Narragansett Bay Special Area Management Plan (Bay SAMP)
Aquaculture Element
Working Group Meeting
June 23, 2021, 4:30 – 6:00 pm
RECORDED MEETING AT: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b50tEAZdANc

Welcome and Overall Purposes of the Meeting: Jennifer McCann, of the University of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Center Rhode Island Sea Grant (URI), served as facilitator and opened the virtual meeting by welcoming approximately 30 virtual attendees (see attached list of attendees). She indicated that the purposes of the meeting were to 1) Communicate the overall Bay SAMP aquaculture element purpose, process, and expectations; and 2) Identify Working Group (WG) information needs to assist with the development of an informed process and product. "This group has an important role to play, and we are excited to get the process underway," she said.

McCann then introduced James Boyd, Deputy Director of the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), who reminded the group that the CRMC, as the state's coastal administrator, is committed to ensuring a productive, science-informed, and transparent process to develop, review, and adopt the NBay SAMP. A goal for all SAMP chapters, he said, is apply "ecosystem-based management" approaches, to leverage economic opportunity and "minimize environmental impacts," within the context of a stakeholder-driven process. He also indicated that a slate of CRMC public workshop meetings will be organized to provide multiple opportunities for public and stakeholder involvement before any formal CRMC rulemaking process begins. Boyd also said that a great deal of science data is available about Narragansett Bay which can inform the aquaculture element – a chapter and complementary siting map or tool – so the aim is to have a comprehensive draft chapter and a detailed aquaculture map prepared for public review by the end of the year.

Overall Purpose of the Bay SAMP and the Aquaculture Element: Boyd then introduced Ben Goetsch, CRMC aquaculture coordinator, to provide more specific information about the Bay SAMP aquaculture element. Goetsch indicated that with the growing role of aquaculture in the state's economic future, there is need to ensure that CRMC, which has served as Rhode Island's aquaculture permitter for decades, enhances its means of effective and efficient permitting and review for lease siting and management activities. This is a "complicated task," he said, and the SAMP process provides a supportive structure for ensuring many voices are heard. In addition, he said, public education about aquaculture activities is necessary to ensure that communities can participate as fully as possible in increasingly complex dialogues about how aquaculture is planned, sited, and managed in Rhode Island.

Q&A: McCann then facilitated a half-hour question-and-answer period for the attendees; approximately 20 questions were asked (see the link in heading to view the Q&A period) with most inquiries focused on: 1) Adaptive and flexible management techniques to ensure the element and the SAMP in general can be useful and productive guidance tools for long-term application; 2) Incorporation of all stakeholders into the process to ensure that a variety of perspectives, from marine farmers, to

commercial wild harvest shellfishermen, to recreational fishermen, to coastal property owners that abut farm sites, to government decision-makers and staff, to industry groups and representatives, and to practitioners, academia, and students; and 3) Development of the mapping tool so it can strongly assist and illuminate aquaculture permitting, review, and siting discussions.

For example, working group member Richard Pastore, addressed the issue of community conflicts with aquaculture, and noted that it could be useful for the SAMP process to examine opportunity to improve the notification process by which the CRMC officially informs property owners of farm permit applications. In response, Boyd indicated that the SAMP process would be seeking enhancements for the notification process, so working group ideas would be needed. Also, working group member Cameron Ennis, director of the Ocean State Aquaculture Association, asked if the CRMC has specific examples in mind for the aquaculture map tool, and Boyd answered that the Massachusetts ShellFAST siting application is one option for a likely model. In addition, working group member Adam Silkes, of American Mussel Harvesters, asked the degree of detail or oversight that the SAMP would be providing in terms of gear usage in the bay, and Boyd indicated that the SAMP will provide descriptions of gear types and guidance, probably, for how and where the equipment is best suited. Working group members and URI professors, Scott McWilliams and Peter Paton, highlight the value of developing a needs assessment prior to making any significant changes to policy.

Information Needs: McCann then engaged the group in a brief discussion about how the working group is a critical forum for information exchange; she said stakeholders will be able to enhance their own efforts and networks with SAMP knowledge, while the state and the SAMP will be enriched by the wealth of stakeholder insights and expertise. To initiate this exchange, she asked attendees to share their information needs, as well as the areas of expertise that they could contribute to the SAMP process.

For example, working group member Lisa Bryer, town planner for Jamestown, indicated that in terms of her information needs, she would benefit from provision of basic gear education, so that she can enhance her knowledge for aquaculture permitting discussions in her municipality. Another working group member, Charles “Chip” Lawrence, a math professor and Tiverton citizen, said he would be pleased to provide expertise in math or data analysis related to coastal resilience to the process. In addition, working group member Dan Geagan, a city planner for Warwick, shared a suggestion that the SAMP process include a series of “lightening rounds” with local governments to gather their information concerning aquaculture lease permit and siting issues. Again, for more information on this section, see the link to the recording of the meeting at the top of the page.

Next Steps: Boyd indicated that the next steps of the process for the aquaculture element working group will be to continue to further collect information to shape content and data for the chapter and the map and to identify data gaps. CRMC will hold 3 working group meetings in July/August focusing on the three distinct biosecurity regions (West Passage, East Passage, and Sakonnet) to discuss in more detail each subregion. During these meetings CRMC will provide more specifics on: timeline and process, and each Aquaculture Element Component (e.g. siting map, navigational and aesthetic

guidelines/standards, and improved notification process). McCann and Boyd adjourned the meeting by indicating the group will continue to meet regularly and thanked the attendees for their participation.