

Ocean SAMP Stakeholder Meeting #1 (Orientation)

Summary Notes

October 29, 2008, 6 – 9 p.m., Bay Campus

Summary Notes: *Note* – these notes reflect information and viewpoints overall, rather than “quote-by quote.” The intent is to capture the overall direction and tenor of participants’ contributions, rather than specific wording, as this seems a more useful approach for describing meeting content.

Purpose of the meeting:

- Discuss the roles and responsibilities of the Ocean SAMP stakeholder group
- Identify stakeholder group participant expectations, issues and concerns
- Provide participants with a better understanding of the Ocean SAMP project

Chair and Facilitator: Ken Payne

Stakeholders in attendance and members of the public: see list

Agenda Items:

Welcome and Introductions – Ken Payne URI

What would participants like to get out of the stakeholder process

The facilitator explained the key ground rules for the process, including:

- Facilitator holds no bias for any particular outcome nor will he press for consensus on SAMP issues.
- The process is open and public; restrictions in terms of participation would only apply to specific conflicting interests, such as those concerning permit applicants to the R.I. Coastal Resources management Council (CRMC).
- Additional forums outside the stakeholder meetings are among the options of continuing conversations amongst the group.
- The facilitator will work to ensure that stakeholders views are thoroughly and accurately reflected both in working products and final products.

Overview and discussion of the Ocean SAMP – Grover Fugate, CRMC (See presentation online at <http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/oceansamp/stakeholders.html>)

Fugate, executive director of the CRMC, provided an overview of the agency, its tools for coastal management – including Special Area Management Plans (SAMPs). With six-plus SAMPs in existence or process, CRMC has for several years considered undertaking an Ocean SAMP as a means to implement policies and practices to address climate change impacts (sea level rise). Impetus for the work grew with recent state interest in determining the feasibility of investing in offshore renewable energy resources – mainly wind power – to reduce pollution and costs associated with oil and gas. Fugate indicated

this interest reflects a trend among all eastern seaboard states and that the SAMP is a public and proactive opportunity to achieve three goals:

Zone state waters to ensure that Rhode Island, rather than a developer, determines the siting of offshore renewable energy resources projects, should that be deemed feasible;
Understand, protect and where possible enhance existing and potential ocean water resources (including plant and animal habitats and public access) and uses (including commercial and recreational fishing and boating industries);
Build on the state's pioneering sea level rise policy to include strong, federally consistent policies that implement practices that contribute to global climate change reduction.

Fugate provided these facts about the Ocean SAMP project and funding apparatus:

The Ocean SAMP is a two-year \$3.2 million project, with \$1.6 million slated to be allocated to the University of Rhode Island for each of the two years. The money will pay for 1) Researchers from URI and other academic institutions to study a broad range of ocean features and activities to meet the three goals listed above; and 2) A public outreach and education initiative to encourage community engagement in both understanding the research issues and providing feedback to inform subsequent SAMP recommendations. The money comes from a state renewable energy fund representing a percentage of electric and gas bill charges collected in Rhode Island. To achieve funding, the CRMC submitted a research and outreach proposal to the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources (OER), which is a division of the Department of Administration and works in concert with the Rhode Island quasi-public Economic Development Corporation, in March 2008. The proposal was approved by an OER proposal committee in June 2008 for an August 2008 start, with initial research launched in late September. Fugate explained later in the meeting that, should the SAMP deem offshore renewable energy resources projects as feasible, the research would only be a starting point for a much more intensive round of federally required site studies. He also stated that due to limited funding, the "research" is primarily focusing on collecting existing data.

Questions/Discussion – Identify stakeholder group participant issues and concerns for the Ocean SAMP– Ken Payne, URI

Issues: the majority of meeting time after Fugate's presentation was spent on questions and answers, with most discussion focusing on these thought areas:

- **What does the SAMP mean for existing ocean uses and resources?** The majority of discussion in this vein spoke to a concern among some attending fishermen that the SAMP, should it zone Rhode Island ocean waters for particular uses, poses the threat of potential displacement to already troubled commercial fisheries. A concern was also voiced that the SAMP could pose a hazard to Native American artifacts on or in the seafloor and that archeological care should be

taken with these items. Payne, as facilitator, indicated that all voices (excepting particular CRMC permit seekers) and positions will be accurately and thoroughly recorded and entertained, and that additional meetings and/or forums will be held if necessary to ensure such activity.

- **Does the SAMP represent a fair and necessary expenditure of public money and how can stakeholders be assured that they are in at the start of the project and that their participation, as well as the full range of information they can offer, will have an impact on the process?** Questions in this area reflected concerns about the transparency of the SAMP process and whether public dollars have been allocated wisely. Some stakeholders indicated they are displeased or uncomfortable that SAMP research has already started. Questions also focused on spending authority and items – whether the SAMP should have been approved without ratepayers say, whether \$3.2 million is too much (or too little), and why the particular project area, partners, researchers, and research topics was chosen. Fugate indicated stakeholders have been convened at the proper time because the questions are not which project partners or content areas need research – he said CRMC has been clear on those for a long time – but what policy decisions should be made in the public arena once data is amassed and synthesized. In addition, Fugate emphasized that due to the limited amount of money, the research component of this project at this point is mainly data collection. Payne also indicated that it is helpful in these kinds of conversations to break out whether a question regards the “authority” or the “efficiency” of SAMP process. In addition to these questions, CRMC was encouraged by a few fisheries representatives to consider complementing the SAMP with additional fisheries data.
- **How will the stakeholder process work and what are its tools?** Payne, Fugate and SAMP Principal Investigator and outreach lead Jennifer McCann (University of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Center/Rhode Island Sea Grant) all indicated that the stakeholders group and the public will have several ways to access and share information: actual stakeholder meetings, additional meetings about a particular interest or question, a list serve, a web site, a manual/binder for each stakeholder, and a series of education modules on SAMP research topics. Again, some questions here reflected a concern about the openness of the project and whether stakeholders can be assured of a high level of participation in the process, as well of a high level of clarity regarding information about a complex process and equally complicated research topics. Payne, Fugate and McCann stressed that public participation and an open process are key to the SAMP and that a significant effort is being made to ensure enfranchisement and an inclusive atmosphere for stakeholders and the public alike.

Logistics notes: McCann asked the group to “vote” for education topics per a handout, and also indicated that meeting notes will be shared with the group shortly. To help

stakeholders plan ahead, dates for the next six meetings have been selected (see sheet), with Tuesdays on an approximate monthly basis slated for these meetings. The group adjourned at 9 p.m.