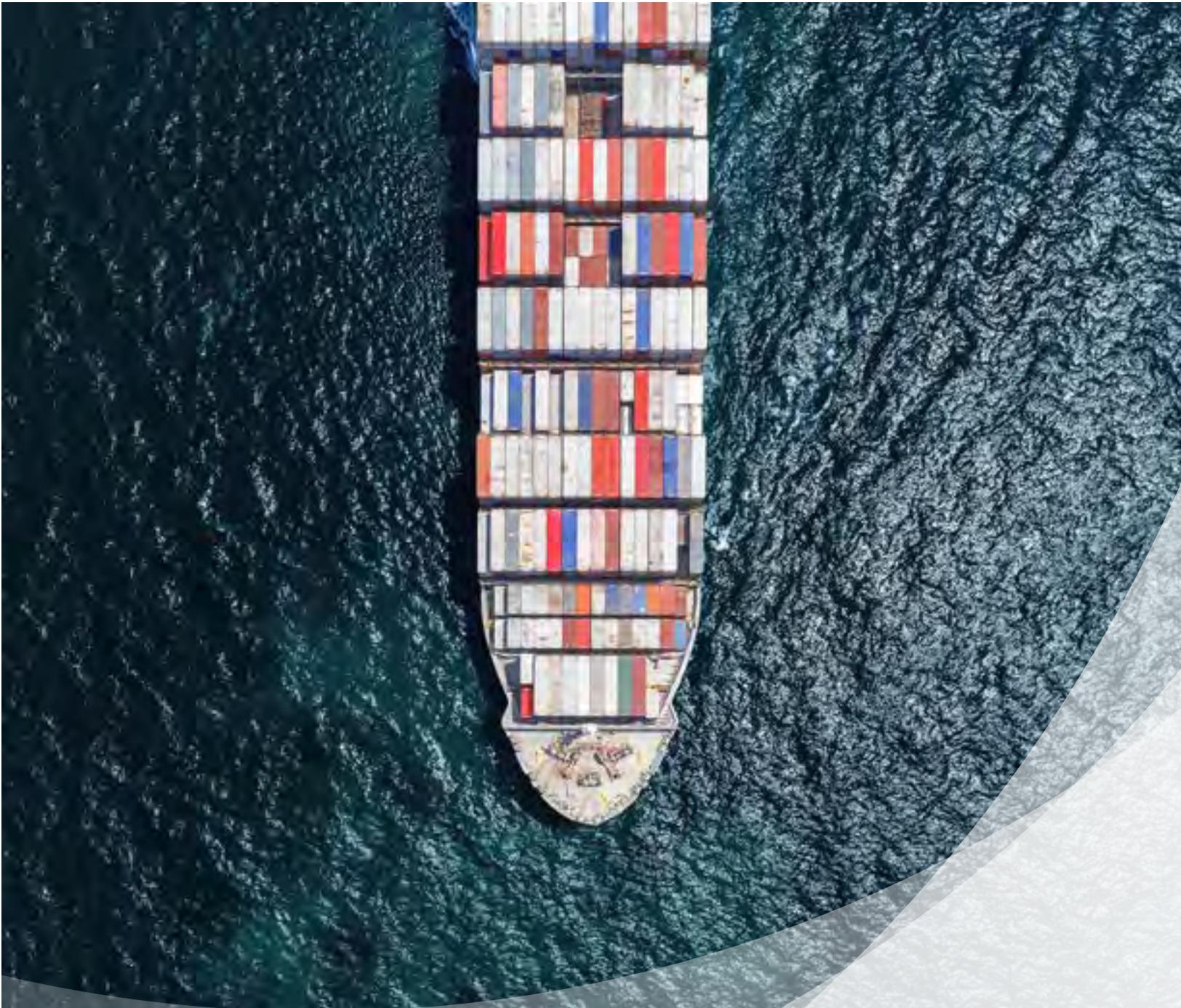
The MARCO Portal **also assisted the Coast Guard with public outreach around a series of Port Access Route Studies (PARS)** to determine routing measures needed to ensure safe navigation along the East Coast in the future. **Portal users can analyze the PARS areas in combination with the Portal's thousands of maps** showing shipping traffic patterns, offshore wind proposals, fishing activity and more, and share their findings with the Coast Guard.

WATER QUALITY

MARCO made huge steps toward our community-based social marketing balloon release reduction campaign. Four aquarium partners (Virginia Aquarium in Virginia Beach, VA; National Aquarium in Baltimore, MD; Adventure Aquarium in Camden, NJ; and the New York Aquarium in New York City, NY.) were invited to join the campaign work group to ensure created material would be consistent with aquarium marketing rules. **Images and messaging were created on impacts to wildlife and balloon release alternatives.** Images and messages that did not test well were discarded and updated materials were tested by OpinionWorks with one-on-one interviews. The results of these interviews assisted in making final adjustments to messaging and images before production.

Despite some bi-annual beach surveys being canceled due to COVID-19, **six surveys across five designated beach locations** (one in each Mid-Atlantic state) **resulted in 6,490 pieces of debris removed from the coast.** The Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Work Group also **heavily participated in the creation and review of the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan**, initiated and coordinated by NOAA's Marine Debris Program (MDP) Planning Team. This effort included attending four workshops centered around the four Action Plan goal areas and reviewing the draft Action Plan.





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MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL
COUNCIL ON THE OCEAN

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