

Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body Webinar: Updates and Opportunity for Input

Summary of Participant Input | August 1, 2013

On August 1, 2013, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body (MidA RPB) convened its first public webinar, entitled *Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body Webinar: Updates and Opportunity for Input*. The webinar featured a series of brief presentations focused on MidA RPB progress-to-date and next steps regarding MidA RPB formation, stakeholder engagement, development of regional ocean planning goals and geographic focus, data and information, and operational considerations, such as a charter. The webinar included four public comment and question sessions during which members of the public could pose comments and questions either verbally by calling into a phone line or through an online chat function. This document summarizes the most common themes of comments and questions offered by participants, as well as MidA RPB responses. Additional information, including a full recording and transcript of the webinar and a listing of all questions posed over chat, can be found at the MidA RPB website¹.

Webinar participants

Approximately 140 participants logged into the webinar². Based on webinar registration, the following sectors appear to have been represented, among others:

- Commercial Fishing
- Recreational Fishing
- Recreational Divers
- Recreational Boating
- Renewable Energy
- Shipping
- Traditional Energy/ Oil and Gas
- Science/ Academia
- Environmental NGO's
- Communication Industry
- Federal Agencies
- Tribal Representatives
- State Governments
- Local Governments

¹ <http://www.boem.gov/Environmental-Stewardship/Mid-Atlantic-Regional-Planning-Body/index.aspx>

² An exact participant count is not possible because webinar organizers are aware that some participants gathered in groups around central computers.

Summary of comments and questions

During four public comment sessions, participants asked questions and offered comment about the following topics:

General comments and questions about the MidA RPB

- Questions were posed about how the MidA RPB will influence policy and regulatory actions and how it will be involved with permitting. MidA RPB members explained that enhanced coordination and data sharing through the MidA RPB is intended to lead to better and more efficient decisions under the existing authorities of MidA RPB member states, federal agencies, and tribes.
- The importance of coordination with Regional Planning Bodies in neighboring regions was emphasized, as well as with other entities that manage resources that cross the boundaries of the MidA region. MidA RPB Members responded that Regional Planning Bodies in adjacent regions will closely coordinate, particularly on issues relevant along the boundaries of the regions. The MidA RPB will also coordinate with other relevant management entities.

Stakeholder engagement

- Comments were offered about the importance of engaging the full range of interests, with specific mention of recreational fishing, sport divers, and commercial shipping (tug and barge), and local governments. The MidA RPB reiterated its commitment to engaging all interest in the process.
- Questions were posed about how the MidA RPB will define stakeholders. It was clarified that the MidA RPB takes a broad view that includes all interests (self-selected) in the use and conservation of our oceans.
- Interest was expressed in a variety of possible mechanisms for engaging stakeholders, particularly different options for advisory bodies or other formal engagement structures that may be established. The need to capture a diverse range of interests in a large region in the context of constrained resources was highlighted. It was acknowledged that this will require creativity by the MidA RPB, which reiterated its commitment to meaningful engagement.
- Several questions were asked about how the MidA RPB will transparently share stakeholder input it has received. The MidA RPB explained that it will post comments received and post summaries, transcripts, and recordings, as appropriate for different kinds of meetings. The MidA RPB will also maintain the central webpage it has established for sharing this information.
- Several offers of assistance, support, and recommendations about tools were made, including related to the Mid-Atlantic Regional Association for Coastal Ocean Observing Systems (MARACOOS), SeaSketch, Surfrider Foundation, Stockton College and other universities and marine science organizations. Specific suggestions about individuals who should be considered for a stakeholder advisory body were also offered.

Setting of regional ocean planning goals and geographic focus

- Questions were posed about initial ideas reflected on the webinar presentation slides and some specific language changes were suggested. Topics highlighted for further consideration by the MidA RPB included:
 - Traditional energy, e.g., oil and gas
 - Dump sites
 - Climate change and resilience planning
 - Enhancing resiliency of marine environment
 - Recreational uses
- Specific examples of current or potential conflicts between ocean activities were offered. The MidA RPB noted that these are the kind of situations that could benefit from better informed and coordinated decision-making by states, federal agencies, and tribes that are part of the MidA RPB.
- Recommendations were offered about the goal setting process, including:
 - The MidA RPB should consider undergoing a visioning process
 - The importance of clarity about goals, objectives, metrics, etc.
- A question was posed about the timing of a regional assessment, which is a detail requiring further discussion by the MidA RPB.

Data and information

Questions about data and information focused on:

- Data privacy and proprietary and sensitive information
- Identifying and filling data gaps
- Data quality standards

The MidA RPB responded that it recognizes the importance of these dimensions of ensuring that data are accurate, transparent, and treated with appropriate sensitivity.

Operational considerations, including a MidA RPB charter

- Questions were posed about the relationship between the MidA RPB Charter and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) Agreement. It was noted that the MidA RPB and MARCO plan to clarify and document the contributions each entity will make to regional ocean planning going forward.
- A question was posed about timing and mechanics for public input to development of the MidA RPB charter. The MidA RPB responded that there will be further opportunities for public input, including during the in-person MidA RPB meeting planned for September 24-25, 2013.