Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan

Final Framework for the Identification of Ecologically Rich Areas

Note: The text below includes the original language from p. 125 of the Final Mid-Atlantic Ocean Action Plan published in December 2016. Additional language in yellow was approved by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body on their March 21, 2017 monthly call and formally at their June 20, 2017 public meeting.

Five components are identified for characterizing potential ERAs in the Mid-Atlantic. These are consistent with the NE RPB approach and with other recognized approaches. Each ERA component is defined according to ecological features and the existing data sets that could be used to characterize and map those features. In addition, those data sets will be cross-checked with known species of Indigenous cultural importance. An ERA could meet one or more of the five components, though not all five need to be met before an area could be identified as an ERA. In addition, ERAs and component data may be characterized according to one or more feature types including (1) fixed, (2) clustered, (3) dynamic/ambulatory and (4) ephemeral features. Long-term data needs are also identified for each component. The following definitions are intended to describe and bound the types of data sets that could be applicable to each component. The components are:

1. Areas of high productivity — includes measured concentrations of high primary and secondary productivity, known proxies for high primary and secondary productivity, and metrics such as food availability.
2. Areas of high biodiversity — includes metrics of biodiversity and habitat areas that are likely to support high biodiversity.
3. Areas of high species abundance including areas of spawning, breeding, feeding, and migratory routes — support ecological functions important for marine life survival; these areas may include persistent or transient core abundance areas for which the underlying life history mechanism is currently unknown or suspected.
4. Areas of vulnerable marine resources — support ecological functions important for marine life survival and are particularly vulnerable to natural and human disturbances.
5. Areas of rare marine resources — distribution and core abundance areas of Federal and State Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species, listed species of concern and candidate species, other demonstrably rare species, and spatially rare habitats.