

MERIDIAN INSTITUTE

Moderator: Laura Cantral
July 11, 2016
11:00 a.m. ET

Operator: This is Conference # 33503118

Operator: Good day and welcome to today's webcast. My name is (Caroline) and I will be your event specialist today.

All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise. Please note, that today's webcast is being recorded. During today's presentation we will have a question and answer session. You can submit your (texted) questions at any time. To do so, click the green "Q&A" icon on the lower left hand corner of your screen, type your question in the open area and click "ask" to submit.

If you would like to view today's presentation in a full screen view, click the "full screen" button in the lower right hand corner of your screen. Press the "escape" key on your keyboard to return to your original view. For optimal viewing and participation, please disable your pop up blockers.

And finally, should you need technical assistance, as a best practice, we suggest that you first refresh your browser. If that does not resolve the issue, please click on the support option on the upper right hand corner of your screen for online troubleshooting.

And it is now my pleasure to turn today's program over to Laura Cantral. Laura, the floor is yours.

Laura Cantral: Thank you, (Caroline). Welcome, everyone. As (Caroline) said this is Laura Cantral, and on behalf of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning body we want to thank you for joining us today.

This is a big milestone; the draft Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action plan has been released, and RPB is very pleased to have this opportunity to provide an overview to hear your questions and comments as you've taken a first look at this draft plan. And to talk to you about other opportunities over the course of the summer to engage with the RPB and have more dialogue and more opportunities for questions and comments about this content. And we'll talk a little bit about that over the course of this webinar.

So, let me just go through a few quick preliminaries. We have three objectives that we want to address during this webinar. We're going to offer an overview of the draft plan, and you can see the link there if you haven't had a chance to go online and see the draft. We want to make sure that you all understand how, when and where you can find out more information and submit your comments by attending a public listening session and other ways that you can provide your input. And then we'll also have a substantial portion of this webinar devoted to time for entertaining your questions and hearing about your input for the draft plan.

So in terms of our agenda, pretty straight forward. We will go from now until 1 pm or as needed. And we're going to -- as soon as I'm done with these few remarks about this agenda -- we will have some remarks about an overview of the regional planning body and its work and then walk through the content of the draft plan.

By right about 12 o'clock or a little before we will shift gears to our Q&A session of the webinar, and you heard (Caroline) giving you instructions about how you can submit your question or your comments using the chat function. Those will come here to us at Meridian and we will be fielding your questions and organizing them by topic.

We may do a little bundling or synthesizing depending on the volume of questions that we're getting, and we'll be posing those to the presenters who

you will hear from providing the overview. And also those presenters are joined by other members of the RPB who are available and standing by to contribute if they want to address a question or a comment that is posed by a member of the public.

So let me tell you a little bit, those of you who have participated in this kind of webinar before this will – this will sound familiar -- but following the event we will post on the RPB Web Site the things that you can see here. There'll be a recording of this webinar, a transcript, the full slide presentation, a record of all of the chat questions and comments. So even if for some reason -- either timing or because we did a little bit of bundling -- you didn't see your question posed in exactly the way you posed it, you will see a record of everything that was submitted. And we'll also provide a list of participants.

So in terms of how you can provide your public – provide your comment, there are three ways that you can do that. The first one is today during the Q&A portion of the webinar. And then you can see on the slides that we are presenting you with a schedule of open houses that will be an opportunity for you to come and meet with members of the RPB, have discussion, provide your input, hear more than we're going to be able to share with you during this event about what's in the plan. And you can see that schedule -- there's going to be a number of opportunities now through the end of the month of July.

And then of course, you are always welcome and encouraged to provide your comment to the plan. There is a deadline for -- during this formal public comment period. We need to hear from you by September 6th and you can send an e-mail to the RPB's e-mail address or you can send your comments in writing and there's an address there. Don't worry about jotting that down because all of this information is on the Web Site and this slide deck will be on the Web Site and there are plenty of ways to find what you need to enable you to get your (public comment in).

All right. So with those preliminaries, I think we're ready to dive right into our content for today, starting with an overview (of) the RPB. And I'm going to turn to Bob LaBelle our federal co-lead for the Mid-Atlantic RPB to kick this off. Bob?

Bob LaBelle: Well thank you, Laura, and welcome, everyone. Good afternoon and thank you so much for tuning in today to talk more about the plan. We're really happy to have you on board.

Just as way – by way of overview, it's hard to believe that we go way back in this to April 2013 in our efforts to (meet) as an RPB and to bring this effort together with the help of everyone who cares about and lives and works in the ocean in the Mid-Atlantic. And of course the primary purpose is to improve overall coordination between all the members that contribute to the RPB. Also data has a lot to do with it as you'll hear about it today, and building the collaborative relationships are probably the most important thing that has happened already over the last three plus years. So, next slide.

So here's the group and the RPB is you can see the states that are involved -- six states -- two federally recognized tribes -- Shinnecock Indian Nation and the Pamunkey Indian Tribe -- the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and eight federal agencies who are all on the phone here and Connecticut -- the state of Connecticut -- serves as an ex-officio member to the RPB. This shows our Web Site and I would encourage you if you haven't been there to go there and look and see all the information you can pick up there. And you can always e-mail us directly at that e-mail address there. Next slide.

So we want to stress that public input has been a priority throughout this draft plan development. And you can see the list there of five full RPB meetings have happened already, full webinars, et cetera, lots of workshops and listening sessions and numerous additional meetings in the specific sectors that work in the ocean and care about the ocean and study the ocean and lots of information, lots of efforts to develop and add data and make it easily available through the Mid-Atlantic data portal and we'll talk more about that very shortly.

I want to stress what's coming up this summer. We did meet the date, July 6th, to get the draft plan out and we did hear your comments and wishes to expand the amount of time that the public had to comment. We were able to go from 45 to 60 days. And certainly you'll hear more about the five open houses

coming up across the states in the Mid-Atlantic this month. So stay tuned for more on that and we hope to see you there. Next slide.

So here is the timeline. Our timeline is getting shorter and more simplified as you can see, if you remember some of the previous charts we've had. We're in the second stage there -- the 60 day public comment period -- it will end on September 6th so please get your comments in. And then we will -- the full RPB will look at those comments and respond and revise the plan accordingly. And then in the fall send the completed ocean action plan to the National Ocean Council for their concurrence and we anticipate approval from the National Ocean Council by late fall, I would say.

And I think at this point I'm going to turn it over to Gwynne Schultz, who is going to give us -- talk to us about chapter one, an overview of the draft plan. Thank you.

Gwynne Schultz: Good, thank you, Bob. So at this time my colleagues and I will present an overview of the draft plan starting with chapter one. You'll note on this slide an image depicting the RPB's primary geographic focus for our regional ocean planning efforts. It encompasses the area from New York to Virginia and seaward to 200 nautical miles, which includes federal, state and tribal waters.

It is truly amazing the abundance of natural resources and diversity of human uses in the region and the management of these resources and uses is distributed among numerous agencies at the federal, state and tribal levels and includes hundreds of domestic laws, regulations and policies. Next slide, please.

So chapter one starts out by characterizing the special relationship of the Mid-Atlantic region to the ocean waters off its shores. It then explains the more than three years of history and collaborative process of Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean planning and includes details about the RPB and its membership. Several foundational documents that were developed with public input are described in this chapter including, first, the RPB charter which clarifies the

purpose, participants and delineation of roles and responsibilities. Then you will also see a description of the regional ocean assessment.

And if you haven't already checked this out online, I really encourage you to. It is an online product that brings together and summarizes best available information on the ocean ecosystem and ocean uses and provides links to more in depth information. Then section 1.4 of chapter one describes the Mid-Atlantic regional ocean framework, and that's what established the 11 overarching principles to guide ocean planning, the two goals for the regional ocean planning process and a series of objective related to each goal.

And then finally in this section you'll see a brief overview of a document called Approach to the Mid-Atlantic Action Plan by which the RPB agreed to identify and implement collaborative actions that we'll be describing when we get into chapter two. Next slide, please.

So, this chapter also explains that the draft plan and the actions contained therein are designed to enhance coordination and collaboration and to inform decision making by the government agencies with existing management authorities over our ocean resources. It explains that this work will be done under these existing authorities and that the RPB itself does not have any regulatory authority. So our next speaker, Bob LaBelle from BOEM is going to kick off an overview of chapter two.

Bob LaBelle: OK, thank you, Gwynne.

So chapter two is all about promoting this big long inter-jurisdictional coordination (phrase) that -- the first day -- the RPB shortened that to IJC. So that's what IJC stands for, you see it all over the place. And all that means is all the entities on the RPB working together in an improved fashion and with a common goal and that is, taking a regional approach to planning for ocean conservation, protection, activities and research and data sharing.

So in chapter two, we try to set up some of the things that were so important for any good ocean plan. And we talked about those among other things, best practices on enhancing coordination. We'll have another slide on that in a second.

But we quickly came to the understanding that it wouldn't make much sense to put all this time and effort into an ocean plan and then not implement it. And a key part of implementing it is to continue with – continue oversight of it and we felt that RPB is the group to do that as they are so intimately familiar with the concepts and actually wrote the first plan.

So we decided to put in the report and to get your opinions on the concept of continuing oversight of what's -- of how the plan's implemented in the future. And we'll talk a little bit later about looking at feedback on how things actually might change as the plan is implemented in the future. Also a very important part that will be discussed by Laura here in a minute is the actions to promote a healthy ocean ecosystem, and under that there's quite an effort underway.

The second major approach that we're taking is sustainable ocean uses. And today you'll hear from all the agencies who stepped up and came up with suggestions and ideas and concepts to further collaboration and data sharing across those uses. And then there's another one that certainly the states are very interested in and that's enhancing their existing approach to the best way to work with the federal agencies on coastal zone management. Next slide please.

So I mentioned best practices, and what this boils down to is there are common approaches that the RPB feels pertain right across the board for all the entities involved trying to work together. And of course everyone wants to use the best available data and information in any decision making that they do for their agency, and the concept is being expanded to increase the interagency coordination to not only gather this data and -- but also to share it and make it easily accessible and we feel the data portal has done that.

And as just mentioned a minute ago, coordination with the stakeholders drives this whole thing. The RPB is a reflection of the many interests across the Mid-Atlantic with regard to care and use of the ocean and its resources. And so we have a formal stakeholders committee and we also have a lot of outreach and other approaches to continue to get stakeholder input.

Also the federal state coordination and federal tribal coordination, there's room for improvement in all of that and we felt that all of these items fall under so called best practices and there are ways to improve them across the board. So at the cornerstone of the plan -- and they feed into many if not all of the specific actions that you'll hear about from the individual agencies in a bit here. Next slide.

So getting back to the agreements between the entities and the agencies and the RPB, the actions in the draft plan basically enhance our capacity as entities to carry out our missions in a better way. So there's nothing that doesn't fall under existing authorities.

There's no new authority that comes from the RPB or the ocean plan but it is a great way to establish collaboration and coordination and improve the way we work together. The actions in the plan as you can see there talks about early coordination for better decision making which benefits not only the agencies involved but anyone who's trying to get a permit or a use for ocean activities. Earlier coordination and understanding and data sharing can only help you be more understanding as you start your idea for a project.

Also new products and practices are developing here especially in the data field. We're excited about the many hundreds of data layers, we have good scientific information and the fact that they are so accessible. If you haven't gone on the Mid-Atlantic portal, please do so and you'll see what I mean. And of course the (linkages) are across the actions.

And then as I mentioned, we decided as a group that it was very important to continue our regional collaboration through the planning body -- the regional planning body. So we have a commitment of the entities to continue the RPB as the primary mechanism to do that, and we'll certainly continue our efforts to get the public and stakeholder input in everything we do.

So I think at this point I'm going to turn over to Laura McKay who is going to talk to us about healthy ocean ecosystem. Laura.

Laura McKay: Thank you, Bob, and good morning, everyone. And it's kind of fun to hear the Scottish pronunciation of my name, McKay.

Bob LaBelle: My New England there coming (out).

Laura McKay: All right. Well I'm really excited about this part of our plan. I think a lot of what has driven the national ocean policy and the need for plans is the concern about keeping our ocean healthy.

So we have six actions in the plan that address these three objectives and basically, I think some of those first words -- discover and understand our ecosystems -- are some of the most important. But also we are all aware that climate is changing, that temperatures are rising and so we want to always account for that in everything we do and in promoting a healthy ocean. And obviously incorporating traditional knowledge is really key and we've learned so much already from so many folks that spend their lives working in the ocean -- on the ocean. So next slide please and we'll jump right into these actions.

So the first one has been the favorite of some and the most feared by some of our stakeholders, but we think it's really important that we try to identify ecologically rich areas. Identifying what's important out there is really step one in ensuring our ability to have a healthy ocean ecosystem. And it's exciting because we've really never attempted this before in the ocean and we know it's difficult and it's very complicated, and we know as we work to do this that we're going to find more data gaps and more that we don't know.

But we also know that ecologically rich areas may not stay put, they may not be static in space and time although they maybe if they are strongly tied to a stable geologic features. But we know these areas may well shift with changes in the ocean, and so we need to account for that and we're going to need a lot of help from scientists and stakeholders in order to try to get this right.

But it also seems likely that to the extent that ERAs are dynamic and move around that our management may need to be more fluid over time, and it may be very difficult to create any hard boundaries and it may not be as useful as we once may have thought. But we're going to take these actions carefully

and slowly and with all kinds of input from all of you. So let's go to the next slide.

And these next three actions are also exciting and important. And again while we've done some work in these areas, we've never done these things on a large regional basis. So, developing a really comprehensive ocean certification monitoring network is going to be really exciting. What we want to do is tie together some of the data that are being collected across the spectrum of (estuarine) waters to offshore ocean waters and that's going to be really helpful in our ability to understand the changes that are happening out there.

We also have a lot of good efforts by the states by NOAA and EPA and non-profits on marine debris, but plastics and the accumulation of them out in the ocean is certainly one of the larger threats to ocean health and more has to be done. So we're excited about joining forces in the Mid-Atlantic and hopefully getting some economies of scale with an effective social marketing strategy that can be used across the region.

And then that last action there, developing indicators the health of the ocean, we think that having a dashboard of indicators that will let us track various elements of ocean health will really again help us understand which problems are the most severe and therefore where we need to focus our energies in the future. So that will be an important action as well.

So with that, I'm going to turn over to Kevin Chu and he's going to talk about the last action in this set. Thank you Kevin.

Kevin Chu:

Good morning everyone. I'm Kevin Chu from NOAA and thank you for joining our webinar. We are as you heard Laura say, really excited about this ocean action plan and we're looking forward to getting your feedback on it.

There are two places in the ocean action plan where you will find activities specifically related to tribal coordination, and there's a section in the sustainable uses that I will step through in a moment. But in this section on healthy ocean ecosystems we decided to include very specifically an action to improve the incorporation of traditional ecological knowledge of the tribes

about the ocean. And we did quite deliberately in order to highlight the fact that we are trying to coordinate better with the tribes on all manner of management.

The regional planning body serves I think as one of the best ways that I see in the upcoming future to address tribal concerns and to incorporate information that the tribe has that we need. It's not going to be an easy process. It's tricky to incorporate the informal knowledge into our science based management system but it is important. We look forward to the challenges of doing it and you will see in the ocean action plan a series of steps that we are intending to take. They are kind of anticipated to be serial steps of documenting current processes and then identifying measures to improve the incorporation. And I'll stop there and let you read that, the section for yourselves.

So I will turn this over now to Joe Atangan of the Department of Defense to introduce the section on sustainable ocean uses. So Joe, over to you.

Joe Atangan: Thank you Kevin. Good morning every – or good afternoon, no good morning everybody. As another set of goals and objectives that are partnering with our ocean – healthy ocean ecosystems goal is the sustainable ocean uses.

In the next set of slides you will see the 33 actions associated with the nine objectives related to these specific ocean uses starting with the national security aspect, ocean energy, commercial and recreational fishing ocean aquaculture, maritime commerce and navigation, sand management, non-consumptive recreation, tribal interest and uses and critical undersea infrastructure. As I mentioned over the next set of slides, the individual champions for these actions and we'll address the specific actions associated with these objectives. Next slide please.

As a representative of the Department of Defense, I'll go over the national security objectives. Our objectives are very simple, it's to account for national security interests in the Mid-Atlantic through enhanced coordination, increased transparency and sharing of information across RPB member entities. The key part there is the increase in transparency and the sharing of information. So our action one is the use of the data of the plan in the data

portal to guide and inform Department of Defense programs, initiatives and planning documents. In essence, we will use the guidance that's in the plan and the data within the portal to help guide our decision making.

Action two is the identification of Department of Defense point of contact for the range and national security layers within the portal. Often times and specifically in the past, the points of contact for who do we even touch base with within DOD to ask the questions about proposed activities in the ocean.

We propose to streamline that by providing this information within the portal so that when a planned project is proposed off the coast of the Mid-Atlantic region that, they can simply go to the portal and identify a list of – and identify the points of contact, who might have an interest in that particular activity so that they are not basically searching around and being advanced in the planning process before they stumble upon a specific entity that they should be coordinating with.

And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Bob LaBelle for the ocean energy section. Next slide please.

Bob LaBelle: Thank you Joe, just struggling with the mute button there. So the next topic is ocean energy. And Bureau of Ocean Energy Management certainly realized that this is a new potential use of offshore waters, and we feel that the RPB and all the collaboration has been very helpful in making sure that if the nation goes in this direction we do it the right way with regard to exiting uses and protecting natural resources.

And so the objective basically on this is to facilitate that collaboration and do things in an improved way than we have in the past when things were more stovepipe between agencies. And we've got these actions that were developed with BOEM to try to accomplish that and I'll briefly touch on each one here.

The first action is important because identifying the key intersections of the relevant federal programs and authorities in this area will inform the site assessment and construction of operation plans for future offshore wind projects. So that's an important one and we're going to be working on getting

a description of where the various agencies come into play with regard to offshore wind energy permitting.

Second action, it's important because the plan and the data portal provide data and information that inform the identification and assessment of locations for offshore renewable energy development. And this includes supporting cumulative analysis and (MIPA) documents which are very difficult to do and it fits – it very nicely helps assess cumulative approaches and impacts in those documents.

We have the best practices which we've already talked about. In addition, developers may use the information to inform the (citing) of their structures within a lease area and developers may provide data and information that they gain from offshore activities in developing wind energy on a voluntary basis. A plan and the data portal are tools to assist in identifying the relevant species, locations that may require further information.

The third action explains you know how studies are so important in terms of obtaining the best available information. We feel that by increasing access to understanding how the various funding groups go about planning their research every year and making that information more available to all will lead to more cooperation and leveraging of possible research projects in the future. And so BOEM has an offshore environmental studies program that is very interested in seeing how if we can leverage studies every year to see if we can increase our knowledge base out there.

The fourth action talks about using the data portal to enhance access to the data, but also maybe to environmental reports and activities or thinking about how to load that up on the portal as well. The, I mentioned the studies program. There's an environmental studies program information system that allows for quick access to numerous environmental reports and studies that BOEM has completed over the years. And we're linking that to the Mid-Atlantic data portal so that will be easy for all users to pick up more information as they go on the portal by going on the BOEM site as well.

The fifth action talks about improving consultation and communication with the tribes. And we will certainly continue to implement BOEM's internal renewable energy policies inviting federally recognized tribal partners to be cooperating agencies in the preparation of (MIPA) documents. We'll also coordinate closely, we'll continue to coordinate with tribal partners to protect sites from impact and we'll work to effectively communicate BOEM science strategy on tribal studies in the Mid-Atlantic regions including developing science communication plans along those lines.

And then finally the last action there explains how BOEM will enhance existing public engagement strategies especially those associated with fishing activities and resources with offshore wind plans and projects.

Strategies of course include convening scoping meetings, open houses, environmental studies meetings et cetera, accepting public comment online, consulting with stakeholders and partners in state, tribal and local governments, as well with the Regional Fishery Management Council. And we'll continue to work with fishermen in Atlantic offshore wind lease holders in the implementation of BOEM's guidance to (OC), and we'll more effectively communicate BOEM's science strategy again with for fishery studies this time in our annual studies development plan.

You can find details about the steps to accomplish these energy actions in chapter 2.4.2. And I think at this point this next slide and we're going to Kevin Chu.

Kevin Chu:

Yes, hello again folks. So to state the obvious, commercial and recreational fishing are major uses of the ocean and together they generate billions of dollars in direct and indirect costs. So they are really significant from an economic point of view, they are significant from a cultural point of view, and from a simply a pleasure point of view as well.

Fishermen are affected by many different activities going on in the oceans, but this section we only address how the regional planning buddy will be involved in fisheries management. You heard Bob LaBelle just talk about the Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management will work to incorporate fishing interests

into the BOEM decision making process. So, there are other places throughout the ocean action plan where fishing interests are addressed for relative to other sustainable uses but here we're talking only about how the RPB will be involved in fishing.

So the fisheries management process is really relatively well organized. There are legal authorities which require us to do very open process, there are many places along that process where stakeholders can get engaged. So and those are largely the goals of the regional planning body, this open process with stakeholder engagement. So to very briefly summarize, the RPB does not intend to get involved in fisheries management decisions.

But we do feel that the regional planning body has a role to play in that, it can add value to the fisheries management process by encouraging better coordination. And the steps you see here are all intended to improve coordination, incorporate more information that is held by individuals who are perhaps not as fully engaged in the decision making processes as they might be.

So you'll see three actions and there are sub steps under each action, I won't go into those. But the first action we're committing to is collaborating better and improving processes within the fisheries management partners and that includes that states and the tribes. The second action is to improve communication with the regulated public not only to explain better what we're doing but to incorporate their views and the information they have into this.

And here we are talking about tradition and local knowledge, not only knowledge held by the tribes but information held by fishermen as well. And the third action we felt we had to do something active, we are going to deliberately increase collaboration for the conservation of essential fish habitat. So, if I could have the next slide please.

With regard to aquaculture, there is not much aquaculture going on in the open ocean at this time in the Mid-Atlantic. So we have not spent a lot of time as an RPB developing actions for that. So what you will see is that there are only two commitments we're making at this time and one is to direct

individuals who are interested in starting aquaculture to the MARCO data portal for information about other uses so that the (citing) process can be done better. And the second is to improve our collaboration with the states between the states and NOAA to better understand each other's needs and to coordinate our actions better.

The states really have a, I would say a greater role to play in aquaculture than at least NOAA does. The Army Corp of Engineers of course has a major role as well but the states because aquaculture tends to be close to shore, for a variety of reasons the states have a lot of activities and we would like to help the states meet their goals and will do so by improving our coordination. So that's it for aquaculture. And with that, I'll pass the microphone over to Chris Scraba from the Coast Guard to talk about maritime commerce and navigation.

Chris Scraba: Thank you Kevin. It is important for us to know that in 2015 four of the top 10 ports in the country in regards to their volume of goods and commodities were within the Mid-Atlantic region. These great maritime ports of the Mid-Atlantic are economically vital to our region's economy because they connect us globally to the rest of the world where 90 percent of all the world's trade is conducted by commercial shipping on our ocean sea lanes and maritime highways.

Today the Mid-Atlantic region continues to be heavily influenced by the Atlantic Ocean, its coastal waters and bays which shape our economy, our culture, our recreational activities and our environment. A significant part of this region is the maritime transportation system which is made up of the offshore sea lanes, coastal maritime highways, approaches to ports and navigation channels and harbors that then connect this commercial shipping into the port infrastructure and into (modal) transportation use to get goods to market.

In a recent U.S. Army Corps study from 2012 had indicated that the container volume of trade and vessels transporting them will both double in size by 2030. With bigger ships already arriving today from the Panama Canal and Suez Canal expansion they require safer, deeper and wider channels.

Maritime commerce will continue to grow increasing the density of vessel traffic trends in the offshore as the increase demand for goods transported by sea expands along our nation's maritime highways.

It is critical for our nation's prosperity to ensure that maritime commerce within the maritime transportation system and offshore ocean approaches continues to flow in a safe, secure, efficient and resilient manner. For these reasons we believe it's important to champion to the maritime commerce and navigational safety section through our ocean action plan.

Our actions include monitoring the maritime commerce trends and vessel traffic patterns that we know will increase substantially over the next decade to ensure it continues to safely flow into the approaches of ports, and is safely funneled offshore within maritime safely corridors prominently alongside other sustainable ocean uses that we talked about this morning.

Regional ocean planning though is the key to smart outreach that will provide us a more informed understanding of the ocean uses to best optimize the efficiency of addressing competing ocean uses while mitigating the risks to navigation safety in the environment. By becoming better informed on the intersections between different entities such as national security interest, wind energy areas, commercial fishing grounds et cetera, his will allow us to compatibly position the safe flow of maritime commerce alongside the other sustainable and important ocean uses.

Working in a collaborative manner we can achieve our mutual interests of safety optimizing the efficiency of competing ocean uses that minimizes conflict, enhances compatibility and most importantly, preserves and protects the oceans in ecologically rich areas for future generations. I thank you all for your time and interest today and I'll now turn it over to Mr. Bob LaBelle to discuss sand management. Next slide please.

Bob LaBelle: Thank you very much. Well this is talking about offshore OCS sand and federal waters. And with the increasing needs for coastal resilience planning and coastal adaptation, offshore sand located in federal waters is another option that coastal communities want to consider. The (Corps) of engineers

plays a key role in this. Of course in the actual projects, BOEM is responsible for leasing and studying which areas are best to gather sand from in federal waters.

And so the objective here is to again take a regional approach, facilitate, enhanced coordination in a regional sense for the Mid-Atlantic state and tribes and federal agencies to work together to try to assess what's out there and perhaps bring some of those resources to bear in appropriate projects. And so the actions we came up with in BOEM, the first one is to work on that enhanced coordination, getting strategic stakeholders to engage and help with the regional planning and partnering initiatives to look at what's out there and talk about where along the coast it might be needed.

The second action is talking about developing an inventory of where the best places for offshore federal sand might be off the Mid-Atlantic. And this will help resource manager's scientists and policy makers to first, identify potential resources in order to reduce potential conflicts with other uses of the OCS, to also improve understanding of the shelf geomorphic systems that control sand distribution and character. And finally, to make informed (borrow) sites optimization decisions; where's the best place to go if we're going to borrow the sand?

The next action -- number three -- details how this comprehensive inventory of sand resources would also support the identification of geologic, environmental and ecological research needs and hopefully provide a regional baseline for (events that) -- habitat assessment and monitoring, a basis to eliminate environmentally sensitive or resource (poor) sites from further consideration including sites with sediment dredging could upset food resources of protected species, for example.

Also helpful to get information regarding previously unknown potential cultural resources requiring further study. And finally, regional (bathymetry) for physical oceanographic modeling and impact assessment. So there's a lot of good information that can be gained by conducting studies in these areas, and BOEM does have a program that's looking to do that and we're also looking for partners always to include.

The fourth action talks about well, we're going to facilitate a regional fan resource management perspective and we'll do that through collaboration. We'll be looking trying to – we'll certainly be building on BOEM's existing individual state cooperative agreements that are held across the area. And also we have an Atlantic sand assessment project in which a vessel went up and down the coast last year sampling sites in federal water. So those data are being made available and we'll be looking to increase our knowledge on broad scale resource evaluation in environmental monitoring studies as well.

The fifth action, BOEM recognizes that commercial and recreational fishery interests and concerns related to sand resource management are priority issues in the Mid-Atlantic region. And BOEM is engaging with Mid-Atlantic stakeholder communities such as commercial and recreational fishermen on projects and topics related to OCS sand, gravel and shell resources both directly through project specific and public involvement efforts, and also indirectly through participation in multi agency regional coordination efforts like the one we're talking about now.

The sixth action talks about how BOEM staff engages with federally recognized tribes on projects and topics related to OCS sand both – again, both directly through project specific tribal consultations and outreach initiatives, and indirectly through the multi agency regional coordination efforts. And this action enhances engagement of tribes and planning and environmental review of proposed sand activities and through for, example identifying submerged cultural resources. You can find details about the steps to accomplish these sand actions in chapter 2.4.6.

And next we have non-consumptive recreation and I'll be turning it over to Liz Semple in New Jersey.

Elizabeth Semple: Well good morning from New Jersey. Non-consumptive recreational use is any non-extractive recreational use that provides an experience rather than a product such as beach going, site seeing, biking, bird watching, surfing, scuba diving. Coastal tourism and recreational economies are dependent on the natural resources and setting (of a) beautiful coastal regions. The objective of

this action is to ensure the importance of non-consumptive recreational uses are accounted for in the management in other uses and resources.

It is proposed that best management practices be identified to protect recreational uses and to minimize and provide education on the potential impacts to natural resources from these uses. Through this action we propose to catalogue current processes that these best management practices can inform. It is also proposed that stakeholders be convened to review findings, share information through implementation of this strategy.

Next we have Kevin Chu from NOAA who will speak about tribal interests and uses.

Kevin Chu: Hello again folks. So this section is more extensive than the section I talked about previously in the healthy ocean ecosystem. It has a series of actions, there are seven of them intended to improve our coordination with the tribes and to help the tribes to be more engaged in the decision making process. There are issues like how do we protect the sacred sites that are under water that we need to address, and it's going to take a series of agencies to address those and we will try to do that through these plans.

The one topic I really want to address right now is that in the course of developing our draft ocean action plan we realize that there's a really profound difference in perspectives on tribal rights and between the U.S. government and the tribes. And it's not surprising at all but it is important to know that – to recognize that there are differences. We do recognize that and we are committed as a regional planning body to work out those differences, to discuss openly and freely the perspectives we have and the authorities we have and to come to a better understanding of what each side is interested and concerned about and what each tribe believes is their right.

So this I think is one of the most exciting parts of the regional planning body and the future over the next few years is that, this pledge to understand each other better and to work out our differences. That process is essential and I think this body is the right forum to work that out. So I won't go into all of the various actions, you can read them for yourselves. I will simply turn it

over to – I can't remember actually who is going to do the undersea infrastructure and Laura Cantral perhaps can help me.

Laura Cantral: Yes. Gwynne Schultz, I think we're looking to you next.

Gwynne Schultz: All right, good. So, undersea infrastructure refers to the equipment and technology placed on or anchored to the ocean floor. And you know this infrastructure includes cables for telecommunication which transmits between 97 to 99 percent of international digital and voice communication.

And the scientific equipment that's deployed on or anchored to the sea floor provides important information about real time atmospheric and oceanographic conditions at sea and along the coast such as tides, air temperature, water temperature, wave height and wind speed.

And in the future, the development of offshore wind energy facilities will likely require multiple power cable systems to be laid. So the draft actions that are proposed here aim to increase our understanding of the current and potential future locations of this infrastructure, and to promote the use of data and information from the plans as well as the data portal to informal regulatory review of these development activities. OK, next slide.

So the federal coastal zone management act promotes the sustainable development of the nation's coasts by encouraging state to balance the conservation and development of coastal resources using their own management authorities. And states with federally approved coastal management programs which in our region includes all six of our Mid-Atlantic states, have the authority under the act to review federal actions.

Specifically, the states look at those actions that have reasonably foreseeable effects on the uses or resources of the state's coastal waters for consistency with the enforceable policies of their approved coastal management programs. So under specific circumstances this may include state review of federal actions that occur outside state waters.

So as noted on this slide, the RPB is interested in exploring two options that makes the Coastal Zone Management Act decisions in a more efficient,

streamlined and coordinated manner. And more information is available in chapter two, section five and there's also a link to another document in the report that gets into much more detail about some options. So at this time what I'll do is hand it over to Laura McKay from Virginia who will present chapter three.

Laura McKay: Thank you, Gwynne. So chapter three is all about science data and tools for decision making. And I'm just going to run through the first three aspects of it before I turn it over to Bob on the research.

So the next slide our data portal, and I hope you all have visited the portal all 131 of you on this call. It's been a huge step to build this portal. MARCO launched it back in 2010 and it's really been the keystone of our efforts and really of this plan. So, just a wonderful, wonderful way for all of us to see where all of the resources are and where all of the human uses are, and just a great tool for everyone to visualize with there.

So, the address is right there on the slide. If you haven't been to the portal, I encourage you to do so. It's just fascinating and there's new data going up all the time. Just last week or the week before we posted thanks to Department of Defense some amazing data layers about military use of the Mid-Atlantic, and it really does help you understand that there's so much going on out there. It's not just a blank blue area.

So next slide, I want to tell you a little bit about our work on the marine life data analysis. There has been so much data collected. It's kind of funny, we you sometimes feel like there's so much information and there's also so many data gaps. But in fact there's been over 3,000 different data layers about marine animals that our wonderful team at Duke and NOAA and Loyola have put together for us to try to synthesize this.

And so this is really exciting in that, this has never been done before. And the key here is to try to understand those 3,000 layers and to be able to overlay them and see what kinds of patterns emerge. So, we hope this will help us in identifying ecologically rich areas and also make clear what additional data we would need in order to make those identifications.

Another encouraging thing that's emerged from these efforts is the value of stakeholder involvement in the process. We've begun to learn so much from our fishermen and other traditional users and that's just key to making sure that we get this information as accurate as possible. And in fact we're looking forward to doing a workshop in August with scientists and stakeholders to go over this data and think about what components of an ecologically rich area should be. So next slide.

We've done similar work with the human use data and again, this has been really illuminating to overlay the different human use data sets to see what kinds of patterns emerge. It's been a little bit easier to do this for human use and we're naturally better at collecting data on our own behavior than we are at collecting it on wildlife out on the ocean.

But even so this exercise too has shown us some data gaps and as an example, we still need some better information on recreational use, and that relates back to the action that Liz mentioned on the need for better accounting for the value of recreational use as one of our sustainable items for Mid-Atlantic.

So next slide to get to additional actions for the portal, the overwriting issue here is to (keep) that we accomplish the continuation of the portal. In addition to closing data gaps and constantly updating, the main work is to secure staff and resources to keep this going indefinitely. But we're optimistic and the federal agencies are committing to keep their data up to date and together with MARCO the RPB is committed to ensuring longevity and utility at the portal. So again I hope you go out there and take a look at it.

We're adding these stories, every map tells a story and if you've got a good story for us let us know. These pages have some video clips that bring everything alive for people using the portal. So with that, I'm going to turn it over now back to Bob LaBelle to talk about science and research.

Bob LaBelle: Thank you Laura. Well we have one action here and that's to identify – you see it there – priority applied science and research and (for the region). It's sort of a new approach; it lends itself nicely to ecosystem base management and things like that. And so the RPB is in a great position to identify priority

applied science and research needs for the Mid-Atlantic region. And this will be done based on criteria to be developed as described in chapter three so please give us your thoughts on that criteria. The action should address data collection, processing and analysis and application of data as well.

We're looking to do a list of priority applied research needs developed in consultation with scientists, traditional knowledge holders and local stakeholders. And this will enable the RPB to focus attention on information that's needed to address the region's goals and objectives, identify interconnections among and opportunities to collaborate with other research agendas, identify programs and funding opportunities that support relevant applied research, and consider and incorporate where possible shared regional needs into federal, state and tribal research ending plans.

So we feel that this joint effort will elevate some of the research needs and many different sources of funding and hopefully lots of entities on the RPB and across the region will benefit from the resulting studies that may come out of this. Next slide.

OK so we're now moving to chapter four, plan implementation. And I'm sure there's a lot of interest in this in terms OK we have a plan, what are we going to do with it? So this is in chapter four and to follow through effectively it requires clear roles and responsibilities, a process for plan updates and amendments hence the regional coordination, resources and performance monitoring and evaluation.

So the administration section describes responsibilities that will facilitate the achievement of the RPB framework goals and objectives and including specific actions and other commitments articulated in this plan. I want to briefly focus on the significance of the RPB committing to continue its collaborative work through the implementation phase, keeping the plan up to date over time and other key aspects of this chapter. So we're really interested in the comments on chapter four. Next slide please.

So the RPB will continue its work and this is to support efficient implementation of the plan. What we'll do is maintain coordination and

administrative functions for plan implementation and updates as described in this particular section. The RPB will work with partners and stakeholders to leverage existing programs and build on the efforts of other regional entities wherever possible. RPB member entities will continue to participate in discussions and work collaboratively to achieve the goals, objectives and actions described in the plan. So that's a key commitment that we have with the existing RPB.

Executive order (13547) directs federal agencies to participate in the regional planning process and to carry out their existing authorities in a manner that's consistent with the plan to the extent consistent with applicable law. So federal agencies have a significant role in collaborative actions described in the plan and future agency actions will be informed by data and information provided in the plan and the data portal. State tribes and Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council which are voluntarily participating in the planning process have equal and significant roles that reflect their authority's jurisdiction and or standing as governments.

These participants play important roles by serving as co-leads of the RPB, and for many specific actions bringing expertise and perspectives as managers of important ocean and coastal resources under their jurisdiction, enhancing regional coordination through the planning process and ensuring that key stakeholders in the region and the general public are engaged. So we encourage you to read chapter four for specifics on all of these important issues. And I am going to turn it over to Gwynne I believe to talk about the appendices.

Gwynne Schultz: All right. So what we want to do is just take a moment to draw your attention to the appendices where you'll find a wealth of information that's referenced in the draft plan. It includes some of those foundational documents that I mentioned earlier today you know including the charter for the Mid-Atlantic RPB, the also the Mid-Atlantic ocean planning framework and the document titled, The Approach to the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Action Plan.

So really we're encouraging you to explore these documents as well as the five other documents listed here. Some of these have already received quite a bit

of public input and were approved by the RPB during the last you know three plus years. However some of them you know such as the draft framework for identification of ecologically rich areas, we're really actively soliciting your response and feedback to that document as well as the other ones. So next slide.

And before I hand it back to Laura Cantral who's going to be overseeing our facilitated you know question and answer section of the agenda, here's a reminder about the different – the public comment process and the MARCO hosted open house listening session. The sessions are being held in each of the states and they'll be held in the evening from six until 8 pm.

They'll include a brief presentation about the draft ocean action plan as well as time for question and answer with the folks showing up in the listening session. And then there's also a poster session where the public can really kind of dig a little deeper into each of the topics with our RPB members. And then finally, any written comments may be submitted to BOEM via e-mail and the address is listed on this slide, and those are being you know accepted we're hoping by September 6th.

And with that, I'm going to hand it back over to Laura Cantral and thank you.

Laura Cantral: Great, thanks Gwynne and thanks to all presenters for walking through this draft plan. I think you've gotten a good flavor of what's in it, and hopefully you've got your copy and you're looking at it carefully and preparing to provide your input and your questions. A number of you have provided questions during this webinar and we've been monitoring that, and from now until one o'clock we will take as many of them as we can get to.

And the lines are still open and operators are standing by, so if you have a question that you haven't shared yet please do that and we'll try to get to all of them and we're just going to take them. We've tried to organize them roughly by topic, either topic or section of the plan as you heard from our presenters.

So presenters, I will do my best to direct a question at one of you individually. And if there are others who are either presenters or those of you who are RPB members but not presenters, if you want to chime in to a question just unmute

your phone line and let me know that you have a contribution to make and we are certainly happy to hear from you. So let's begin.

The first question is from (Zachary Lee) and Gwynne I'm going to pose this question to you. And the question is we would like specifics as to the "numerous additional sector specific and data focused outreach efforts" conducted by the RPB, especially those outreach efforts related to fishing, fishermen et cetera.

Gwynne Schultz: OK. Let's see, there have been a number of sector specific outreach efforts especially related to the acquisition and portrayal of data and information on the portal. We have met with the shipping industry, tug and barge industry, fishing community just to name a few of them.

With regard to specifics of when and how and what types of information, I'm going to recommend that we even have – we have maybe someone from, who's been actively engaged with the portal team getting to more detail. Or kind of also encourage you to attend one of the public listening sessions where we do have our portal team will be available there to kind of get into how more that data has been you know collected.

The states have also been actively engaged with the stakeholder liaison committee that has representatives from offshore wind, marine science, tourism, environmental conservation, port shipping, fishing, the submarine cables, marine navigation, ocean recreation and marine trades. And we have talked with these different sectors and shared with them materials that were released publicly to the – from the RPB. And the input that we've – that the states received from them has been very helpful in informing the states which have then been sharing quite a bit of this information with the RPB. So I encourage anyone else to help respond to that question.

Laura Cantral: Anyone else? OK Gwynne, thank you. Let's keep going. Bob, I have a couple of questions coming up. They're different questions but I think they're both for you to field, again others if you want to chime in but Bob you take the first crack at it.

This question comes from (Christine Hopper) with the Ocean Conservancy. One of the outcomes for stakeholders who participated in the planning process have always hoped for is better and earlier stakeholder engagement so that stakeholders with potential conflicts can work with project proponents up front to resolve potential problems proactively. What commitments does the plan contain to help achieve that goal?

Bob LaBelle: OK, thanks Laura. Well let me just comment on you know why that came about. I think the RPB was engaged in an iterative process to first define what they were about and we did that through our charter and our framework document, and then to look inwardly at the various entities, the agencies that are a part of the RPB with regard to their existing missions and objectives and work off what we felt were improvements.

Certainly stakeholders play a key role since all these entities you know engage the public and user groups repeatedly in their existing work. So I don't think there's a case where the public had previously not had access to opportunities to weigh in on the various activities that go on out there. And so what we felt we were doing here is getting together as a group to talk about how to improve that access in a regional sense.

So it did take us a good while to finally reach out with something that you know stood on its own and made sense for the public and the stakeholders to evaluate. And we did as we showed in that previous list, we did reach out with a lot of workshops and meetings and other sessions to try to get that input, we have our stakeholder advisory committee et cetera.

Could we have done more? Certainly, but not with the existing time and resources we had (at our) you know available. And the way this thing sort of grew organically, we're in a good spot now to answer the question finally about what we're going to do in the future. Now that the plan is in the public's hands, we're looking to as the implementation moves forward we're looking to earlier input as we you know go ahead with following up on what's in the plan with regard to our existing activities. So I hope that addresses the question.

Laura Cantral: All right Bob, thank you. So stay with us here, I'm going to ask you a couple more. This next one is from (Charles Caruso) and his question is, why don't you give stakeholders that you plan to regularly consult with as examples environmental NGOs, commercial fishery groups et cetera membership status on the RPB so that they provide their input directly and maybe buy in to general consensus decisions of the RPB?

Bob LaBelle: Well I think this goes back to the ocean policy that was developed nationally across several administrations in the past. And you know the thought was with regard to marine planning that the entities should be involved in the issues in terms of you know federal, state and tribal governments. Each of those member entities have the responsibility to represent its public in the best way possible.

And so it would be pretty difficult to have a committee that wouldn't number in the hundreds if you tried to have you know everyone represented who would want to be on that committee. So I think what happened here is that the RPB followed the guidance in the handbook that the National Ocean Council put out with regard to how to do an ocean plan.

Laura Cantral: OK Bob, one more for you and then we're going to give you a little break. This is a question from (Brett Greenfield). The national ocean policy calls for draft marine plans to be released with accompanying environmental impact analysis that includes alternatives to public review. When will the public have access to this analysis and alternatives?

Bob LaBelle: Well I don't think that they called for an environmental impact statement on the plan. You know agencies do environmental impact statements based on federal actions. So I think what they were – the document was referring to is that existing federal actions that come from existing authorities would certainly have (EISs).

We would meet not only (MIPA) but all the laws out there; Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act et cetera. And so the difference is that the plan itself is more of a guideline on how to do work up front to work better

together across the agencies as opposed to some document that would come out with a specific action that would be subject to (MIPA) review.

Laura Cantral: All right, thank you. So I'm going to pose a couple more of these (nature) question which is about the plan, about stakeholder engagement and the nature of the RPB. And Gwynne, two questions coming from you – coming for you. The first one is from (Jeff Dean).

It's a little unclear about when the stakeholder liaison committee members get involved. Are they involved in the initial site selection or only in micro (citing) once the site is selected for example in wind energy?

Gwynne Schultz: The stakeholders in general have an opportunity to become engaged in projects in a number of ways. The first and to me the most kind of proactive is right up front in helping us ensure that there's data on the portal, data and information. So whether it you know whatever your particular interest is if you're you know representing the recreational community, the fishing community or you know some other some industry or business.

The better data that's on the portal will mean that as a developer and or government agency that's responsible for looking at a project, when they look at the portal in they know that a particular use or activity is occurring number one, that's the being proactive and letting folks know that there's a potential here that a new activity may impact an existing activity, or that there is a group of stakeholders out there that are really using an area and are interested in understanding what are the kinds of activities that may come in. The other place where stakeholders really can get into a little bit more of the discussion about particular projects, I think some of those are identified in the individual actions.

I know Bob LaBelle when he went through the ocean energy actions kind of talked about having kind of more proactive engagement with the fishing community and with stakeholders. So you'd have to look at a particular sustainable use and see how the responsible agency is thinking of getting that information out to the public. And you know while the draft plan does have quite a bit of information in that, you could look forward also to the regional

planning body's work plan that will be developed later this year that will get into a little bit more detail about how we propose on implementing in more detail some of those actions.

Laura Cantral: OK. There are a couple of questions that I want to pose at this point about the nature of the plan, the authority of the plan and then we've got a couple of questions that are related that are very you know, content specific and I want to at least give us a good flavor for what those questions are. A lot of questions are coming in, we're going to do our best to get to as many of them as we can in the time we have left.

So Bob, I think you're on deck for these next couple of questions. And the one I'm posing now is from (Megan Lat) who wants to know are the objectives or actions which are listed in numerical order listed in order of significance or are all of the objectives and actions of equal weight?

Bob LaBelle: That's a good question. You know I think I can answer for how we did it in my agency. I think we tried to put the overarching actions, you know the intent of what we were trying to do up front. It's not that it's more important. I think and I think most groups did the same thing in terms of listing the action items. I think the top one sort of reflected the intent and then you went down the list on how you were going to try to meet that intent.

I think there's really a – there wasn't at least in BOEM's on BOEM's part we didn't try to evaluate which of these priorities we're going to work on first. We're going to try to work on all those things because one of the things that we asked in the agency was look, you know what things need doing and we didn't necessarily order them. Some of them are more longer term in nature but they're all equally important I think.

Laura Cantral: All right. And just (as a process) you know just to add on, there has been no prioritization exercise as part of the RPB's work on this draft. (Ali Chase) wants to know and Bob, I think you can take this one too, did the executive summary consider an official part of the plan? In other words, will it be approved by the NOC as well?

Bob LaBelle: If we send it in as a group it will be part of what the NOC reviews. So I think the answer is yes on that.

Laura Cantral: OK. And final plan authority kind of question is for now is from (Zachary Lee) who's asking, when will IJC inter-jurisdictional coordination actions such as federal coordination be undertaken in a project permitting process? How can someone evaluate the efficacy of (BMPs) and IJC actions when we have no idea of when or how this will occur?

Bob LaBelle: Well, I don't think there's a – you know an individual step in a permitting action where we say OK, now we're going to turn to the IJC actions. They are much more in the background and sort of earlier in the process. For example through IJC actions, if a potential project operator wants to look at areas in the ocean they would be encouraged to you know through IJC actions the agencies are encouraged to get together and talk about that sooner rather than later. Also the entities would be encouraged to use the scientific data on the data portal to inform how they would you know, who they should contact and what issues and resources are in the – are in the mix in terms of where they want to go.

So I think the IJC actions are more on how things work and trying to make things work better than a separate step. Again we don't have authority, there is no authority in the RPB or the plan to insert any new steps anywhere.

Laura Cantral: Thanks Bob. All right, so now we're going to go to into plan content itself. And we're going to start with a set of questions about healthy ocean ecosystems so Laura McKay you're on deck. I'm going to start with a question from (Noah Chesmond) which is actually a compound question, several questions.

Can you provide more details about the ERA pilot project process? How will the RPB choose a pilot ERA? What type of outcomes will the RPB be seeking from the pilot process and how will stakeholders be able to participate in this process?

Laura McKay: Great, OK thanks for that question (Noah). Yes, so the idea is that after we do some work to identify ERAs kind of generally in the region that we would

choose one. And we would do that based on criteria that we worked out with some stakeholder input.

But we're thinking that the criteria of choosing a pilot it could revolve around something like where do we have the best information, where do we have the fewest data gaps where we feel we can increase the certainty that we understand that area fairly well, or well enough to do the in depth assessment which will involve really documenting what makes that area ecologically rich and also how we are currently managing it and what its current status is. And so with some stakeholder input we'll figure out those criteria.

Another one that's been talked about is you know what area is at most risk the soonest? So we're not sure yet how we'll make those decisions but we have committed that we would do that through some workshop effort to select the pilot area. And so the outcome I sort of hinted out already the outcome of choosing the pilot area would be to do that kind of documentation of its current status, its current health and its current management schemes.

And then that would be done by overlaying the human uses that we would use our human use data synthesis overlay that on the pilot ecologically rich area, and that will tell us what kinds of activities are currently going on and then we can get a better, clearer picture of how that area is being managed. And then that report would just be made available to the agencies that are managing uses in that area and that's where the RPB authority would stop.

And so that's really the outcome of identifying these areas is really better information and information collected in one reliable place. So stakeholders would be involved all along the way in that process. And I hope that answers it for you (Noah) but again, there's some more detail in the plan itself.

Laura Cantral: OK. Thank you. I'm going to pose a couple of questions coming from (Ali Chase) and I'll give you a chance – there are different questions, question then you can answer and I'll ask another one. Our first questions is will ERAs be posted on the data portal?

Laura McKay: Eventually once identified I believe so and the ultimate outcome as I mentioned would be a kind of in depth assessment report on the ecologically rich area.

Laura Cantral: OK. And our second question is, why aren't there federal agency leads identified yet for health ocean ecosystem actions number one and number five?

Laura McKay: I think because they all have a stake in it and I'm hoping that you know we'll sort that out as we once the plan is, we have the concurrent from the NOC and we can start to move forward in 2017. The agencies need a little more time to figure out who would be involved in each one. So that was the ERAs was number one, I have to remember what number five was. Is that marine? Oh, that's the indicators.

Again, I think a lot of agencies will be involved in the indicators. What we want to do is look at what indicators each federal agency is already collecting and so that we have a very efficient system for simply pulling that data into on dashboard of various indicators and trying to make that fairly automatic. So I would suspect that you know perhaps all eight federal agencies will be involved in helping with action number five.

Laura Cantral: OK. One more question on health ocean ecosystems for the time being and this one's from (Judith White). (Judith), I hope I said your last name right. Clearly ocean (certification) and marine debris are important, but equally important are (nutrient) pollution causing nitrification and toxic chemicals. Why did you ignore these other pollutants that damage healthy ocean ecosystems?

Laura McKay: Thanks for that question, it does give me an opportunity to explain it. I appreciate that. It's not that we're ignoring it. We did think about those things but what we recognized is that nitrification especially is a bit more of a near shore and nitrification and (alga blooms). And there are already multiple programs in place that are interstate programs, the Chesapeake Bay program, Delaware Estuary, Long Island (Sound). There are multistate entities that

have been working hard for 20, 30 years on those kinds of issues so we did not want to recreate any wheels.

The toxic chemicals, I'm not aware, I'm sure there are plenty out there. That hasn't emerged yet as an offshore ocean issue that I'm aware of. But I'm sure there are more pollution issues, certainly noise pollution is another one you might have mentioned that we are not addressing yet. But this plan is due – I think we're, we've committed that we're going to update the overall plan every five years. And so we're going to be on the lookout for other issues like that that may get incorporated in the future.

We also we're trying to be pretty realistic in these actions in terms of what we felt we could do within the next five years to get going on things. So I hope that helps.

Laura Cantral: All right, good. And just to be clear, that was Laura McKay answering that last batch of questions that were related to health ocean ecosystems. And we have another question from (Judith) who was the question I just posed. And Chris, this is a question for you Chris Scraba regarding commerce and marine – maritime commerce and navigation.

The question is, ships continue to be made larger and larger requiring continued dredging to deepen channels and widen them; this often requires special means disposal of contaminated sediments. Will this cycle of larger and larger ships and continued enlarging of channels and ports go on forever? When will it stop?

Chris Scraba: A very good question. There was in fact a recent article in the (Virginia-Pilot Ledger Star) here two weeks ago dealing with the Panama Canal expansion and dealing with the projects that are in Miami, Jacksonville, Charleston, Savannah, Norfolk, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York City. The competition among these ports continues to grow but there will be a period or a point where – I'll give you an example.

There is in Hampton Roads area here the depth of the water is 50 feet, and the size of the large container ship that arrived yesterday which was the first (post) Panamax vessel had 9,000 TEUs which is a 20 foot equivalent unit.

There comes a time based on funding, which the Army Corps of engineers gets to dredge, has to be a project that is appropriated and authorized by Congress. Congress and our (country only) has a finite amount of money and I think that's going to be the deciding factor as to when does it stop. I don't know if it ever will stop.

20 years from now we could see all these ports continuing to expand. But there is going to be finite resources that are available and the geographic make up of some of these ports will be advantageous to become the winners and (where), unfortunately some will become losers just based I think on the geographic (out lie) that is there. One example is in Hampton Roads there is a outer continental shelf of 60 feet that matches into the federal navigation project that the Army Corps could continue to dredge over the next 10, 20, 30, 50 years. And that provides them a natural waterway to get down sometimes maybe 55 even 60 feet.

Conversely, off Savannah, Georgia not in the Mid-Atlantic but an example is their federal navigation project may be to 50 feet but it's approximately eight to 10 miles to get to the outer continental shelf 60 feet and between those two areas is about 45 feet. So that's a physical barrier between the federal navigation project and the outer continental shelf that will prevent that port from deepening. So I think the sort answer is that based on geographic make up of some of these ports and the financial restraint that we have as a federal government will cause some ports to get bigger and some ports not. Thank you very much for your question today.

Laura Cantral: Thanks, Chris. I'm going to move now to a few questions about ocean energy. We have three questions so Bob LaBelle I'm going to be directing these questions to you, and then I'm going to also keep you on the floor for an offshore sand management question.

So regarding ocean energy we have a question from (Zachary Lee). Does the Mid-Atlantic plan only apply to wind energy when it talks about ocean energy?

Bob LaBelle: Well, I think when you read the chapter there's an introductory part that sort of says that the RPB decided to focus on wind energy as an important new use that may come into the region. So there – we looked at other sources of energy such as LNG and offshore oil and gas et cetera but the RPB as a group decided to focus on wind energy.

Laura Cantral: OK, now a question from (Carol Brighton). Does the Mid-Atlantic RPB have any input on seismic testing for oil and gas exploration?

Bob LaBelle: I didn't quite hear you, any interest?

Laura Cantral: And input. Does the RPB have any input on seismic testing for oil and gas?

Bob LaBelle: I think we didn't discuss – well we discussed that briefly in several meetings but I don't think we ever came to a conclusion on writing anything in the report about it. I think it would have if oil and gas was included in the Department of the Interior's next five year plan, the seismic testing probably would have been in the report. And I understand that the seismic testing there are still some companies that are interested in trying to obtain permits.

So I think this is a good example as that moves ahead or not in the region it's something that it would be the next duration of the ocean plan could weigh in on that in terms of how the RPB might want to respond to that use.

Laura Cantral: All right, and another question from (Zachary Lee). Is BOEM committing to implementing regulatory guidance based on the (BMCs) and the use of data portal and environmental and regulatory reviews?

Bob LaBelle: I don't believe so, I don't think it's needed. It's sort of the other way around. What we're saying is the portal is just another tool that helps us and helps others access data that is used to meet our existing regulatory requirements. So we're not looking to issue new regs based on the portal or the plan.

Laura Cantral: OK. Now this one is an offshore sand question for you Bob and it's from (Matt Gove). Is the U.S. Army Corps not part of the RPB through DOD representation? And then he cites page 62 of the plan which says, "This section focuses on sand management in the OCS for which BOEM has sole

management responsibility. BOEM will work to accomplish the above objectives recognizing that the success of each action item cannot be fully realized absent Army Corps collaboration and partnership".

Bob LaBelle: Yes, you know as we wrote the plan we definitely met with Corps and had discussion with them. And you know Joe Atangan was very helpful with that. We worked to be clear in the section on sand that we were talking about basically BOEM's leasing authority for federal sand. The Corps again is represented by DOD on the RPB and I'll defer to Joe if he'd like to add anything.

Joe Atangan: Yes, Bob, thanks. So initial response – our response to the initial question is the U.S. Army Corp part of the RPB through DOD representation, let's parch that out a little bit here. Everything that the DOD representative in other words any of the documents that we have that have been developed through the RPB process has – have the chop and review of the U.S. Army Corps. And they have – so they've had input in every document. So yes, the DOD represents the Army Corps to the RPB.

Now what I will – to amplify some of the comments that Bob mentioned earlier though, I think as we implement the plan as we get more into detail into the I guess we get more into the weeds with regard to the detail required for implementation of the plan, it becomes necessary for other agencies that are a subset of the ones who have a seat at the table at the RPB to become involved.

For example, you know while BOEM sits on the RPB, there may be other parts, the Department of Interior that may be involved. The same is true for DOD; while navy is currently occupying the seat for the DOD within the RPB, as we march down the road here in the implementation and as issues rise to prominence that will – that may require a more robust Army Corps representation, then we would simply go to the Army Corps of engineers and you know, solicit more participation for them and make sure that the right folks are getting involved in that particular subject.

So I guess what I would ask is as we go through this process be mindful that the current members of the RPB are providing the foundation document, and as we go through the implementation there will be opportunities for those who have a more direct say in the activities to be – to participate in the process.

Laura Cantral: Thank you. We're now going to move to some questions that are related to the data portal and science and research. So Laura McKay, I'll be posing some of these to you and Bob maybe you as well. Again, others who want to contribute you're welcome to do so.

The first question is from (Katie Morgan). (Katie) wants to know, who do you envision the data portal being used by, the general public, private sector companies seeking permits in the ocean, state and federal agencies or all of the above? Can you give examples of how you think the portal could be useful to each of these groups?

Laura McKay: Sure, the answer is all of the above. There will be multiple ways and multiple sectors that could use the portal. So let's see where to start. I suppose you know if you were a developer of some sort whether it was wind energy, or maybe you were looking to expand or create a new shipping lane or you know any new activity you were thinking about that you wanted to take place out there in the ocean, the portal would be a great place to start.

You can turn on all the different layers to see what's already out there, what spaces are already being used by whom and begin to think about whether your activity would make sense within that area, or whether you're going to have a lot of conflicts pop up.

So and that's just really a generic example but there's you know, I don't want to take up too much time going into a lot of hypotheticals but you know everything you know where are whales migrating, how might that affect you know some shipping activities or some recreational activities? There's just a myriad of different combinations of layers that are going to be useful for a multitude of sectors.

Laura Cantral: Great. Next question is from (Anne Merwin). Can you give us an example of a situation in the past where lack of data or coordination caused problems and

how this plan would help change that outcome in similar situations in the future?

Laura McKay: It's a little tough for me from my position because I'm relatively new to working in offshore areas just the past couple of years working on this plan. I've been more involved in near shore kinds of things as a (CDM) program manager. But and I don't know if others on the line other RPB members can come up with examples.

But one example I can give you in Virginia is we have our offshore wind energy area has been leased to Dominion. And although we've had a little bit of setback in Virginia with some of our test turbines not going up as we had hoped as soon as we had hoped, we were able to use information from the portal on communities at the fishing areas. These were maps that were produced with fishermen using some data from NOAA clarifying that information.

And so we were able to use that data from the portal as a starting point and zoom into our wind energy area and work with fishermen to refine that. And so it was a huge jump up to have that data in the portal to get started on that project and identify areas for micro (citing) within our wind energy area that developers might want to stay away from because for instance a shipwreck that was really important to recreational fishers, and where the cable would come across to Virginia Beach from the offshore wind area some areas that were important for fishing and where time of year of restrictions would be really helpful to not impose on the fishing industry.

So that's again a little bit more hypothetical because the turbines have not yet been built, but it is an example of how we've been able to use information in the portal to better prepare for future development.

Laura Cantral: Laura, (Charles Caruso) wants to know do you plan to include data from coastal estuaries in the data portal?

Laura McKay: I think it'll depend on the need because the other nice thing about our portal is we think of it as nested. So we have national data sets that are in the national Marine Cadastre and then we in the Mid-Atlantic and the north east have our

regional ocean data portal. And within the Mid-Atlantic each state has some type of portal. In Virginia we have something called (Coastal Gems).

And so we keep more detailed near shore data in our state portals. But to the extent that issues arise and ocean planning issues arise where it might be important to have some of that data in the portal, we'll consider you know putting up whatever might be needed in order to ensure that ocean needs are met.

Laura Cantral: All right, our next question is from (Amy Trice) who is asking if you can give us an example of some new data and information that was generated as part of this planning process, and why you think it as important for purposes of ocean management to generate it.

Laura McKay: Sure. It's a kind of long list but I just mentioned the communities at sea maps using NOAA data on vessel trip reports and vessel permit data so that we can now see where fishermen from a particular community where they go out in the Mid-Atlantic. That's all new information that's out there tremendously useful. I also mentioned earlier the new Department of Defense layers that have just gone up that were again a result of this whole ocean planning effort.

We had asked the Department of Defense a while ago if we could get some more detailed data for the Mid-Atlantic and they said, you know we really need to think about doing this for the whole country. And got elevated to pretty high levels in Department of Defense and Joe could tell you more about that, in order to ensure that you know it would not impact national security so they had to clear everything that could go out. But I think they've been incredibly helpful in allowing this new information to go up.

The other thing that's new on the portal are these synthesis products, the information that we're getting where we're pulling together all the different data layers over time for marine mammals, sea birds, sea turtles and fish, our marine life data synthesis. That's all new and a result of this ocean planning process as is the human use data synthesis. We just never had that kind of information available before we launched this portal.

Laura Cantral: Laura, regarding the synthesis products we have a question about that from (Brett Greenfield). When will the marine life and habitat synthesis products and the human use intensity grids mentioned in the draft plan be accessible to the public on the data portal? Are there certain maps and products referred to in the draft plan that will not be available before the close of the comment period?

Laura McKay: The human use data synthesis information is already up on the portal, so you can see that now so that's all available. I would have to – I don't want to misspeak so I'd have to double check with our portal team when some of the marine life data will go up but hopefully pretty soon. And as I mentioned, we are going to have a workshop in August to look at ecologically rich areas.

But I think, I would hope that because I think our (due) team is close to ready to provide some of the synthesis of say just all the bird data or all the whale data. I think that should be going up I hope before – I don't know if it'll go up before the end of the comment period. Is (Jay O'Dell) or someone from the portal team on the line that we could turn to Laura?

Laura Cantral: I don't think so.

Laura McKay: OK. Well, we'll try to get an answer to you on that (Brett) as soon as we can.

Laura Cantral: All right, next question is from (Michele Brunetti Post). From the 3,000 data layers mentioned, can you give a few examples of where the most ecologically rich areas are off New Jersey?

Laura McKay: I think you might be able to just vaguely see in the plan itself there might be a couple of images. But one thing we do see in looking at the marine mammal data is you tend to see them either near shore or along a shelf edge which is to say along where the canyons are. But again it's seasonal variation so you have to think about that over time where they are. And – but it is interesting not so much you know out in kind of the middle of the continental shelf, more at the edges near the coast and off at the canyon edge.

Laura Cantral: So I'm going to go back to a couple of questions that have come in that are related to the ecologically rich areas, ERAs. (Sarah Chassis) wants to know

what is the anticipated timeframe for applying the framework and identifying ecologically rich areas?

Laura McKay: So as I said, we'll have this workshop in August and continue that work. And then once the plan – we didn't want to be doing things in advance of the plan of the NOC thing in concurrence with the plan, so we didn't want to go too far. But I would hope that we can get a framework in place in early 2017 and then start that process of choosing a pilot area in which to do an in depth assessment.

Laura Cantral: OK. (Zachary Lee) wants to know is it intended for marine life synthesis products to be used in project permitting?

Laura McKay: Not necessarily as you go kind of higher up the pyramid of synthesis. Some of the base layers with individual maps for where say endangered species are occurring those could be, should be useful in permitting for the federal agencies that are involved. But then once you start synthesizing over groups of animals and there are not necessarily any regulatory statutes in place for protection of those, again the plan has no regulatory authority. And so those kinds of synthesis maps were really you know meant to be used just for planning purposes and for development of these more in depth assessments that help us understand why those areas are ecologically rich and how they're currently managed. But then that's where the RPB's authority would end and federal agencies you know would do what they will with that information.

Laura Cantral: Laura, (Zachary) also wants to know when will the August workshop for ERA development be specifically?

Laura McKay: When specifically?

Laura Cantral: Yes.

Laura McKay: We're looking at a couple of dates in mid-August somewhere around the 16th, 17th and 18th, and I'm not sure if we have a location exactly set. I know we were looking to do something probably in the Baltimore area. And I don't know if (Kate Morrison) is on the line if (Kate) would like to chime in if she has anything more definitive.

Laura Cantral: Yes, I don't think we have that capability.

Laura McKay: OK, sorry.

Laura Cantral: OK, bear with me just a moment. We're coming up here at the top of the hour and I just want to see if there's anything else we can cover in the last couple of minutes that we have. I think we're probably going to need to wrap it up at this point.

OK, so thanks to all of you who have submitted these questions. We did our best to get to all of them, there might be a couple that we just run out of time and that's why we hope that you will continue to stay engaged in this process and come to the public meeting opportunities that are going to be happening this summer. As a reminder, after this event we will have the things that you see on the slide available for you to go back and take advantage of or to share with others who weren't able to join us today. There'll be a recording, the transcripts, the full slide presentation, a record of all of the questions and comments and a list of the webinar participants.

We've got a good sense of the kinds of things that are on your mind today; questions about next steps and the process, about the role of the RPB both in putting this draft plan together and what it will do next and as well as implementation which of course is really, really important. And then we also appreciate your questions specifically about different elements of the plan whether it's ERAs, other things related to healthy ocean ecosystems or sustainable uses, and about the development of data and information and how that will inform decision making which really is the crux of this regional exercise.

So I think we will wrap it up at this point and look forward to seeing you at one of the meetings over the course of the summer. I'm going to ask ...

Laura McKay: Laura.

Laura Cantral: Yes.

Laura McKay: I'm so sorry to interrupt you, but I did get a couple of answers via e-mail to those last questions. And as far as the marine life synthesis products, the first batch of those should be available on the portal by the end of August, and for the ERA framework meeting it's looking like August 18th in Baltimore.

Laura Cantral: All right, great. Well I'm glad we could provide that information here as we close out. Thanks very much and we look forward to seeing you over the course of the summer.

Operator: And thank you to all of our participants for joining today. This does conclude our webcast and you may now disconnect. Have a good day.

END