



**RHODE ISLAND**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT**  
235 Promenade Street, Providence, RI 02908-5767 Rhode Island Relay 711  
**Office of the Director**

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February 27, 2013

Rhode Island's fisheries and other biological marine resources are among our most valuable natural assets and an important part of the heritage and culture of the Ocean State. As Director of the Department of Environmental Management, I am impressed with both the challenges and opportunities associated with our marine fishery resources. Fisheries management is unquestionably a complex undertaking, due to the range of factors and variables that need to be addressed, the overlapping management regimes, and the diverse interests of stakeholders. Our fisheries continue to sustain us, as a source of food, recreation, and employment, and warrant our continued strong support, sound stewardship, and commitment to improve management and to ensure healthy sustainable resources.

As I work with staff, fishermen, and other stakeholders on various fishery management issues, I sense the need for a set of guiding principles and policies that would help to identify and galvanize our collective efforts and steer us forward, in accordance with Rhode Island's broad interests. While there are numerous provisions of law and regulation that offer foundation and direction, there is no single, unifying vision that captures the breadth and depth of the Department's role and responsibilities regarding marine fisheries management.

The attached document set forth a set of broad, overarching *Principles & Policies Governing Marine Fisheries Management in Rhode Island* that reflect the priority interests of the State with regard to the conservation and management of marine fisheries resources, and the associated programs and activities of the Department. I offer the document not as a directive, rather as a building block to help secure and grow our interests in healthy and productive marine fisheries. The principles and policies will evolve over time as we evaluate and clarify our priorities with stakeholders and partners. Accordingly, I welcome feedback and look forward to maintaining an open dialogue with, and continuing to support the interests of, Rhode Islanders who eat, catch, process, sell, grow, enjoy and care about our fish, shellfish, lobsters and crabs and their habitats. Our outstanding marine resources support our economy and quality of life.

Sincerely,

Janet Coit  
Director



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## **Principles & Policies**

### **Governing Marine Fisheries Management in Rhode Island**

*February 2013*

#### **PURPOSE**

- ❖ The purpose of this document is to set forth a series of principles and policies that reflect the priority interests of the State of Rhode Island with regard to the conservation and management of marine fisheries resources, and to guide and support the programs and activities of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management pertaining to marine fisheries.

#### **FOCUS**

- ❖ For the purpose of this document, marine fishery resources are wild stocks of fish, shellfish, and crustaceans that occur naturally in the marine environment.

#### **PRINCIPLES**

- I. Marine fishery resources are public trust resources subject to state and federal stewardship.
- II. Rhode Island's primary interests in marine fishery resources pertain to those resources that:
  - Inhabit the marine and estuarine waters of the State and region;
  - Are allocated to the State via regional management programs, and
  - Are accessible to Rhode Island harvesters and processors via regional management programs.
- III. The marine fishery resources belonging to, allocated to, and of interest to Rhode Island need to be preserved and protected, at healthy, sustainable levels –
  - Because of their ecological value, and
  - Because they are renewable natural resources that provide food, recreation, income, and employment, and other economic, social, and cultural benefits.

## **POLICIES**

### ***General***

1. To preserve, protect, and manage the marine fishery resources belonging to, allocated to, and of interest to Rhode Island, the State shall seek to:
  - Study, monitor, and maintain the health of the State's marine ecosystem, while contributing to and promoting the study and health of the associated regional marine ecosystem, particularly with regard to:
    - Rebuilding depleted stocks,
    - Restoring degraded habitats, and
    - Using sound science to assess stock status and establish sustainable harvest levels.
2. In accordance with sustainable harvest levels, the State shall seek to manage harvests in ways that best address the State's interests. Those interests include:
  - Making full, effective, and efficient use of available harvest opportunities, while minimizing discards, discard mortality, ecological impacts, habitat degradation, and other wasteful practices;
  - Balancing and supporting the interests of those who harvest for personal use and enjoyment as well as businesses that support such uses; those who rely upon the commercial fishing industry as a source of food; those engaged in the commercial fishing industry; and those who wish to enter the commercial fishing industry; and
  - Employing sound governance.

### ***Personal Use & Enjoyment***

3. In support of the interests of those who harvest for personal use, subsistence, and enjoyment, the State shall seek to:
  - Provide fair, open, and equitable access and harvest opportunities, with certain preferences to residents of the State; and
  - Maintain strong and viable businesses that support recreational fishing interests, including but not limited to for-hire vessels, bait and tackle shops, and other related marine trades.

### ***Seafood Consumers***

4. In support of the interests of those who rely upon the commercial fishing industry as a source of food, the State shall seek to provide a stable supply of fresh, locally caught seafood.

### ***Commercial Industry***

5. In support of the interests of those engaged in the commercial fishing industry, the State shall seek to:
  - Maintain an economically strong, viable, and diverse Rhode Island industry;
  - Support the business interests of fishermen, and the economic interests of the industry as a whole, by enhancing flexibility and opportunity, minimizing regulatory constraints, and enabling participants to fish in an efficient, cost-effective, economically viable, and environmentally and ecologically sound manner;
  - Support and protect industry-related jobs while pursuing expanded industry-related employment opportunities associated with strengthened, diversified, and value-added fisheries;
  - Support safe fishing operations;
  - Minimize or eliminate the need for in-season fisheries closures;
  - Support port services and other land-side infrastructure needs;
  - Support enhanced marketing opportunities;
  - Pursue and protect state-based allocations that provide fair shares for Rhode Island fishermen; and
  - Balance the interests of Rhode Island's state- and federal-waters fishermen.
6. In support of the interests of those who wish to enter the commercial fishing industry, the State shall seek to provide meaningful access opportunities, without unduly impacting the interests of those currently engaged in the industry.

### ***Sound Governance***

7. In fulfilling the principles and policies set forth in this document, the State shall seek to:
  - Maintain compliance and compatibility with the provisions of the Rhode Island General Laws, and with regional and federal programs that involve Rhode Island interests.
  - Manage the public's resources wisely, protecting what needs to be protected, and optimizing harvest practices and opportunities in accordance with the overall interests of the people of the State;
  - Collaborate with academia, industry, non-governmental organizations, and other state and federal partners to broaden and improve marine fisheries science, research, and restoration programs;

- Draw upon stakeholder input, consider innovative ideas, give due consideration to the advice of the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council, and employ adaptive approaches;
- Support the development and use of innovative harvest methods and gear technologies, including but not limited to those that better enable fishermen to avoid non-targeted species and minimize adverse ecological impacts;
- Pursue ecosystem-based management;
- Develop regulations that are based on sound science, and are rational, effective, efficient, and enforceable;
- Provide for accountability via accurate and timely data collection and monitoring;
- Provide for fair and effective enforcement;
- Develop and enact cost-efficient management programs, while securing sufficient resources to support management needs; and
- Conduct and support public information and education programs.