

**Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body
Ecologically Rich Areas Workshop**

**Agenda
May 19, 2017
9:00 am- 4:30 pm**

St. Jones National Estuarine Research Reserve
818 Kitts Hummock Rd.
Dover, DE 19901

Public Skype access: (8:40- 11:30 am)

<https://meet.state.de.us/kimberly.cole/7GQTNWCB?sl=1>

Note: For participants joining via Skype, please test the link in advance to ensure your system can connect. For technical support during the meeting, please call the Reserve at (302) 739-6377, and ask for Kim Cole

Workshop objectives:

- 1) Enhance understanding of ongoing work to develop data products characterizing the components of ecological richness (i.e. high productivity, high biodiversity, high species abundance, vulnerable and rare resources) and types of ecologically rich areas (ERAs).
- 2) Obtain stakeholder input on the opportunities and challenges associated with identifying ERAs.
- 3) Review efforts to collect expert input that will guide ERA data development and solicit ideas for obtaining additional stakeholder and expert input.
- 4) Obtain stakeholder input on criteria¹ the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body could use for selecting a pilot ERA.

Workshop findings will be reported to the full RPB at the June 20 meeting in Silver Spring, MD.

Background materials:

- Mid-Atlantic Marine Life and Data Analysis Presentation (January 2016)
<http://midatlanticocean.org/video-presentations-from-the-jan-29-marco-ocean-data-forum-now-available-online/>

¹ The Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan states that "Criteria for choosing a pilot area could include the relative completeness, quality, abundance and reliability of the available data for the area, presence of human uses in the area, and whether an area is being actively managed under multiple authorities. Additional factors, challenges and opportunities will also be considered as appropriate, such as changing conditions, trends, and new data that may become available.

- Link to Aug 2016 MDAT Workshop Summary report http://midatlanticocean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/August-2016-ERA-Workshop-Summary-Report_Final.pdf
- Language in the Final Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan (inserted at end of this document)

AGENDA

8:40 am	Public webinar opens
8:45 - 9:00 am	<p>Welcome and Overview of Agenda</p> <p><i>Laura McKay, Lead, Ecologically Rich Areas Work Group; Chair, MARCO</i></p> <p><i>Darlene Finch, Facilitator, NOAA/NOS</i></p>
9:00 - 9:45 am	<p>Update from Marine Life and Data Analysis Team (<i>Pat Halpin and Jesse Cleary, Marine Life and Data Analysis team, Duke University</i>)</p> <p>Participants will learn about the four types of ERAs (fixed, clustered, ambulatory and ephemeral) and five ERA components (productivity, biodiversity, species abundance, vulnerability and rarity) as well as progress to date in developing data synthesis products.</p>
9:45 - 10:15 am	Question and Answer
10:15 – 10:45 am	<p>Overview of survey to collect expert input from Mid-Atlantic and Northeast (<i>Jay Odell, Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal Team</i>)</p> <p>Participants will learn about the SeaSketch survey and responses obtained from the survey to date, and consider this input in thinking about how to identify ERAs.</p>
10:45 – 11:15 am	Question and Answer
11:15 am	Public webinar closes
11:15- 12:00 pm	<p>Understanding and Explaining ERAs: To gain a better understanding of what stakeholders consider the benefits and challenges of identifying ERAs, participants will be asked to discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe what an ERA is? • How could describing the ecosystem features and applicable government authorities for a specific area help agencies and ocean stakeholders make better decisions? • What concerns do you have regarding development of maps showing ERAs? • Beyond data synthesis products and factual reports, are there other communication approaches that could make ERA information useful to government agencies and ocean stakeholders?

12:00- 12:30 pm	Lunch (provided for registered participants)
12:30- 12:40 pm	Charge to Small Groups
12:40- 1:45 pm	<p>Input on ERA Data Development: Participants will be asked to discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have questions about data development efforts to date? • Do you have questions about where the data development effort is headed in the future? • What are some of the key issues with the data being developed? • What other data should we be looking at to identify ERAs? (beyond that described by the MDAT team)
1:45 – 2:00 pm	Review of ERA Data Development Discussions
2:00- 2:15 pm	Break
2:15- 3:15 pm	<p>Possible Criteria for Selecting a Pilot ERA: Participants will be asked to discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What criteria should be used to select a pilot ERA? What are the limitations of applying each of those criteria? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Relative completeness of the available data? ○ Quality of the available data? ○ Size of the area? ○ Presence of human uses in the area? ○ Is the area being actively managed by multiple authorities? ○ Changing ocean conditions? ○ Emerging trends? • What other criteria should be considered for selecting a pilot ERA and why?
3:15- 3:30 pm	Review of Possible Criteria for Selecting a Pilot ERA
3:30 – 3:45pm	Brainstorm Other Opportunities for Soliciting Input
3:45 – 4:15pm	Review of Small Group Input and Discussion
4:15- 4:30 pm	Wrap-up
4:30 pm	Adjourn

➔ HEALTHY OCEAN ECOSYSTEM

Action 1 – Identify ecologically rich areas of the ocean in the Mid-Atlantic region and increase understanding of those areas to foster more informed decision making.

This action is intended to deepen our understanding of key areas of the Mid-Atlantic ocean ecosystem in order to inform decision making under existing authorities. Under this action, the RPB will continue to develop enhanced data products for individual marine species, marine life synthesis products, and human use data and information synthesis products to support science-based decision making under a range of authorities. Ultimately, advanced synthesis of marine life and habitat data can help identify general or specific areas that are characterized by one or more components of ecological richness, such as high biodiversity, abundance, and productivity (see Appendix 4). Through this action, the RPB will:

- Explore scientifically rigorous methods of data synthesis that can help identify particular areas as being ecologically rich.
- Continue to develop spatial data products that illustrate components of ecological richness.
- Develop detailed factual reports that are the result of in-depth reviews of those areas. These reports will bring together spatial and non-spatial scientific information about the marine ecosystem, information about human uses in those areas, and summaries of existing management practices applicable in those areas. The reports will be designed to provide information to support informed stakeholder engagement and decision making under existing authorities.

The marine life data synthesis products and the factual reports can potentially inform a range of decisions, including NEPA analyses, evaluation of baseline information for offshore development projects, development of research agendas, and other agency-specific processes and practices. It is important to clarify at the outset that the RPB does not have the authority to identify discrete areas of the ocean for specific management objectives. Instead, identification of ERAs and their constituent components through data products shared publicly through the Data Portal and the factual reports are intended to inform management decisions under existing authorities.

This effort will be carried out in coordination with a similar effort in the Northeast region, and will include robust engagement of fishermen, conservation organizations, maritime industry, recreational users, and other stakeholders, scientists and other technical experts, Traditional Knowledge holders, and the general public at every step below.

RPB lead entities: Full RPB

Steps to accomplish this action include:

- A. Evaluate and refine the marine life data layers and synthesis approach currently being explored by the RPB. This includes developing a general framework that contains terms, references, and general components that help characterize ERAs. A **draft framework** for identification of ERAs can be found in Appendix 4. This step includes identifying and/or developing appropriate data products to represent ERA components, as well as methodologies for application of these data to define ERAs. (**short-term** and **underway**)

- B. Apply the methodologies and identify potential ERAs. (**short-term**)
- C. Select one or more potential ERAs, based on a set of criteria³² to be developed, to serve as a pilot for in-depth review. (**short-term**)
- D. Review the pilot area by:
 - 1) Characterizing the marine ecology and ecological functions of the pilot area, including observed changes or trends of key species;
 - 2) Identifying human uses in that pilot area, applying sufficient existing human use data as appropriate, including the human use grid tool³³; and
 - 3) Summarizing key authorities and applicable management practices relevant to that pilot area. (**short-term**)
- E. Compile all information collected for the pilot area into a comprehensive factual report to inform management authorities in decision making, particularly regarding decisions that may affect those areas. (**short-term**)
- F. Document and evaluate the use of the pilot report in informing agency-specific processes and methodologies for decision making and make any necessary improvements to the process of identifying, reviewing, and developing reports about ERAs. (**long-term**)
- G. Based on the evaluation in Step F, taking into consideration improvements to the pilot approach and incorporating relevant new information, continue to select and review ERAs and develop factual reports. (**long-term and ongoing**)