

Ocean SAMP Stakeholder Meeting #17
Notes, January 18, 2011, 6 – 9 p.m.
Hazard Rooms A and B, URI Bay Campus

Purpose of the Meeting:

- 1) Learn about the latest Ocean SAMP team activities regarding plan implementation
- 2) Discuss the Rhode Island and Massachusetts MOU
- 3) Update Stakeholders on the Federal government's decision to accelerate offshore renewable energy
- 4) Celebrate the plan's passage by CRMC on October 19, 2010

Meeting Chair and Facilitator: Ken Payne

Payne indicated to the approximately 20 attendees that the SAMP has been adopted and this is the first meeting since the October 19, 2010 adoption by the CRMC. He said work to enhance the SAMP continues and that Fugate would be providing an update on SAMP activity since that time.

Updates/Discussion – Grover Fugate, CRMC

Fugate provided updates about Ocean SAMP implementation, the Rhode Island/Massachusetts Memorandum of Understanding (RI/MA MOU) and the Federal government promotion of offshore renewable energy:

Ocean SAMP Implementation: Fugate indicated that since SAMP adoption, two additional packages of comments are being readied as amendments for approval by the CRMC. The entire SAMP is also being readied for approval by the federal government, with NOAA as the primary reviewing agency. He said that the related process of applying for a SAMP boundary extension (so it would be 30 miles out, rather than three miles out) is moving along as well, with the SAMP team gathering and providing all necessary information to NOAA for the review process. He said that the CRMC will continue to work on amending and enhancing SAMP policies as new data becomes available from ongoing studies of the SAMP area.

Jennifer McCann and Fugate indicated that new Ocean SAMP related projects include a National Oceanographic Partnership Program (NOPP) initiative which involves the Ocean SAMP team (URI and Rhode Island Sea Grant College Program) developing data collection processes and standards which would be used along with existing tools, such as environmental impact statements, to evaluate the impacts of potential projects on the ocean environment. The project is contributing to Rhode Island's effort to develop and evolve a nationally useful and comprehensive coastal and marine spatial planning model. The goal is to provide agencies with a comprehensive, yet flexible means of

assessing the impacts of a broad range of offshore renewable energy resources projects on marine ecosystems and human activities.

Fugate also said that SAMP is proving helpful for enhancing Rhode Island's ability to plan uses of ocean waters. For example, he said that an effort by Connecticut to designate a dredge spoils site in ocean water that Rhode Island may be planning to use is now being carefully studied by the federal delegation – and that the effort may not happen if it is decided that Rhode Island, through its SAMP process, has already decided how to use that portion of water. Fugate said that while the SAMP may not specifically answer all needs, such as those regarding certain kinds of fishing licenses, it could prove very helpful in instances such as the dredging issue.

In response to a question, Fugate said that all the information regarding the NOAA approval process of the SAMP is public, so the Ocean SAMP team will make any information and lists regarding the approval processes available on the web site as they become available. Between the SAMP amendments and the boundary extension, NOAA will need about three or four months to review and process all the information and make decisions, Fugate said.

CRMC Council Member Don Gomez asked Grover to indicate what will happen as more information comes in from scientists, especially the bird studies and ocean floor mapping work. Fugate said that as the data is processed (there is also some additional acoustics data incoming), it will be added to the technical reports to aid with the amendment approval process. In relation to this, Fugate was asked if the new information will be applicable for Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analyses, and Fugate said yes, the data would be applicable.

RI/MA MOU: Fugate said that the federal process to engage governors on the Atlantic coast in a MOU to make offshore development of renewable energy resources as effective and efficient as possible is moving forward. Working groups to support the process have been formed, and Fugate serves on three of these groups. He said Rhode Island is well positioned to serve as a pilot project due to the work that has been accomplished through the Ocean SAMP. Locally, Rhode Island continues to work with Massachusetts to develop a cooperative effort to develop offshore renewable energy resources in waters adjacent to both states.

Fugate was asked if other states are participating in similar MOU processes, and Fugate said that there are efforts both on the Southern and Western coasts to collaboratively address offshore renewable energy issues and leasing potential. He also, in regards to a question about the Massachusetts response to the MOU process, said that during required Rhode Island Ocean SAMP informational sessions to the Massachusetts public recently, he heard very often that Massachusetts citizens are very impressed with the Ocean SAMP and its participatory process, as well as the in-depth data collection effort that took place. He said there is disappointment on the part of Massachusetts citizens in

the ocean planning process that they were provided. Fugate said that to participate in the Atlantic Governors effort, Rhode Island and Massachusetts had to agree to come up with a block leasing plan that both states could share and live with, and that this has been largely done and is set to be signed off on shortly. Once this plan is approved, and the other Atlantic states plans are approved, then the Federal government, through BOEMRE – the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement – will work to evaluate the plans and come up with an overall plan for the Atlantic Coast.

Federal government promotion of offshore renewable energy: As part of the process to promote the Atlantic Coast MOU program, Fugate said that the Federal government has launched and is promoting a Smart From The Start initiative. The initiative is geared to help the Atlantic states work collaboratively and move smoothly through the process to divide up the ocean lease blocks. The initiative is supported by working groups, which many state officials, including Fugate, serve on, and are ensuring communication conduits remain open between the states and the Federal government. The overall process means that once the evaluation of state plans is concluded this year, several states will be selected to serve as pilot project states, and Fugate said that Rhode Island is in the running to be one of those states. By being a pilot program state, the state will be able to make use of BOEMRE resources, such as staff technical assistance, for the selected project. In answer to a question, Fugate said that he does not consider the Smart From The Start program to be as heavily invested in coastal and marine spatial planning (MSP) as Rhode Island is, and as the SAMP and the NOPP projects are, but that MSP is part of the discussion.

Discussion/Next Steps – Ken Payne

Payne said that the Ocean SAMP team will be keeping stakeholders informed as the SAMP implementation process continues, and McCann reminded the group that through the SAMP, and now the NOPP, Rhode Island continues to lead the nation in innovative management practices such as MSP. She said everyone should be very proud of their contributions to the SAMP process.

Celebration

Payne led a brief toast to the success of the SAMP, and thanked the stakeholders and the staff for their efforts.

Adjourn