

PRESSRELEASE

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Mid-Atlantic States Release Course of Action, Convene Experts to Discuss Deep Sea Canyon Science

BALTIMORE. The Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) has recently adopted a Course of Action to consider and develop recommendations to strengthen federal protection of submarine canyon habitats. MARCO's recommendations to federal agencies will be based on synthesis of existing data.

MARCO is working with its five member states, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey and New York. "We're taking an important step towards collaboratively addressing shared marine habitat priorities in the Mid-Atlantic region," says Gwynne Schultz of Maryland's Department of Natural Resources who chairs MARCO's Management Board.

A number of submarine canyons exist along the continental shelf edge in the Mid-Atlantic region. Current data suggest these canyons support unique, highly diverse, and vulnerable habitats. More documentation and exploration is underway to refine and expand our understanding of these important offshore areas.

To gain clarity on the exceptional ecological and significant economic importance of the submarine canyons, MARCO assembled regional science experts and explorers in Baltimore on Friday, September 12 as a part of the Star-Spangled Spectacular in the Inner Harbor.

MARCO's development of the course of action also coincides with the launch of a federally funded expedition to explore several submarine canyons. From September 4 to October 7, 2014, the NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer* is exploring the largely unknown deep-sea ecosystems of the U.S. Atlantic coast with a special emphasis on the canyon structures. Earlier this year, MARCO provided a list of priority canyons for exploration to the *Okeanos* team, helping to guide the scientific direction of the expedition.

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The full Course of Action Statement can be found at: <http://midatlanticocean.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/MARCO.Submarine-Canyons.2014.09.12.pdf>

Information on the *Okeanos Explorer* 2014 Atlantic Canyons Expedition may be accessed at: <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/okeanos/explorations/ex1404/welcome.html>

Additional Visual Resources for media available at: <http://midatlanticocean.org/media-resources-submarine-canyons/>

Summary of Course of Action Statement

To advance its shared goal of ensuring that key ocean habitats of the Mid-Atlantic are protected from the principal activities effects that threaten their sensitive and unique features, biological populations, and ecological processes, MARCO intends to work in partnership with researchers, Federal agencies and stakeholders to:

1. Gather, analyze and apply the best available science to identify important submarine canyon habitats, processes and features including those supporting high biomass and biological diversity, and clearly define both their ecological and economic benefit to the Mid-Atlantic region.
2. Determine where gaps in data exist, and with the intention of closing those gaps, encourage and guide a sustained process of scientific exploration and research to inform the ongoing assessment of management priorities.
3. Gather, analyze and apply the best available science to identify and understand the effects of current and potential human activities on submarine canyon habitats in the Mid-Atlantic region.
4. Consider potential mechanisms that strengthen protection of submarine canyon habitats. MARCO may develop recommendations to federal agencies, based on synthesis of existing data, to protect canyon habitats from certain harmful effects.
5. Further characterize the importance of submarine canyons, and the ocean areas they occupy, to fisheries, tourism and recreation, shipping and waterborne transportation, and potential future activities.

About MARCO

Established by the Governors of the five coastal Mid-Atlantic states (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia) in 2009, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) is a partnership to address shared regional priorities and provide a collective voice for the region. The five MARCO states focus on four-shared priority areas identified in the Governors Agreement: climate change adaptation, marine habitats, offshore renewable energy and water quality. MARCO also uses regional ocean planning as a means to advance these priorities.

Learn more at: www.midatlanticocean.org