



MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL COUNCIL ON THE OCEAN

MID-ATLANTIC OCEAN PLANNING COMMITTEE

5-Year Work Plan (2026–2030)

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Executive Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Ocean Planning Committee (Mid-A OPC) provides the mechanism for the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) to coordinate, consult, and engage with federal agencies, federally recognized Tribes, and the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council. This five-year work plan outlines strategic priorities and actions to guide regional ocean planning from 2026 through 2030. It focuses on strengthening data sharing, improving collaborative planning processes, and using clear communication to support shared regional priorities. These efforts support the sustainable management of ocean and coastal resources and strengthen collaboration among partners across the Mid-Atlantic.

The work plan is organized around four strategies:

- [Strategy 1](#) focuses on strengthening collaboration among state, federal, Tribal, and regional partners to address shared ocean planning priorities.
- [Strategy 2](#) improves the accessibility and integration of ocean data to support informed decision-making.
- [Strategy 3](#) establishes a long-term, adaptive work plan that aligns with ongoing and future ocean planning efforts.
- [Strategy 4](#) sustains topic-specific work groups, committees, and networks to implement planned work and address emerging regional ocean challenges.

This work plan provides a clear path for the Mid-A OPC to continue coordinating regional ocean planning, drive informed decision-making, and strengthen partnerships to protect and sustainably manage the Mid-Atlantic's ocean and coastal resources.

Introduction

The Mid-Atlantic Ocean Planning Committee (Mid-A OPC, or Committee) provides the mechanism for the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO), a State-led, Congressionally-authorized Regional Ocean Partnership (ROP)¹ to coordinate, consult, and engage with the Federal Government, Federally Recognized Tribes, and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC). The Mid-A OPC provides a forum to collaboratively address the sustainable use and conservation of the Mid-Atlantic region's ocean and coastal resources. Through the Mid-A OPC, partner entities develop shared strategies for protecting marine habitats, improving the region's coastal and ocean water quality, preparing coastal communities for changing ocean conditions and extreme weather events, and promoting sustainable offshore uses. The Mid-A OPC is not intended to establish any new authorities, and activities will be consistent with existing laws and regulations.

¹ 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 ROPs were directed to "maintain a mechanism for coordination, consultation, and engagement with the Federal Government and Indian Tribes."

As outlined in its Terms of Reference, the Mid-A OPC has several **core functions** that guide its work:²

1. 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.
2. Support mutual understanding among state, federal, Tribal, and regional fisheries management entities' programs and related activities, and identify opportunities for coordination and collaboration.
3. Foster partnerships with other regional organizations, groups addressing coastal and ocean-related policy, research, education, and exploration.
4. 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.
5. Encourage transparency of Mid-A OPC decision-making and activities through active stakeholder engagement.
6. Implement outreach programs for public information, education, and participation to foster stewardship of Mid-Atlantic ocean and coastal resources.

These core functions provide the foundation for the 2026-2030 work plan. Each strategy outlined below is designed to operationalize and align with one or more of these core responsibilities, ensuring that the Mid-A OPC's efforts are both comprehensive and focused.

Need for Action

The Mid-Atlantic region faces increasing pressures from both existing and emerging ocean uses. These include commercial and recreational fisheries, offshore energy development, maritime transportation, marine minerals exploration, deep-sea research, and conservation efforts. As these activities expand and intersect, the need to coordinate planning to protect environmental, economic, and cultural resources also grows.

Sound regional planning requires robust data, sustained coordination, and strong engagement with stakeholders across governments, industry, research institutions, and the public. It also requires a long-term approach that anticipates future needs and links local actions with regional priorities. Over the next five years, the Mid-A OPC will support these needs through collaboration, clear communication, and long-term strategy development across all regional priority areas. Ultimately, the OPC will need to continue to demonstrate its importance to a new federal Administration and to external partners, as the emphasis on certain priorities is expected to continue to shift in the coming years.

Goal

The goal of this five-year work plan is to strengthen coordination of regional ocean planning across

² [Mid-A OPC Terms of Reference](#)

the Mid-Atlantic by improving data sharing, supporting long-term strategy development, and sustaining multi-stakeholder engagement. These efforts will support science-based, data-driven decision-making and help protect and manage ocean and coastal resources across the region.

Strategies

The Mid-A OPC's work from 2026 to 2030 will be guided by three strategies. Each strategy is supported by a set of long-term priority areas and Actions, which will be carried out by Mid-A OPC members and partners. These will be implemented through a series of specific activities and initiatives, reviewed and updated regularly in response to emerging issues, stakeholder input, and regional needs.

Strategy 1: Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

Purpose and Alignment: Strengthen coordination, communication, and collaboration across state, federal, Tribal, regional, and industry partners. Support information sharing and collective understanding of regional needs. This strategy aligns with the Mid-A OPC's core functions 1 and 2.

Action 1.1 Plan and execute the annual Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum. The Forum brings together stakeholders, technical experts, and policymakers to discuss regional ocean planning priorities and advance shared goals. It will continue to serve as the region's primary venue for engaging diverse stakeholders, increasing awareness of regional ocean priorities, and identifying new action items for advancing ocean planning.

Action 1.2 Maintain coordination with the Mid-Atlantic ROP Tribal Caucus. The Tribal Caucus receives organizational support in the form of staffing and funding from MARCO. The Committee will work closely with the Caucus to ensure meaningful participation of Tribal Nations in ocean planning efforts, which may include opportunities to integrate Tribal perspectives, priorities, and knowledge in regional activities.

Action 1.3 Sustain and expand collaboration with regional science and research partners to support ocean planning. This includes ongoing coordination with the [Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative \(RWSC\)](#), engagement with research institutions, and connection to regional and national networks focused on ocean and coastal planning. These partnerships strengthen shared understanding of research needs, data availability, and emerging issues.

Action 1.4 Advance communication and economic storytelling. The Committee will highlight the economic value of healthy ocean and coastal systems by sharing clear stories and case studies focused on the Mid-Atlantic's blue economy, including tourism, energy, and fisheries. These stories will show how regional coordination and planning

support the long-term viability of these sectors and the communities that depend on them.

Strategy 2: Advance Regional Data Sharing and Facilitate Information Exchange

Purpose and Alignment: Enhance data sharing and improve access to reliable ocean data to support informed regional decision-making in ocean planning. This strategy aligns with the Mid-A OPC's core functions 4 and 5.

Action 2.1 Maintain and improve integration of ocean and coastal data on the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal. The Committee will support MARCO's implementation of the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal's annual work plan by coordinating with work groups and partners to identify priority data additions, support maintenance and improvements to metadata and data discovery efforts, and encourage the use of Portal tools that help users visualize ecological resources and human uses in the Mid-Atlantic ocean.

Action 2.2 Advance seafloor mapping and seafloor planning. The Committee will support a coordinated regional approach to seafloor data needs and acquisition, mapping priorities, and planning for infrastructure and exploration activities. The Committee will work with the Seafloor Planning Subcommittee to identify gaps, prioritize data needs, and support synthesis and integration into the Portal.

Action 2.3 Promote information sharing across sectors. The Committee will continue to host quarterly Mid-A OPC membership meetings to share member updates, and maintain communication channels that help identify new data needs and support transparency.

Strategy 3: Long-Term Planning and Development of Regional Ocean Priorities

Purpose and Alignment: Establish an adaptive, long-term planning approach that aligns regional priorities with emerging issues and opportunities. Support the development of durable roadmaps and clear communication about regional needs. This strategy aligns with the Mid-A OPC's core functions 1, 2, and 6.

Action 3.1 Develop and maintain a five-year planning cycle. The Committee will maintain this plan as a living document that guides long-term planning and adapts to new information, scientific advances, and stakeholder feedback.

Action 3.2 Share clear, accessible information about regional trends and findings. The Committee will maintain a webpage that compiles regional assessments from partner organizations and is updated annually to reflect new and revised information. Every five years, the Committee will prepare a short summary highlighting key trends and implications for ocean planning.

Action 3.3 Integrate economic and community-focused information into regional planning. The Committee will embed economic metrics and clear narratives into work products to help decision-makers understand the value of ocean stewardship.

Action 3.4 Track and synthesize lessons learned from priority efforts outside of standing work groups (e.g., seafloor mapping, coastal hazards, economic valuation and communication) to support long-term regional planning, improve alignment across topic areas, and ensure that emerging insights are incorporated into the formulation of future priorities.

Action 3.5 Identify opportunities to produce final regional products (e.g., synthesis reports, regional assessments, white papers) that can be used by federal and state partners to support decision-making, and assess barriers to and best practices for developing those products.

Strategy 4: Support and Sustain Topic-Specific Work Groups, Committees, and Networks

Purpose and Alignment: Support work groups and networks that focus on regionally important topics and ensure they have the structure and coordination needed to advance shared priorities. This strategy aligns with core functions 1, 2, and 3.

Action 4.1 Convene and support topic-specific work groups (See Appendix B). The Committee will continue to support groups that address regional priorities such as maritime commerce and navigation safety, ocean conservation, coastal hazards and resilience, marine debris, coastal acidification, ocean mapping, energy and infrastructure, recreation, and coastal carbon.

Action 4.2 Establish new work groups or subcommittees as needed. New work groups may be created when the Forum or other Committee activities identify issues that would benefit from coordinated regional action.

Action 4.3 Build capacity within existing work groups. The Committee will help sustain work groups by providing organizational support, encouraging participation across jurisdictions, and promoting alignment with long-term regional needs.