

REGIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE IN THE U.S.**An Agenda for Action***

The US Commission on Ocean Policy (USCOP), the Pew Oceans Commission (PEW), and the President's US Ocean Action Plan call for the development of regional ocean governance (ROG) frameworks as a way to provide support for coordinated and integrated, ecosystem-based approach to management. To move towards the ecosystem-based approach to management, new forms of thinking, planning, acting and governance are all necessary. The challenge is to move from where we are and to build on current regional and ecosystem-based efforts, to where we need to be to support healthy, productive and resilient coastal and ocean ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations.

On July 20, 2005, a group of individuals, including state coastal managers, academics, NGOs, federal officials, and many others, met in New Orleans to review the status of regional ocean governance initiatives around the nation, and to make recommendations as to how short, medium and long-term action might accelerate progress. This statement represents a community vision.

Purpose of Regional Ocean Governance

The overall purpose of regional ocean governance is to protect, maintain and restore marine ecosystem health and to provide for ecologically sustainable human use. More specifically ROG provides a framework for undertaking the following responsibilities:

- Address priority problems and opportunities within a biogeographic region;
- Assess the capacity of existing governance mechanisms to address those problems and opportunities, including a review of conflicting mandates and methods to reconcile them while still recognizing existing efforts;
- Support research, larger-scale modeling, integrated observing and monitoring systems ~~to provide a sound ongoing~~ that serve scientific basis for decisions and management needs as well as stakeholder interests.
- Prepare regional ecosystem assessments that guide management decisions, including an analysis of existing environmental data needs and products, as well as how economic, social, and cultural factors affect the ecosystem and human use;
- Engage and develop an educated public that acts as a champion and steward of coastal and marine ecosystems

* This document builds from the PRINCIPLES FOR OCEAN REGIONAL GOVERNANCE proposed by the ad-hoc Working Group of the Ocean Policy Roundtable. April 2005.

- Develop and execute strategic plans that take an adaptive, ecosystem-based management approach to solving the priority problems, that foster integration among sectors and jurisdictions, and that take advantage of opportunities for ecologically sustainable economic and human uses of the marine environment. Such strategic plans should be geographically specific and lead toward multi-objective actions for ocean use, conservation and management
- Identify measurable short and long-term goals, assign responsibilities for taking actions to achieve those goals, and identify the necessary resources.
- Prepare an evaluation process to be conducted by a clearly identified entity including user-group participants that periodically assesses progress toward stated goals, identifies impediments that inhibit achieving the goals, and recommends reform measures.

Attributes of Regional Ocean Governance

- Boundaries: ~~regional~~Regional governance should encompass the appropriate ecosystem unit (land/water area) ~~sufficient to address~~ as driven by the priority issues. Consistent with recommendations of the ~~U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy~~USCOP and the ~~Pew Oceans Commission~~PEW ~~issue-driven ecosystem units~~ should encompass ~~be understood within the context of Large Marine Ecosystems (or and the Great Lakes), contain all contributing watersheds and corresponding nations or States, and extend seaward to the limits of the EEZ, or extend and internationally as appropriate).~~ Subregions can be identified to address specific issues. Boundaries should be well-defined, but flexible over time to allow for adaptive regional approaches.
- Representation: Regional governance mechanisms should ~~consist of~~ provide, at a minimum, the following: representatives of federal, state, tribal and local governments, ~~operate~~operation in a transparent and accountable manner, and provide for the input and participation of the public and other interested parties at all stages as appropriate, while respecting existing authorities. Accountability through an authoritative entity must be in place at the outset.
- Participation: Regional governance should recognize existing efforts to better enable regional and locally-based interests to fully participate in the design and implementation of governance initiatives through cooperative conservation and management actions.
- Integration: Regional governance should ~~recognize~~ identify and seek to overcome inconsistent statutory and programmatic mandates and pursue management structures that effectively integrate environmental and societal needs.

- Coordination: Regional governance should ensure that there is effective and consistent coordination between all regional coastal and ocean observing systems and traditional environmental monitoring, scientific research, and information and product development entities.

Short-term Need and Opportunities for Action:

Rapid action is needed to build momentum, share experience, and harness the energy of the increasing numbers of state and regionally initiated actions.

State and regional entities should:

- ~~Organize into~~ Commit to establishing a national learning network and pursue opportunities for a web-based information exchange service and periodic meetings on selected topics. Within individual regions, sub-networks are needed for information exchange and issue identification.
- Identify and describe priority issues and needs precisely, and form action strategies to address them while also thinking about future opportunities or issues (e.g., mariculture, renewable energy, etc.) and how they should be addressed.
- Find appropriate opportunities for immediate action that build on existing efforts, such as pilot projects or regional decision tools that support a regional approach.

The Committee on Ocean Policy, its various subcommittees, and participating federal agencies (using the framework established under the Bush Action Plan) should:

- Document the positive and negative experiences of the Great Lakes, Gulf of Mexico, Gulf of Maine and other regional initiatives and offer these examples to other parts of the country for consideration.
- Develop a cohesive network or system of ROG mechanisms with common goals, themes and approaches, as experience is gained with the initial efforts.
- Stimulate federal agency action to support the identified priority regional issues.
- Develop strategies for linking science and monitoring to support identified regional needs. Through cooperative efforts of the Subcommittee on Integrated Management of Ocean Resources (SIMOR) and the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (JSOST) additional emphasis might be given to seafloor mapping, data products, HAB/hypoxia/invasives research, special monitoring needs, and others, depending on identified regional priority issues and needs.

Congress should authorize regional ocean governance actions as it considers reauthorization and amendment to existing laws and new legislation as follows:

- The CZMA should encourage states to give greater attention to ocean affairs and regional ocean governance mechanisms.
- The Magnuson Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act should encourage the fisheries management councils to adopt an ecosystem approach to fisheries and require close collaboration and support of emerging regional ocean governance mechanisms.
- Legislation authorizing and funding Integrated Ocean Observing Systems at the regional scale should require that they support the broad objectives of regional ocean governance as defined by the regions and states within the regions.
- Comprehensive ocean legislation considered by the Congress should explicitly require that regional ocean governance be a core component of new governance arrangements for conservation and use of the seas.

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