

Ocean SAMP Stakeholder Meeting #18
Notes, June 21, 2012, 6 – 8 p.m.
Hazard Rooms A and B, URI Bay Campus

Purpose of the Meeting:

- 1) Provide an update on the Ocean SAMP Implementation
- 2) Present a draft of the Ocean SAMP Science Research Agenda and obtain stakeholder feedback

Meeting Facilitator – Jennifer McCann, URI

McCann thanked everyone for coming and said we will be getting an update on Ocean SAMP implementation, and that we will be taking a look at the research agenda that has been drafted for the ongoing SAMP. This meeting will serve to answer any questions and to gather input on the research agenda. A round of introductions was made for the group of approximately 30 people.

Updates/Discussion – Grover Fugate, CRMC

Fugate, via speakerphone, updated the group on Ocean SAMP implementation, the proposed Block Island Project, and the Federal government promotion of offshore renewable energy. He reminded the group that the Block Island project is a state-regulated pilot effort involving turbine developer Deepwater Wind, and that there is significant potential for an offshore, federal-regulated project as well. The Ocean SAMP is the key state regulatory document guiding the Block Island test turbine project. Concerning the Block Island Site, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) is currently reviewing Deepwater Wind's permit application to place five offshore wind turbines in the Ocean SAMP designated Renewable Energy Zone. Deepwater has not submitted its permit application to CRMC yet because it has not received all the municipal approvals for the cable from the town of Narragansett. CRMC requires that a permit application include this local approval, while the ACOE does not. Apparently the major issue is the route to get the cable from the water to the transfer station.

Concerning the federal efforts for offshore renewable energy, the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is currently completing the environmental assessment (EA) for research to take place within the Area of Mutual Interest (AMI). This document, expected to be out to the public in June/July 2012 contains a significant amount of data from the Ocean SAMP initiative. According to Fugate, this EA is more comprehensive and thorough than the EA that was developed by BOEM for the Offshore site in the Mid-Atlantic. CRMC is being consulted by BOEM on this effort.

On the research side, Deepwater Wind, Inc., in partnership with URI Department of Ocean Engineering, and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) have submitted a \$20 million request to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) with the purpose of promoting the installation of offshore renewable energy and reducing costs of offshore renewable energy by increasing certainty of construction and policy issues. If secured, this information will be useful for the Ocean SAMP data gathering, as well as the rest of the ocean planning work taking place both in the region and state.

After Fugate's update, people asked questions about the activities. One set of questions had to do with the DOE grant; people wanted to know why public funds are available to a private developer, and also wanted to know more about the University of Rhode Island's role in the process. Fugate and McCann indicated that the federal government specifically wanted to provide funds to make sure that developers start collaborating with the public on renewable energy efforts, and that these efforts are built on the best science possible. They also said that Deepwater Wind is the lead on the proposal, and that the URI Ocean Engineering department is taking the lead for URI and will be contracted for the effort, should it be funded. In terms of the Block Island pilot project, there were questions as to why the state does not seem to be moving forward working with the Narragansett on various siting and construction issues. Fugate said that discussions are not at a standstill, but that a restrained pace has been needed, as the town is working through a transfer station location issue, and is currently functioning without a manager. There were also questions about whether electromagnetic field studies – in terms of the impact of underwater cables that would connect to turbines in the local project – are part of the research agenda. McCann and Michelle Carnevale, Ocean SAMP team member, indicated yes. Finally, another block of questions had to do with the process for ensuring that mitigation measures are solidly in place prior to construction, as are the processes that will be followed to gauge how well those measures work. For example, how will we warn right whales to steer clear of potential turbine construction areas, and then how can we know if, in fact, our chosen warning system worked and disrupted whales as little as possible? Fugate said he's very aware of this; he said he has actually been looking far and wide to ensure the data team gathers as much information on this as possible, and he is not depending solely on federal information, as it is not as detailed or specific as some of the data collected for the Ocean SAMP.

Science Research Agenda Presentation and Discussion – Monique LaFrance, URI

LaFrance provided an overview of the draft Research Agenda, and explained that the agenda will define baseline knowledge, prioritize research projects, encourage collaborative research efforts, serve as a leveraging tool for fundraising, and assist regional and national ocean planning initiatives. She also took the group through the four elements of the agenda: baseline data, monitoring programs, ocean engineering, and information framework. After the presentation, the group asked questions that fell into a few main categories. First, there were comments that the research agenda should

strongly reflect a context of industrial development, and should be a useful tool to help “zone” the ocean properly so the placement of different uses makes sense, and doesn’t follow the planning and zoning mistakes made on land. Building off of that discussion, another group of questions had to do with potentially bolstering the agenda further with additional information and guidance on what the cumulative impacts of offshore industrialization are, how the nation’s Public Trust law will operate within this new area of development, and which offshore areas have critical habitat in need of additional conservation measures. Finally, questions were asked about turbine farms; why is the state putting energy into developing design standards – shouldn’t the developer undertake the cost of such research? And a related question – shouldn’t we continue to speak of other forms of renewable energy, rather than continuously only referring to wind power? Fugate said that it is critical that the state do the design standards so there is official, approved guidance for evaluating developer applications for building offshore windfarms. Also, he said the focus of the Ocean SAMP has been a variety of uses, not just wind turbines, so he agrees that the comment about overall renewable energy types is fair.

McCann asked the group to share how they intend to make use of the Research Agenda, and many attendees said that the opportunity to develop partnerships is key. McCann encouraged the group to read the draft agenda closely, and go online to <http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/oceansamp/comment.html> to log in written comments. She said that, as with the Ocean SAMP, the team will be looking at each comment very closely, and logging a detailed response in a document. After asking the group how much time they wanted, it was determined that the public will have until the end of August to review the agenda and make their comments. McCann said the team will then take the time to review the comments, give responses, and provide a new draft in the fall. Fugate said the agenda will be adopted as part of the Ocean SAMP document; a public workshop and other meetings will be held, but the process does not require an official CRMC public hearing.

Adjourn