

July 25, 2016

To the Northeast Regional Planning Body:

We are joining the Surfrider Foundation in thanking you for your work in developing the nation's first regional ocean plan (Plan), and calling upon you to make the following changes in the final draft:

1. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Robust public engagement is a cornerstone of the National Ocean Policy. To best ensure that public input and the vision our coastal communities hold for the future of New England's coast inform decision-making, we ask that you develop and integrate into this Plan clear processes for public engagement in both future planning efforts and implementation. This includes the formation of a regionally representative and sectorally diverse standing stakeholder liaison committee, and the incorporation in the Plan of a known stakeholder database organized by sector across the region to provide agencies and applicants a starting point for identifying potentially affected ocean users. Known stakeholder data for multiple sectors were procured during the development of the Plan and should be used, with the addition of explicit agency commitments to regularly updating the database. Such a database should be a starting point for outreach and not a standalone measure for identifying potentially affected stakeholders. To increase transparency and provide the best engagement mechanism, we recommend that the NERP provide an easily accessible online form for the public to opt-in for notifications across the Northeast region and interests.

2. OCEAN RECREATION & TOURISM IS VITAL TO NEW ENGLAND!

We appreciate the inclusion of ocean recreation in this process, and urge you to better emphasize in the Plan the vital role this sector plays to New England communities. Coastal recreation and tourism is the single largest contributor to the Northeast Region's ocean economy, accounting for 55% of the coastal economy.¹ An estimated \$18.6 billion and over 328,000 jobs were produced in the NE by this sector in 2013.² These contributions are vital to the sustainability of New England's ocean economy and the durability of our coastal communities, and are dependent upon healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems and effective management decisions. The Plan should explicitly highlight the recreation and tourism sector for the economic and sociocultural values that it contributes to the region. The Plan should include specific actions for filling known gaps in understanding ocean recreation and specifying deadlines and agency leads for completing additional characterization work.

¹ National Ocean Economics Program, <http://www.oceaneconomics.org>.

² ENOW, Economics: National Ocean Watch. ENOW Explorer, 2015. Estimate includes direct, indirect and induced contributions. <http://www.coast.noaa.gov/enowexplorer>



3. SUSTAINABLE OCEAN USES REQUIRE A HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM!

Identifying important ecological areas is critical for achieving the overarching goal of healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems, and we thank you for the work you have done in assembling the ecosystem-based management working group to develop the IEA framework. While such identifications will be used in different ways across ocean user groups and agencies, this initial task is vital to complete for the advancement of planning efforts and decisions affecting all ocean sectors, uses and interests. We ask that you maintain focus on identifying IEAs, and tighten the timeline for completion of this priority work.

More specific recommendations for how to accomplish these recommendations can be found in Surfrider Foundation's letter to the NERP, submitted on July 25, 2016.

Thank you for your trailblazing work in developing the first in the nation regional ocean plan, and for considering our thoughts on improvements to this precedent-setting Plan.

Sincerely,

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