**MFC Offshore Wind Committee**

**Meeting summary**

**9/12/2022 and 10/25/2022**

The Marine Fisheries Council Offshore Wind Committee met virtually on September 12, 2022, with the purpose of learning more about the NJ Research and Monitoring Initiative (RMI) and two research studies that have been funded.

Staff presented an overview of the NJ Research and Monitoring Initiative, including the source of funds, administration and staffing, the process of identifying resources of concern, research priorities, and developing research projects, regional coordination, and approved concepts and proposals.

Drs. Grace Saba and Josh Kohut from Rutgers University presented information about their RMI project, Baseline Environmental Monitoring via Autonomous Underwater Vehicles (Slocum Gilders). The full proposal for this project was provided. One advisor asked whether turbine foundations would affect currents within the wind farms. Staff responded that this topic is one of the RMI research priorities, and provided recent publications on the topic in a subsequent email. There was a question about wind wake effect on weather. Information about an upcoming webinar on the topic was provided by email.

Drs. Keith Dunton and Jason Adolf from Monmouth University presented information about the studies they’ve proposed to the NJ RMI that use acoustic telemetry and environmental DNA (eDNA) to monitor protected, prohibited, and commercially/recreationally important species. The acoustic telemetry project has been approved for funding, but the eDNA project is still under development. Full proposals were provided to this group in advance of this meeting. The researchers were asked if they would consider tagging menhaden, but Dr. Dunton responded that they can’t tag that species with the techniques they’re using.

The Committee requested a similar presentation from Dr. Pankaj Lal, who will be conducting a study on the Socioeconomics of Recreational Fishing in NJ for the RMI. The full, approved proposal for that work was provided to the Committee and Advisors. Staff agreed to schedule a meeting with Dr. Lal.

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The Marine Fisheries Council Offshore Wind Committee met virtually on October 25, 2022, to receive an overview of a recreational fisheries socioeconomic study and a surf clam study, both of which have been approved for funding through the NJ offshore wind RMI.

Staff presented a brief update on offshore wind activities, including the state’s higher offshore wind goal (11 GW by 2040), planned update to the Strategic Plan for next year, and an upcoming opportunity to review a draft of the next OREC Solicitation Guidance.

Staff continued with a brief reminder of how RMI priorities and projects are selected. Stakeholders were engaged throughout the priority setting process. Project proposals are reviewed by subject matter experts both within and outside DEP, with final approval determined by the RMI Steering Committee.

Dr. Daphne Munroe from Rutgers University provided an overview of her RMI funded project, Calibration Experiments for a Novel Clam Survey Dredge and Monitoring Carbonate Chemistry of Surfclam Habitat. Data for this project will be made publicly available once it has been entered and proofed. One committee member commended Dr. Munroe for making the data available. Staff commented that data sharing is a stipulation for RMI funded projects. Advisors expressed interest in how the study results might inform impacts on crabs and how potential changes in hydrodynamics might affect carbonate chemistry.

Dr. Pankaj Lal from Montclair University presented an overview of his study, Monitoring the Socioeconomic Impacts of New Jersey's Offshore Wind Development on Recreational Fisheries Economy. The committee and advisors had many questions regarding the sampling methodology, including sample size and whether the sampling frame is representative of the overall recreational fishing sector. Several participants recommended that the researchers engage with the for-hire industry and bait/tackle shops as well as key private recreational anglers so they can provide input into the project and get buy-in from the recreational fishing industry.

Following the presentations, the committee continued with an open discussion during which several topics were discussed. Several participants recommended the use of incentives to increase participation in survey-based projects, such as Dr. Lal’s. There was a recommendation for additional meetings to receive updates on other RMI projects. Staff responded that no other projects are currently approved, and we would need approval from the Steering Committee regarding projects that are still under review. The committee proposed a recommendation to the Steering Committee to promote the use of recreational and commercial vessels as survey platforms for RMI projects.