

The first meeting of the Northeast Regional Ocean Planning Body (RPB)

The first meeting of the Northeast Regional Ocean Planning Body (RPB) was held in Portland, Maine Nove 19 & 20th. The Northeast RPB is charged with leading the process to develop regional ocean plans that build upon existing governmental authorities and planning processes to improve management, siting, and regulatory decisions affecting coastal and ocean resources and uses. It is comprised of two representatives from each New England state, 10 federal agency representatives, a state member of the New England Fisheries Management Council, and representatives from the 10 federally recognized tribes of the region.

The **purpose** of the meeting was to:

- Develop a common understanding about basic operational considerations and initial products
- Provide context regarding current activities in the Northeast that lay a foundation for regional ocean planning
- Engage stakeholders and the public about regional ocean planning for the Northeast;

A meeting summary, video, and presentations are available on the Northeast Regional Ocean Council's (NROC) website <http://northeastoceancouncil.org/regional-planning-body/>^[1].

[Click here](#)^[2] for Ocean Conservancy's blog on the meeting.

If you were unable to attend, but would like to submit comments or to join the mailing list to receive updates on the activities of the Northeast RPB, please email katie.lund@noaa.gov^[3].

National Ocean Policy 101:

What you need to know and why you should care

The National Ocean Policy was adopted on July 19, 2010. It provides a framework for comprehensive, coordinated management of our nation's coasts, Great Lakes and ocean.

?Bringing all the government agencies together on ocean policy is long overdue. Everyone wants to get it right.? - Jim Lanard, President of the Offshore Wind Development Coalition

Whom does the National Ocean Policy benefit?

All ocean users benefit, particularly those within emerging industries, like offshore renewables. The Policy promotes better practices for siting offshore renewable energy by collecting data, proactively engaging stakeholders and making recommendations to avoid conflicts. It provides a forum for state, tribal and federal agency coordination that will provide regulatory consistency and efficiency. Local communities and economies have a stake in the proper management of our coasts and oceans ? the National Ocean Policy ensures that happens.

Where do possible wind farm locations overlap with vital fishing areas? How will shipping routes be affected? These are questions that emerging offshore industries need to know to make business decisions, and the National Ocean Policy can help provide that information.

What does it do?

The Policy provides guidance in making decisions that will protect our ocean, waterways and coastlines, all of which provide income, recreation, food and flood protection for the neighboring communities and states.

It?s about coordination. More than 20 federal agencies and over 140 laws address our coasts and the ocean, often in competing and conflicting ways. The policy improves collaboration and coordination and empowers the states to have a greater say in federal decision-making.

It?s about collecting, mapping, sharing and using information for smart planning. It will create an ocean atlas with information on ocean uses and resources. The policy provides information to state, tribal and federal agencies, as well as ocean users and the public, in a transparent manner and recommends a hands-on process to enable stakeholders to help make smart decisions about important ocean and coastal resources for generations to come.

When does it start?

Some businesses are already benefiting from smart ocean planning. For example, the Rhode Island Ocean Special Area Management Plan (OSAMP), a planning process akin to that outlined in the National Ocean Policy, helped to identify a renewable energy area off Block Island that has enabled a wind developer to jump-start the permitting process.

The planning ? a result of a rigorous data collection and stakeholder engagement effort by Rhode Island?s coastal zone management agency ? has increased certainty for the developer and greatly advanced the siting process for the project. After working together with other stakeholders, the Rhode Island developer has recently agreed to a set of voluntary measures to help protect endangered North Atlantic right whales.

Nationally, regions are moving forward at their own pace; some are already at work, building off of existing plans and processes. Other regions have started collecting information and bringing stakeholders together.

Where is this happening?

The Policy foresees the formation of nine Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) around the country that will create ocean atlases, coordinate management agencies and in some cases develop ocean plans. Regions have already received funding to begin work in two critical areas: data gathering and stakeholder outreach. New England has formed the first official RPB, and other regions are moving forward quickly. The RPBs will include representatives from state agencies, tribes, fisheries management councils and local governments. They will work with stakeholders and the public to gather information and, where relevant, develop plans. The National Ocean Council (NOC) is helping coordinate the regions and is drafting a handbook to provide guidance and support. To follow the activities of the Northeast RPB, click [here](#) . To view a map of multiple uses in New England waters, check out the [Northeast Ocean Data Portal](#)^[4].

Why should you care?

It's about maximizing economic benefits while safeguarding the jobs that depend on a healthy marine environment. If your job depends on the ocean, access to comprehensive data can help you make better business decisions and provide you with greater regulatory certainty and efficiency that may enhance your ability to attract investors.

Industries including commercial fishing, recreation, offshore energy and shipping are all vying to use the same waters, including sensitive areas and important fish habitat. For example, a new short sea shipping lane might cross the best wind farm site. A wind farm might affect fishing grounds. Emerging industries in particular need to find locations to operate that minimize conflicts with other users.

Offshore energy developers have said that the National Ocean Policy and comprehensive ocean planning make smart business sense and will not only help provide clean energy for our nation, but will also create the new jobs our economy needs.

What can you do?

If you have a stake in the ocean, your voice, knowledge and input are important. Engagement happens at every step ? this is a bottom-up approach. A key component to the Policy is Regional Planning Bodies, and with an open invitation to all stakeholders, meetings and other open forums will give everyone a say in decisions about how best to use and protect ocean resources.

How can we plan for the future?

- Create an ocean atlas that allows everyone to see what's going on in U.S. waters.
- Invite all stakeholders to ocean town hall meetings and other open forums that give everyone a say in decisions about how to use and protect ocean resources
- Empower those whose lives are most affected by the ocean to plan for the future

?What it means for us is greater predictability, lower risk, lower cost. In our view, when you can identify the right places to do ocean energy, you can do everything better ? you can do conservation better and can do energy development better.? Markian Melnyk, President, Atlantic Grid Development

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Links:

- [1] <http://northeastoceancouncil.org/regional-planning-body/>
- [2] <http://theblogaquatic.org/2012/11/28/its-good-to-be-here-and-get-it-started-ocean-use-planning-moves-forward-in-new-england/>
- [3] <mailto:katie.lund@noaa.gov?subject=RPB%20Mailing%20List>
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