

**MARINE RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT PLAN**  
**Status Report to the**  
**Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council**  
**May 24, 2005**

**Background**

Rhode Island's Coastal Management Program was adopted by the General Assembly in 1977. Since then, the program has evolved, building upon its foundation "to preserve, protect, develop and where possible, restore the coastal resources of the state for this and succeeding generations through comprehensive and coordinated long-range planning and management designed to produce the maximum benefit for society from such coastal resources."<sup>1</sup> The authority to administer the program, regulations and implementation activities lies with the RI Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC). As we move ahead in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the state has made a commitment to bolster its policies and programs to insure that the environment, economic and recreational assets of the state are well managed to achieve the goals of the "Ocean State."

**Purpose**

The Marine Resources Development Plan (MRDP) was enacted by the General Assembly in 2004 [RIG.L. 2004, Chapter 145 (2004-S 3028 A)] as part of a comprehensive package of legislation to update and harmonize the planning responsibilities of the state's environmental agencies. The MRDP will be a strategic document - a guide to action- rather than a "comprehensive plan." As a strategic plan, the MRDP shall include specific goals, performance measures and an implementation program. Its purpose is to "provide an integrated strategy for:

- a) Improving the health and functionality of Rhode Island's marine ecosystem;
- b) Providing for appropriate marine-related economic development; and
- c) Promoting the use and enjoyment of Rhode Island's marine resources by the people of the state." [RIGL46-23-6(1)(v)(A)(1)]

**The major functions of the MRDP include:**

- Increase the CRMC visible leadership in designing the coast Rhode Islanders want in a manner that is strategic, holistic, and intentional.
- Guiding the use of the full range of CRMC powers in planning and management, coordination and operations, as well as its adjudicatory authority and its ability to act as a binding arbitrator.
- Achieving consistency for planning among CRMC and other state agencies.
- Utilizing the State Guide Plan mechanism to achieve better integration with local plans and community visions.
- Facilitating CRMC involvement in the RI Bays, Rivers and Watersheds Coordination Team and the "systems level plan."
- Establishing a framework document for Special Area Management Plans, a key approach to ecosystem management for coastal waters and adjacent lands.

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<sup>1</sup> RICRMP, Page 1.

**Content.** The “first working draft” recognizes that in coastal management questions often defy definite formulation (they lack boundaries), lack an explicit basis for termination of consideration (there is no stopping point), and present a never ending array of alternatives. Such questions are difficult to address constructively through traditional planning, but they are susceptible to design solutions. In design, a vision is developed, implications are considered, interventions (actions) are proposed, and policies (guidance) are adopted. Design is strategic; it builds and expands capabilities. The “first working draft” is a design document in precisely this sense. It is not a traditional plan.

The “first working draft” accepts two propositions as axiomatic: 1) Rhode Island economy has changed; 2) methods of natural resource management have changed. The “first working draft” endeavors to provide the CRMC strategies to be effective in the face of these changes.

The “first working draft” has six sections and concludes with a discussion of the potential and expanded use of special area management plans as an implementation tool.

### **Process**

Consistent with the legislation, a working group has been formed by the CRMC to prepare the MRDP in cooperation with the Department of Environmental Management, the Statewide Planning Program and the Economic Development Corporation, and with the involvement of other agencies as appropriate. After initial consultation in December, 2004 with these agencies, the working group will solicit additional input and dialog with the agencies in May, 2005, to insure that the economic, environmental and recreational components are well integrated, as well as consistent with the systems level plans as appropriate.

**Progress.** Since the initial briefing to the CRMC on Jan. 25, 2005, the ad-hoc MRDP Working Group has met consistently about once every three weeks. The Working Group participants include the URI Coastal Resources Center, the RI Economic Policy Council, CRMC senior staff and the Senate Policy Office. These participants have shared their knowledge about coastal and economic issues in Rhode Island and about the state of the practice in planning, governmental organization, and coastal zone management. This “brainstorming” has distilled into the “first working draft” of an MRDP.

**Next Steps.** The Working Group will 1) reach out, as required by statute and good practice, to other entities for their in-put into the working draft, 2) will prepare a “second working draft,” and 3) will present the a revised/polished “second working draft” to the Council or a committee of the Council for its review, prior to preparing a “final draft” suitable for public hearing.