

Mid-Atlantic Ocean Planning Committee (Mid-A OPC)

Terms of Reference

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Background:

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) is a Regional Ocean Partnership (ROP) authorized by Congress in 2022, *“as intergovernmental coordinators for shared regional priorities among States and Indian Tribes relating to the collaborative management of the large marine ecosystems, thereby reducing duplication of efforts and maximizing opportunities to leverage support in the ocean and coastal regions.”* The purpose of ROPs is to *“empower States to take a lead role in managing oceans, coastal, and Great Lakes areas.”* To further that objective the ROP’s were directed to *“maintain a mechanism for coordination, consultation, and engagement with the Federal Government and Indian Tribes.”*

Purpose:

The Mid-Atlantic Ocean Planning Committee (Mid-A OPC, or Committee) has been established to provide the mechanism for MARCO coordination, consultation, and engagement with the Federal Government, Indian Tribes and the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (MAFMC). The Mid-A OPC provides a forum to collaborate on regional issues and approaches to support sustainable use and conservation of the Mid-Atlantic region’s ocean and coastal resources including strategies for protecting marine habitats, improving the region’s coastal and ocean water quality, preparing communities for climate change, and promoting the sustainable development of offshore renewable energy. The Mid-A OPC is not intended to establish any new authorities, and activities will be consistent with existing laws and regulations.

Functions:

- Organize, support, sustain, and promote a forum for communication, information sharing, and coordination on activities relevant to shared regional ocean planning priorities for the Mid-Atlantic ocean and coast.
- Support mutual understanding among state, federal, Tribal, and regional fisheries management entities’ programs and related activities, and identify opportunities for coordination and collaboration.
- Foster partnerships with other regional organizations, groups addressing coastal and ocean-related policy, research, education, and exploration.
- Support ROP management of the [Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal](#) and develop

associated data products for purposes that advance the priorities of the partnership and Mid-A OPC.

- Encourage transparency of Mid-A OPC decision-making and activities through active stakeholder engagement.
- Implement outreach programs for public information, education, and participation to foster stewardship of Mid-Atlantic ocean and coastal resources.

Organization:

Committee Members

Mid-A OPC members shall include a primary, senior-level representative with professional responsibilities related to the use and management of coastal and ocean resources from the entities listed below. Members are encouraged to designate an alternate to participate in meetings and to represent them, as needed, on the Committee activities.

Member entities include:

- The five MARCO states – New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia.
- Federally recognized Tribes in the region.
- The Mid-Atlantic Atlantic Fisheries Management Council.
- Federal agencies including, but not limited to, the Department of Commerce through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); the Department of the Interior through the U.S Geological Survey, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service; the Department of Defense through the Navy and U.S Army Corps of Engineers; the Department of Homeland Security through the U.S. Coast Guard; the U.S. Department of Energy, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Attend and provide agency updates during Mid-A OPC quarterly webinars.
- Identify emerging ocean and/or coastal issues that would benefit from regional collaboration, and make recommendations to the Steering Committee for their consideration.
- Participate, or identify appropriate agency or program staff, to participate in relevant collaborative Work Groups as described below.
- Review and provide input to the Steering Committee on Mid-A OPC bi-annual work plans to ensure alignment with each member-entity goals, policies and priorities.
- Participate in the annual Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum.

MARCO will provide organizational and facilitation support for the Mid-A OPC, and will maintain a roster of current members and alternates, and periodically review and update its membership.

All members are encouraged to identify and reach out to other agency or entity colleagues with expertise and responsibilities related to specific issues under discussion by the OPC.

Committee Co-Chairs

The Mid-A OPC will be chaired by one state representative designated by the MARCO Management Board, one federal representative selected by the federal agency members, and one Tribal co-chair selected by Tribal members. Chairs will serve for two-year terms, unless another period is agreed to.

Role and Responsibilities:

- Coordinate in reviewing agendas and running meetings, including quarterly Mid-A OPC Member webinars, Steering Committee calls, and the annual Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum.
- Coordinate with the MARCO Mid-A OPC administrative staff and attend to organizational matters between meetings, as needed.
- Act as principal State, Federal, and Tribal points of contact for the Mid-A OPC.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee will include the two (2) Co-Chairs, two (2) additional state representatives designated by MARCO, and two (2) additional federal agency representatives selected by the federal agency members; one (1) federally recognized Tribal representative, and one (1) MAFMC representative. Steering Committee members will serve renewable two-year terms, unless otherwise agreed. The Steering Committee will use a consensus-based model for making decisions.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Identify ocean and coastal planning and management issues that would benefit from regional collaboration, coordination or engagement.
- Consult with Committee Members, as needed, to develop recommendations for projects, partnerships and initiatives that advance regional ocean planning and management.
- Collaborate with MARCO in developing bi-annual work plans, and assure alignment with Member entity authorities, policies, and priorities.
- Review and approve establishment of standing and ad hoc working groups.
- Assist Co-Chairs in developing meeting agendas, and addressing organizational and administrative matters.
- Set priorities and oversee planning for an annual Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum.
- Develop additional guidelines and processes, as needed, to further delineate Committee functions, such as: Committee organization, composition, and member roles and responsibilities.

Meetings:

The Mid-A OPC will coordinate and host the following virtual, hybrid or in-person meetings as described below. These meetings and schedules may be modified from time to time by the Steering Committee.

Member Meetings:

- Quarterly, virtual Member webinars to review, feature and discuss new and emerging issues, and other OPC activities including:
 - Member updates, updates on OPC or pertinent federal interagency activities, ROP and state updates encompassing ROP-funded projects and activities.
 - Updates from regional partners, stakeholder and other relevant ocean and coastal management programs.
 - Needs and status of the OPC bi-annual and working group work plans.

Steering Committee Meetings:

- Six virtual conference call meetings held annually, scheduled on a bi-monthly basis set by the Steering Committee.

Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum:

- The Mid-A OPC will plan and organize an in-person or hybrid annual meeting to be known as the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum, as resources are available. It will be a public Forum open to interested stakeholders. The objectives of the Forum include the following:
 - Share information, best practices, and discuss issues of significance to regional ocean planning and management;
 - Review progress and receive feedback on implementation of bi-annual and working committee work plans;
 - Seek input and facilitate two-way dialogue between governmental agencies, the general public, and interested stakeholders, and
 - Review the Committee priorities, and the need to identify further collaborative, coordination, or engagement efforts.
- The Steering Committee will establish a Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum planning committee.

Working Groups:

The Mid-A OPC may establish collaborative working groups, as needed, to advance priority issues. Working groups can be established as a means for ongoing coordination on specific topics or issues, shorter term issue deliberation or project implementation, or ad hoc initiatives as needed.

The Steering Committee will develop guidelines for establishing and approving working groups. These guidelines will include evaluating the necessity and objectives of the group, potential work plan activities, membership framework including stakeholder engagement and the resources and capacity necessary to implement activities. The working group's justification, purpose and objectives, and anticipated duration will be explicitly outlined, and upon achieving the project's goals, the group will be disbanded.

Each working group should, to the extent possible, include representatives with relevant expertise from pertinent Mid-A OPC members, other state and/or federal programs, and may include representatives from NGOs, academia and research institutions, and relevant industry(ies) as appropriate. Each working group should identify a lead and where possible, federal and state co-leads, to call and chair the meetings.

Engagement, Communications and Support:

Stakeholders:

The Mid-A OPC will develop and periodically update a stakeholder engagement plan. This plan will be designed to identify participation opportunities, solicit and consider diverse perspectives, and, whenever feasible, leverage collective efforts to advance regional ocean planning and management.

General principles for stakeholder engagement include the following:

- Provide regular updates and varied engagement opportunities.
- Identify opportunities for stakeholder participation in Mid-A OPC activities.
- Maintain transparency in Committee decision-making.
- Explore further engagement options as needs and issues evolve.

Communications:

MARCO will maintain a Mid-A OPC public website. The website will provide information about the Mid-A OPC and its activities, including the Terms of Reference, Members, working groups, work plans and other activities. Notice of Mid-A OPC meetings, working group activities, and news announcements will be posted as they become available. MARCO will also maintain Mid-A OPC contact and email distribution lists for outreach to the public and internal and external communications purposes.

Support and Funding:

MARCO will continue to provide contract staff, to the extent funds and capacity are available, to support the Regional Ocean Partnership activities and the Mid-A OPC through, and will seek additional ROP funding opportunities as they arise in consultation with the Mid-A OPC. MARCO will also collaborate with the Mid-A OPC and its working group to develop funding proposals to support specific projects and other relevant efforts. Federal agencies, states, and Member entities are encouraged to contribute in-kind services and aid in identifying and securing additional funding to support the Mid-A OPC.