

# Frequently Asked Questions about the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body (MidA RPB) was established in 2013, pursuant to the National Policy for Stewardship of the Ocean, Our Coasts, and the Great Lakes, to develop and apply a planning process to the ocean and coastal waters off of the States of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. Ocean planning provides a collaborative, data-based approach to ensuring sound management and protection of ocean resources and the many uses that depend on them. The MidA RPB comprises representatives from the above States as well as Federal agencies, Tribes, and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. This document answers questions members of the public may have about regional ocean planning and the MidA RPB.

**Q1: What is regional ocean planning?**

**A1:** Regional ocean planning is:

- A tool to address ocean management challenges and advance economic development and conservation objectives.
- A proactive, collaborative, and data-driven approach to planning for ocean uses and activities.
- A process for analyzing current and anticipated uses of ocean and coastal areas, and to help understand conflicting or competing use of space.

**Q2: What can regional ocean planning accomplish?**

**A2:** Regional ocean planning can:

- Enhance coordination and data sharing across governmental agencies charged with managing ocean areas and resources.
- Create efficiencies in decision-making and resource expenditures.
- Understand the interconnections between ecosystem health and human and societal needs.
- Increase understanding of ocean areas.

**Q3: Why do we need regional ocean planning?**

**A3:** We need regional ocean planning because:

- Demand for ocean areas is increasing (both types and intensity of uses).
- Ocean and coastal resources and ecosystems are fragile and have been degrading. Resource managers, ocean users, and other stakeholders are all responsible for ensuring a healthy ocean.
- Governmental agencies evolved, for the most part, to deal with singular issues (e.g. fish or offshore energy) and can improve their coordination in the decisions

they make about using ocean areas. Improved coordination can save money, reduce bureaucracy, and improve the efficiency of tax dollars spent on ocean management.

- It reduces conflicts among uses, increases planning efficiencies, and addresses regulatory inefficiencies.
- It establishes a framework for collaboration and a shared set of goals to promote ecosystem-based management.

**Q4: Who is responsible for making decisions about how our ocean waters are used, now and in the future?**

**A4:** State, Regional, Tribal, and Federal Governmental agencies are responsible for making decisions based on existing authorities about how our ocean waters and resources are used, now and in the future. Working collaboratively, agencies, tribes, resource managers, ocean users, and other stakeholders can improve coordination, integration, and decision-making. In addition:

- Regional ocean planning should improve decision-making by helping individual agencies exercise existing authorities in a more informed, coordinated, and efficient manner.
- Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) provide a forum for coordination and information sharing at multiple levels of government toward decisions about goals and objectives.

**Q5: How does regional ocean planning compare to zoning on land?**

**A5:** Unlike terrestrial zoning, regional ocean planning does not impose restrictions or have a regulatory effect on ocean and coastal activities. The ocean is a public resource that belongs to all people and ocean planning does not regulate like land-based zoning that specifies allowable uses. Regional ocean planning may identify where certain ocean uses are more or less appropriate to inform sound decision making under existing authorities.

**Q6: What is a Regional Planning Body (RPB) and what is its role?**

**A6:** The Mid-Atlantic is one of nine regional planning areas identified under the National Ocean Policy (NOP). Each regional planning area can establish a RPB consisting of Federal, State, Tribal, and Fishery Management Council representatives to develop regional objectives, compile and analyze information on the region, identify information gaps, and, if desirable, develop regional ocean plans; participation on the Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) are voluntary for State, Tribal, and Fishery Management Council members. The MidA RPB identified six workflows at its May 2014 in-person meeting focused on the following topics:

- Options for the nature and content of a regional ocean action plan (OAP) for the Mid-Atlantic region.

- Opportunities to foster and enhance improved interjurisdictional coordination (IJC) to improve decision making among MidA RPB member entities.
- Opportunities to engage stakeholders throughout the regional ocean planning process.
- Strategies to coordinate with organizations working on issues related to bays, estuaries, and coasts that fall outside the geographic scope of RPB activities (as described in the MidA RPB's [Framework](#)).
- The maintenance and continued development of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on Oceans (MARCO) Mid-Atlantic Data Portal ([Portal](#)) to provide up-to-date data to inform regional ocean planning.
- The content and structure of a regional ocean assessment (ROA) to provide information and data to support the development of the OAP.

**Q7: Is the MidA RPB a regulatory body?**

**A7:** No, regional planning bodies are not regulatory bodies; they do not create new regulations, laws, authorities, or missions. Regional planning bodies may create regional ocean plans, information exchange, and coordination processes to help inform and guide decision-making under existing authorities.

**Q8: Who are the members of the MidA RPB? How were they selected?**

**A8:** RPBs are intergovernmental bodies comprised of State, Tribal, Federal, and Regional Fishery Management Council (RFMC) representatives.

- Non-Federal RPB representatives were designated by the Governors of participating States, Tribal governments, and Regional Fishery Management Councils.
- Federal agencies identified their official representative to the RPB. Federal representative members are subject matter experts with sufficient seniority, positional authority, and expertise to enable them to represent their agencies on the RPBs and have the authority to make decisions about ocean planning and commitments on their agency's behalf.
- The current roster of [RPB members](#) is available online.

**Q9: Will regional ocean planning include identifying specific spaces in the ocean that are more or less appropriate for certain categories of uses?**

**A9:** Regional ocean planning is an information gathering and sharing process for analyzing current and anticipated uses of ocean and coastal areas. It provides a more coherent way to facilitate multiple existing and emerging uses of the marine environment, ensure public access for recreation and other pursuits, and minimize conflicts among uses in a way that sustains and preserves marine resources and healthy ecosystems that are critical to the well-being and prosperity of the Mid-Atlantic region.

**Q10: Do regional ocean planning and the National Ocean Policy constitute new regulations or restrictions?**

**A10:** The National Ocean Policy uses existing agencies' responsibilities and authorities to strengthen coordination to address ocean issues more effectively. It does *not*:

- Restrict any ocean uses.
- Change agencies' missions or Congressional mandates for agencies.
- Require new legislation.
- Supersede existing agency or departmental authority.

**Q11: Will the Mid-Atlantic regional ocean planning effort give preference to existing use over new or emerging uses, such as renewable energy or aquaculture?**

**A11:** Regional ocean planning ensures that existing activities are part of the baseline to be considered when analyzing new or expanding activities, which can ensure that existing and traditional uses are taken into account from the start of a decision-making process. Regional ocean planning does not specify one use's value over another.

**Q12: Isn't regional ocean planning all about wind power?**

**A12:** Historically, much of the conversation surrounding ocean planning has revolved around offshore wind energy development, but wind energy is just one piece of the puzzle. In the Mid-Atlantic, there are many other factors that have pointed to a need for ocean planning, including aquaculture, commercial and recreational fishing, navigation, species habitat protection, and many others.

**Q13: Does the National Ocean Policy require the formation of stakeholder or advisory committees as part of regional ocean planning?**

**A13:** No, advisory committees are not required. The MidA RPB will identify and utilize various means to ensure public and stakeholder participation.

- MARCO looks to coordinate with the MidA RPB to leverage intellectual and fiscal investments, and to support the regional ocean planning efforts through a number of activities, including stakeholder engagement and spatial data development, assessment, and dissemination.
- MARCO works on ocean management priorities beyond planning and the scope of the RPB. These priorities include climate change adaptation, marine habitats, renewable energy, and water quality issues.
- To help facilitate close coordination and cooperation, the MARCO Management Board members also serve on the RPB.

**Q14: To what extent will the MidA RPB engage stakeholders throughout the process?**

**A14:** Throughout the ocean planning process, robust stakeholder and public participation is critical to provide a strong, informed, and inclusive foundation for regional planning. Specifically:

- Stakeholder and public participation will be sought through a variety of mechanisms that may include public comment processes, public listening sessions, online webinars, workshops, and other mechanisms.
- These interactions will help the region to gain a better understanding of the range of interests and interactions of human uses and influences on the planning area, as well as expectations, points of agreement and disagreement, and interests for the future.
- One specific opportunity for stakeholder engagement is in the form of public comment periods and public listening sessions, at which members of the public may provide comment on specific RPB draft ideas and products in an in-person setting. For example, in order to effectively gather substantive stakeholder input on the *Draft Framework for Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Planning* in early 2014, the State representatives to the MidA RPB hosted in-person public listening sessions in collaboration with their federal partners. These public listening sessions were held from February through April 2014 in Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, New Jersey, and New York. To gain input on the next set of draft RPB products, MARCO is planning to host a second round of public listening sessions in November 2014 in Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, New Jersey, and New York. More specific information about these public listening sessions will be posted to the RPB's website as it becomes available.

**Q15:** How does the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) relate to the MidA RPB?

**A15:** MARCO was established to articulate, coordinate, and advance member States' interests with respect to shared ocean management priorities through planning, projects, collaboration and outreach. To that extent, MARCO will continue to pursue its mission to complement and support any independent but related activities of the RPB, including ocean planning and shared use of the MARCO Ocean Data Portal.

- MARCO is committed to working across governmental boundaries – with State and Federal agencies, Tribes, regional bodies, local authorities – and with stakeholders and interested members of the public to support regional ocean planning in the Mid-Atlantic and to advance MARCO's identified regional priorities.