

Northeast Regional Ocean Council

Terms of Reference

The Northeast Regional Ocean Council (NROC) is a regional ocean partnership that provides a forum for the New England states and federal agencies to address ocean and coastal issues that benefit from a regional response. NROC was formed to augment current state, multi-state, and federal governance and institutional mechanisms to improve management of ocean and coastal resources. NROC encourages and values partnerships and collaboration with other regional organizations and groups to advance shared interests.

Mission

Provide a voluntary forum for New England states and federal partners to coordinate and collaborate on regional approaches to support balanced uses and conservation of the Northeast region's ocean and coastal resources.

Scope

NROC was formed in 2005 by the New England Governors and works to:

- Identify and address local, state, and regional ecosystem-based environmental issues;
- Seek new, and encourage existing, ocean and coastal initiatives and partnerships;
- Facilitate information exchanges, including reports, discussions, initiatives and plans which may be developed or considered; and
- Foster regional communication, interaction and cooperation on marine and oceans-related research and development, education, exploration and observation.

Structure

Council Membership

Each NROC member state – Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut - may appoint up to two senior level representatives. Governors' appointees may designate an alternate to serve on the Council in their absence. (Alternates will be consistent from meeting to meeting.) To maintain continuity, council members shall remain appointed until removed by a Governor through a reappointment.

Federal agencies are equal members of the Council and are represented by the Department of Commerce through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); the Department of the Interior through the US Geological Survey, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Parks Service; the Department of Agriculture through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; the Department of Defense through the US Army Corps of Engineers; the Department of Homeland Security through the US Coast Guard; and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Council Co-Chairs

One state representative and one federal representative will co-chair NROC for an agreed upon period (i.e. 12 or 18 months). These individuals will organize agendas, run meetings, track progress on the biannual work plan, and act as principal points of contact and spokesmen for the Council. In addition, they may present an annual report to the NE Governors' Conference.

State chairs will rotate in the following order based on geography from North to South: ME, NH, MA, RI, CT. Federal chairs will rotate by federal line department.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee will consist of the current NROC co-chairs, as well as the previous and upcoming sets of co-chairs. This will amount to three state and three federal representatives. Examples of Executive Committee duties include attending to administrative matters between meetings and developing recommendations to the Council on projects and partnerships.

Committees and Working Groups

NROC may form committees that reflect and work on Council priority issues and goals. These standing committees will develop and implement specific two-year work plans. They will inform and recommend to the Council how best to approach regional problems and coordinate activities.

In addition, NROC may convene working groups to take on specific projects and develop recommendations for approval by the Council. Working groups will form as needed and disband upon completion of a project.

Each committee and working group will have representatives from pertinent state and federal agencies and may include representatives from NGOs, academia and industry. Each committee and working group shall elect a representative to call and chair meetings.

Relationships

NROC benefits from, and values, having close and collaborative relationships with other regional organizations. NROC has Memoranda of Understanding with the Northeast Regional Association of Coastal and Ocean Observing Systems (NERACOOS), the Regional Sea Grant Consortium, and the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment, and will participate in the activities of these organizations.

NROC will communicate directly with the New England Governors and the President's National Ocean Council and its Steering Committee and Governance Coordinating Committee to make clear the priorities and needs for the Northeast. In addition, NROC will work closely and communicate with the Northeast's Regional Planning Body for ocean planning.

Operations

Meetings

NROC will meet three to four times a year. Meetings will take place in a central location to facilitate participation. The Executive Committee will hold regular meetings, every 2-3 weeks, via conference call. Committees and working groups will meet as necessary.

Decisions

NROC will develop recommendations on a consensus basis. In the unlikely event that consensus cannot be achieved, a vote will be held and the concerns of abstaining or opposing members will be made known to appropriate agencies. In a voting situation, there shall be equal representation between state and federal members. Each member state and federal agency, regardless of the number of appointees, will have only one vote on the Council.

Activities

NROC shall execute strategies and activities identified in a biannual work plan. NROC will produce an annual summary of activities and accomplishments.

Support

NROC will seek funds as appropriate to support the implementation of its goals. In addition, NROC will seek assistance with staffing and preparing meetings, recording action items and tasks, and other administrative tasks as needed.

Communications

To enhance internal communications and file and work sharing, NROC will maintain a Council share site (e.g., Basecamp). This site will be limited to member state and federal agency Council and Committee representatives only, and share site content and access should be treated as internal and confidential. NROC will also maintain an external public website for broader communication purposes.