

Mr. Ian Bowles
Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs
MA Executive Office of Energy Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

November 24, 2009

Dear Secretary Bowles,

We, the members of the Ocean Science Advisory Council (OSAC) are pleased to provide you with our comments on the proposed Science Framework for the Massachusetts Ocean Management Plan. The OSAC was formed in September 2008 per the requirement of the Massachusetts Ocean Act to assist you in creating a baseline assessment and obtaining any other scientific information necessary for the development of the Ocean Management Plan. We congratulate the State for recognizing the importance of science and the inclusion of a science framework to enable the Ocean Plan to evolve over time with new scientific information about the marine environment – particularly as it faces greater pressure from human uses and the impacts of climate change.

Over the past year, the OSAC met numerous times to review and discuss various work products including the draft reports of the six inter-agency working groups, the draft baseline assessment, the ecological valuation index, and the draft science framework.

The Draft Science Framework is impressive in its depth and comprehensive approach towards developing a full understanding of the natural and human dynamics related to the marine environment. It is ambitious in scope and will require significant investment and commitment on the part of the Commonwealth and partners such as the Massachusetts Ocean Partnership. We are aware that the funding necessary to support all the activities in the Science Framework is substantial and acquisition of these funds is uncertain in this time of shrinking budgets and competing government programs. For that reason, the OSAC recommends that the Final Ocean Plan prioritize its science research activities over the next several years. We believe that top priority should be given to the critical research activities that must be accomplished in order to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan, understand the impacts of human activities on the marine ecosystem, and advance the next iteration of the Ocean Plan.

The OSAC recommends that the Commonwealth give priority to the following Science Framework components and activities during the next few years:

- Complete the statewide habitat classification for marine and estuarine waters;
- Develop an ecological valuation methodology that includes more non-commercial species (that were included in the draft ocean plan analyses) with fishery-independent measures of distribution and abundance;
- Improve the Division of Marine Fisheries Assessment Bottom Trawl Survey database and data treatment to provide a more precise understanding of the location of fish and

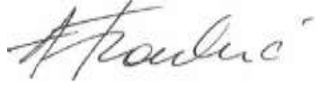
shellfish populations, essential data for use in the habitat classification system and any subsequent ecological evaluation;

- Develop a suite of indicators, and implement a program to monitor the health of the marine environment, and the effectiveness of the Ocean Plan;
- Develop and implement Cumulative Impact Assessment models so that cumulative impacts can be incorporated into the decision making process;
- Improve the human use and socioeconomic database (particularly related to recreational uses and commercial fishing);
- Collect, analyze, and disseminate scientific data for measuring the impacts of climate change on the marine environment, and incorporate data into adaptive management and decision making process;
- Study and evaluate the direct and indirect ecological effects of new uses and new ocean construction that will result as the Ocean Plan is implemented.

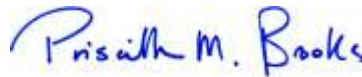
The OSAC has selected these science priorities by considering all the data incorporated into the plan and identified data gaps; the requirements of the Oceans Act and the goals of the Ocean Plan; comments from stakeholders' public meetings; and the available science for management.

We hope that the contributions from the OSAC members have been helpful to the ocean management planning staff throughout this 18 month process. We stand ready to provide further assistance to you as you consider public comments and finalize the Ocean Plan.

Sincerely,



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Cc: Deerin Babb-Brott, Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Coastal Zone Management