

Delaware Coastal Management Program MARCO Establishes Regional Coordination October 2009

In June 2009 the Governors of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia convened a summit to mark the signing of the *Mid-Atlantic Governors' Agreement on Ocean Conservation* and the establishment of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO). MARCO staff drafted an initial action plan to advance each of the Governors' four shared priorities: protection of sensitive and unique offshore habitat areas; support the sustainable development of offshore renewable energy; prepare the region's coastal communities for the impacts of climate change on ocean and coastal resources; and promote improvements in the region's coastal water quality. Coastal and marine spatial planning (CMSP) has recently been added as a fifth priority in light of the recommendations of the President's Ocean Policy Task Force and the National Ocean Policy to develop a national framework for CMSP.

The Governors' Agreement called for MARCO to hold a Stakeholder Workshop on the initial action plan. In December 2009, key state and federal agency representatives along with high-profile leaders of the full range of ocean interests learned from each other, deliberated, and made commitments to advancing MARCO's initial actions. In response, MARCO is collaborating with federal partners to implement the initial actions, drafting an updated action plan, and developing stakeholder engagement strategies. In May and August 2010, the DCP hosted two MARCO Management Board working meetings to further the state-federal partnerships, the development of the action plan, and the stakeholder engagement process.

Over the last year MARCO has made significant progress in establishing and embarking on its regional agenda for shared state action and coordination in the Mid-Atlantic. MARCO completed the first of two phases of an internet-based GIS mapping and planning portal for use by the general public to view and share maps depicting critical ocean habitats and resources. Each state is participating in the Atlantic Offshore Wind Energy Consortium and has launched efforts to develop consistent survey and monitoring protocols for individual offshore wind projects. MARCO developed a white paper titled "MARCO Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Information Exchange" which profiles the status of adaptation related activities and is developing targeted messaging of the risks of climate change and sea level rise to communities. MARCO has also compiled all of the State's efforts, best management practices, and existing information on marine debris and floatable control and has identified state and federal representatives to identify water quality information gaps and strategies to address them.

For the next two years, MARCO will continue to address the priorities set within the Mid-Atlantic Governors' Agreement through a set of refined and focused near-term activities: (1) Collaborate on the development of regional state standards for siting and operating offshore renewable energy projects; (2) Explore new approaches to the use of state authorities that will further the comprehensive protection of regionally-significant offshore habitats; (3) Conduct a region-wide vulnerability assessment, to serve as the basis for ongoing climate change and coastal resiliency adaptation efforts; (4) Reduce land-based water quality impairments to the regional ocean ecosystem, focusing on marine debris and ocean acidification; and (5) Advance the development and use of the MARCO Mapping and Planning Portal to guide the joint federal-state CMSP effort.

Lastly, MARCO will continue to focus on broadening its partnerships and coordination across the Mid-Atlantic region and seeking opportunities for the involvement of more partners. The federal governments increased focus on coastal and ocean activities and new federal funding opportunities will help support regional ocean partnerships like MARCO and provide additional resources for MARCO to achieve its goals.