

Creating a National Forum for Sanctuary Advisory Councils

I. The Vision

By 2020 the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) sanctuary advisory councils (councils or advisory councils) will evolve to a new level, allowing councils to have an even greater impact on marine conservation and their communities through the management and designation of national marine sanctuaries. The ONMS will provide the resources and direction to facilitate the council elevation. Councils will:

- Engage regionally and nationally, while acting locally.
- Utilize new technologies to better connect to each other, communities, and ONMS staff.
- Explore new avenues to act as connectors between the sanctuaries and the communities.
- Identify new partnerships in science, education, technology, management and community.
- Foster multi-cultural engagement in the councils, sanctuaries and communities.

II. The Councils: Yesterday and Today

2010 is a tremendous milestone for NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, as it marks the 20th anniversary of working with our sanctuary advisory councils. The ONMS and its advisory council partners have been working together for two decades to advance national marine sanctuaries to become our nation's premier marine conservation program.

During these years, the ONMS has invested a significant amount in the councils. This support has allowed advisory councils to grow in number, membership, and impact on the program. Individuals that serve their communities and sanctuaries as members of sanctuary advisory councils and council working groups represent a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Council members include fishers, divers, teachers, boaters, business people, conservationists, scientists, and elected officials – these individuals are the connectors to our sanctuary communities.

Already a force to be reckoned with, there are over 750 citizens actively engaged through ONMS sanctuary advisory councils; that number includes 429 advisory council members, and over 310 additional individuals serving on council working groups as interested members of the public. Collectively, these individuals contribute over 16,000 hours of their time annually to help guide management and protect sanctuary resources.

III. The Broader View

In 2009 the topic of ocean acidification galvanized councils, with thirteen councils taking action on the issue. Action included educating council members on the topic, passing resolutions highlighting it as a substantial threat to sanctuary resources, and urging NOAA to take action at the local, regional and national level. This demonstrates a new level of passion and engagement – a new way for the councils to focus on local sanctuary resources while making a difference regionally and nationally by joining forces across the system.

The ocean acidification actions are just one example of what can be achieved when the ONMS and the councils partner together to go the extra mile to utilize our councils in the most effective, efficient manner – there is a multiplier effect. It is not about asking our councils and staff to do more, but to think about it and implement it differently.

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Dan Basta's Challenge piece presents *"a perspective on the future direction(s) of the National Marine Sanctuary System and its programs. It proposes that the system and its programs have far more to provide the nation; that these special places can be considered vehicles for helping Americans to resolve many of the critical problems of our time -- sustainable economies, energy independence, climate change and adaptation, barriers between cultures that prevent collective solutions, national security and others. The proposition is that a system of special places can create broad-based effects of sufficient scale to be of nationwide significance."*¹

Sanctuary advisory councils are a critical piece to tackling these critical challenges of our time, and capitalizing on and creating opportunities in these times of seemingly insurmountable problems and great change. As a system of national marine sanctuaries it is possible to "create broad-based effects of sufficient scale to be of nationwide significance". As a system of sanctuary advisory councils, the results can be even more impressive on a broad scale, working in our "own backyards" while also creating an impact regionally, nationally and even internationally.

2010 is the time for the ONMS to renew and increase investment in our sanctuary advisory councils, and begin to examine, support and utilize councils from a new perspective.

IV. The Path Forward

The ONMS is committed to initiating a multi-faceted and multi-year approach that begins with formalizing a Council Cross-Cut and establishing a Council Executive Committee to enhance collaboration and coordination of advisory council leadership and support at all levels of the program and to enhance the connection of these functional elements to program leadership. This structure will permit the ONMS to ascend beyond a collection of individual site programs into a deliberate, coordinated, national program that is larger than the sum of its parts.

Formalizing the Council Cross-Cut:

- ❖ **Council Cross-Cut Definition:** The team of ONMS staff that manage sanctuary advisory councils including, the National Sanctuary Advisory Council Coordinator, the National Council Liaison, and the fourteen council coordinators. The CPPD Chief does not sit on the Council Cross-Cut; however, the CPPD Chief will provide guidance and oversight to the team as appropriate.
- ❖ **Current Situation:** This team has met annually since 2000 as a part of the Sanctuary Advisory Council Summit, which also includes council chairs; the team currently holds a 1 - 2 day internal Council Coordinator Meeting in conjunction with the Summit. Twice in the past, the team held a separate week-long meeting. The team also holds conference calls three times a year.
- ❖ **Elevation Proposal:**
 - *Function:* The Council Cross-Cut will review and provide input on all plans, products, and policies coming out of the Council Executive Committee (CEC - see below).
 - *Meetings:* The team will continue to meet and participate annually in the SAC Summit. The team will continue to meet and participate annually in the Council Coordinator Meeting. The Council Coordinator Meeting will eventually become a separate, annual, week-long meeting to allow adequate time for internal discussions, training, and planning.
 - *Budget:* In the long-term the Council Cross-Cut will have its own annual operating plan and budget. In the short-term funding will likely be provided as an activity within the CPPD budget. Budget allowing, funding will be provided annually for the SAC Summit and the Council Coordinator Meeting.

¹ Basta, Dan, "Our Challenge", February 2009.

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- *Staffing:* Formalizing the Council Cross-Cut will require the ONMS to evaluate and enhance both national and site-level staffing and other resources for councils.

Establishing the Council Executive Committee:

- ❖ **Council Executive Committee (CEC) Definition:** The body led by the National Sanctuary Advisory Council Coordinator, and composed of one council coordinator from each of the four regions, with the addition of the National Council Liaison. The CPPD Chief does not sit on the CEC; however, the CPPD Chief will provide guidance and oversight to the CEC as appropriate.
- ❖ **Current Situation:** There is no current analog to the CEC; however, over the years various internal working groups have been established on an ad hoc basis to address specific council-related issues (e.g. Summit Agenda Working Group, Alternates Working Group, and National Advisory Council Options Working Group).
- ❖ **Elevation Proposal:**
 - *Function:* The CEC will: provide advice and recommendations to the ONMS senior leadership on council needs and priorities; enhance communication at site, regional and national levels regarding councils; enhance communication at site, regional and national levels between ONMS cross-cuts; and coordinate council-related activities and opportunities among sites, within the regions, and nationally.
 - *Charter:* The CEC is established by and operates according to a charter which details background, purpose, responsibilities, membership, terms, meetings, etc.
 - *Leadership:* The CEC is led by the National Sanctuary Advisory Council Coordinator, and composed of council coordinators from each of the four regions, with the addition of the National Council Liaison. With the exception of the lead and National Council Liaison, which are permanent positions, other cross-cut members serve two-year terms and rotate between the sites.
 - *ET/LT Representation:* In the long-term the CEC lead will sit on the ONMS Executive Team and the Leadership Team. In the short-term the CPPD Chief will continue to represent councils on the ET and LT.
 - *Meetings:* Members of the CEC will continue to participate in the annual SAC Summit and Council Coordinator Meeting. The CEC will meet (or hold conference calls) 2-4 times per year (TBD); one of these meetings will be in conjunction with the Summit or Council Coordinator Meeting.
 - *Budget:* Budget allowing, funding will be provided for CEC Meetings (alternatively, conference calls can be utilized); the number of CEC meetings likely to be 2-4 per year. In the long-term the Council Cross-Cut (which includes the CEC) will have its own annual operating plan and budget. In the short-term funding will likely be provided as an activity within the CPPD budget.
 - *Staffing:* Establishing the CEC will require the ONMS to evaluate and enhance both national and site-level staffing and other resources for councils.

Identifying the Next Steps

- ❖ Once the Council Cross-Cut is formalized and the Council Executive Committee is established, the CEC will first focus on increasing capacity (staffing and funding) for sanctuary advisory councils. Once capacity has increased, the CEC will work to develop a plan that identifies council-related priorities, needs, and actions.