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## Envisioning a National System of Marine Protected Areas: A Gulf of Mexico Region Public Dialogue

### Breakout Group Responses

This document provides a synthesis transcription of comments received from participants during breakout groups at the July 18, 2005, Gulf of Mexico Region Public Dialogue held in New Orleans, Louisiana.

#### Background

Marine protected areas (MPAs) in the United States are widely used as a tool for helping conserve the nation's wealth of natural and cultural resources for all Americans and the world. These precious resources, including coral reefs, kelp forests, whales, shipwrecks, and a wide variety of marine life in the oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes, are vital to the economic sustainability of the nation for this and future generations. MPAs provide recreation and economic opportunities for millions of Americans; help sustain critical habitats and marine resources; and act as an "insurance policy" by helping protect marine resources from human impacts.

Over the past two decades, the use of place-based marine conservation and management tools, including the use of MPAs, has risen dramatically. Currently, there are hundreds of federal, state, territory, and tribal authorities and thousands of sites in U.S. waters. Each site may have varying definitions of types and purposes. These sites range from multiple-use to no-take reserves, although less than one percent (1%) of MPAs in the U.S. are no-take reserves. The complexity of MPAs and their recognition as vital tools for marine conservation and management are the foundation of Presidential Executive Order 13158 on MPAs, which was signed on May 26, 2000. The Executive Order directs the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Department of the Interior to work with other federal agencies and consult with states, territories, tribes, and the public to develop a scientifically based, comprehensive national system of MPAs. The MPA Center was established to execute this role.

As part of this effort, the MPA Center has outlined a multi-year process to engage the nation in developing the national system of MPAs. This process includes collecting and considering continuous stakeholder and partner input for the development of the national system, enhancing relationships with stakeholder organizations engaged in these issues, developing and applying

sound science about marine resources and their use, and communicating clear, consistent information about the process. The process includes a series of workshops and Regional Public Dialogue meetings to enable the MPA Center to receive input from a wide variety of stakeholders and partners to inform the development the draft Framework for the national system of MPAs.

### Gulf of Mexico Region Public Dialogue

The third in the series of Regional Public Dialogue meetings was held July 18, 2005 in New Orleans, Louisiana at the New Orleans Marriott. After initial remarks and presentations from the MPA Center and Mr. Robert Zales, II, MPA Federal Advisory Committee member, participants were broken out into small groups to facilitate their input in response to the following five questions:

- 1) What are the Gulf of Mexico's important marine economic, recreational, and other types of uses and values that you want to be considered in developing a national system of MPAs?
- 2) What are the Gulf of Mexico's important natural and cultural resources that you think a national system of MPAs should conserve and sustain for future generations?
- 3) How should NOAA and Department of the Interior continue to work with stakeholders like you in the Gulf of Mexico to develop the vision for the national system?
- 4) How could your interests in the Gulf of Mexico's natural and cultural resource issues benefit from some kind of national system of MPAs?
- 5) Other comments?

The notes below were recorded on paper flip charts during the meeting and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The comments from each individual and group have been aggregated under each of the five respective questions.

All input received during this and other Dialogues is on the public record and will be considered in developing the draft Framework for a national system of MPAs. At this preliminary stage in the effort, the MPA Center does not intend to respond to any comments received via these Dialogues. Once a draft Framework for the national system is developed, NOAA will publish it in the *Federal Register* for formal public comment and will subsequently provide a formal response to any comments received.

This and other reports from workshops, as well as regularly updated information about the MPA Center's work to develop of the national system of MPAs can be found at <http://mpa.gov/>. For more information, contact Jonathan Kelsey, NOAA National MPA Center, via phone at: 301-713-3155 ext. 130, or by e-mail at: [mpa.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:mpa.comments@noaa.gov).

### Summary of Breakout Group Responses

- 1) What are the Gulf of Mexico's important marine economic, recreational, and other types of uses and values that you want to be considered in developing a national system of MPAs?
  - Consumptive fisheries (commercial / recreational) direct food species and others
  - Oil and gas production
  - Sediment sources/ beach nourishment

- Transportation/ shipping
- Military activity
- Recreation boating/ diving (natural and cultural)
- Tourism
- Research and educational uses
- Offshore dredge disposal sites
- Fishing, oil, gas, charter boat, tourism
  - artificial reefs
  - commercial (e.g.) shrimp, fish, crab
  - tours and eco tourism
- Diving (recreational and commercial)
- Hunting
- Game fish across the resource (that cross the Gulf)
  - commercial and other use
- Genetic diversity
- Biopharmaceuticals
- Research
- Sustainability
- Shipping (commerce)
- Cruise ship, university ships
- Fly fishing
- Local use
- Shipwrecks, ancient lower sea level sites
- Sand mining (beach renourishment)
- Sponging
- Recreational navigation (sail boating, gas-burning boats)
- Aquaculture
- Live rock culture
- Tropical fish/ aquarium collectors (subset of comm.. fishing)
- Recreational collection of tropical fish
- Treasure hunting
- Economic value – maritime jobs (at facilities, through business transactions)
- NR exploration (oil/ gas)
  - Variety of platforms and relative needs ; pipelines and potential for future construction
- Fisheries: Commercial and recreational
- Fairways for maritime transit
- Anchorages, sea buoys
- Coastal restoration complements MPAs
- \$8 billion in GoMex for recreational fish.
- Diving, snorkeling
- Biodiversity: aesthetics and biological functioning
- Maintain harvest for future generations
  - Sustainable, environmental & economic system
- Port accessibility
- Cascading effect upwards
  - Protecting fisheries can help protect larger organisms (e.g., whales)
- De facto protection from restricted accessibility (e.g., oil platforms)
- USES
  - Commercial shrimp/ fish/ crabs (How will MPAs impact fisheries?)
  - Industrial and agricultural
    - Discharge – chemical plants
  - Sport fishing

- Maintain freedom to fish/ access
    - Public resources
  - Aquaculture
  - Recreation
    - Boating
    - Diving
    - Swimming
  - Oil and gas (extraction and transportation)
    - LNG
    - Transportation
      - Pipelines
      - Shipping
      - Differences in what these impact (i.e., Larval fish recruitment)
- VALUES
  - Economic
  - Cultural
    - Conservation
    - Traditional employment/community culture
  - Need for sustainable uses
  - Access as a value
  - Freedom to fish (anglers)
  - Extractive value of biological, mineral
  - Recreation value and tourism
  - Make sure management actions are appropriate for resource goals
  - Federal actions should find out the problems and address the source (e.g., Upland or upriver pollution/ sediment)
  - Take broad look at protection; make it ecosystem “whole picture” based
  - States decide MPA w/ stakeholder input
  - Different pieces/ managed areas need to connect
  - Who’s driving this process?
    - Local, state, federal, organization

2) What are the Gulf of Mexico’s important natural and cultural resources that you think a national system of MPAs should conserve and sustain for future generations?

- Fisheries productivity
  - Shrimp, reef fish, grouper, king fish, snappers, menhaden, pelagics
- Seagrass beds/ nursery areas/ feeding areas
- Fish spawning aggregation areas/ feeding areas
- Oyster reefs/ clam beds
- Crab fisheries
- Coral reef complexes/ limestone hard bottom
- Shipwrecks
- Submarine canyons/ seamounts
- Chemosynthetic communities
- Oil rigs biological communities/ artificial reefs
- Endangered/ Protect marine mammals, turtles, sturgeon, and birds
- Seabirds
- Colonial nesting birds/ breeding sites
- Migrating bird rest areas
- Mangroves

- Barrier islands/ shorelines
- Estuarine resources
- Coral reefs/ habitat
- Connecting representative networks
- Shipwrecks (50+ automatic protected)
- Unaltered marine ecosystems
  - appreciation and comparative purposes
- Fishing communities – works w/ other communities
  - preserving cultural communities
  - protecting resource and area
  - protect resources that people depend on
- Sensitive coastal areas: wetlands, barrier islands, sea grass, spawning groups, fish populations, estuaries, etc.
- Fish populations (e.g. sharks) – general category that include many...
- Sea turtle nesting beaches and sea turtles
- Wading birds
- Deep water habitats
  - Chemosynthetic communities/ seeps
- Deep water coral and invertebrates (e.g., oyster beds)
- Things we haven't discovered yet
- Topographic features (e.g., Florida Middlegrounds)
- Pinnacle trend (pinnacles and ridges w/ invertebrates)
- Artificial reefs and planning area (this is fish specific or cultural resource)
- Marine mammals – whales (sperm whales that move a lot), dolphins, manatees
- National Marine Sanctuaries, Seashores
- Endangered species
- Should some species be singled out?
- Should be ecosystem approach (MPAs) – “Tapestry of Life”
- Unaltered ecosystems of all types in Gulf (representative areas)
- Sea grass
- Hard bottom
- Chemosynthetic communities
- Flower gardens
- Coral
- Shipwrecks
- Marine mammals
- Artificial reefs
- Spawning areas
- Estuaries (e.g., Mississippi Delta)
- General fish habitat
- Seagrass, coral reefs, marine mammals, turtles
- Shrimp, fish (diversity), crabs
- Oil and gas
- Birds
- Salt marshes
  - Connection as nursery for fish economic and other values
  - Concern about erosion
- Tourism – food (people come for the food)
- Nursery ground for migratory fish
- Freedom
  - Historical way of life / “character of the place”
  - Land and water

- Ecological services/ processes
  - Need to restore resources that are no longer here
- 3) How should NOAA and Department of the Interior continue to work with stakeholders like you in the Gulf of Mexico to develop the vision for the national system?
- Professional societies/ associations (e.g., ERF – AFS)
  - Web page
  - Seminars at annual/ regional conference and meetings of professional societies
  - Engaging forums where user groups meet (ed. Fisheries commissions/ councils)
  - Good public relations effort in regional and national outlets (e.g. reporters with long term relationships)
  - General public outreach/ local level
  - Individuals within user groups/ targeted outreach
  - Target outreach to state agencies
  - Using local media that individual resources users are accessing
  - Piggyback onto the Integrated Ocean Observing Systems effort/ regional workshops
  - Outreach to environmental community – correct misconceptions
  - Take advice of Federal Advisory Committee
  - Not top-down (too litigious)/ unlike National Marine Fisheries Service process
  - Science- driven
    - Drafts of any regulatory action put out for public consistently throughout process
    - Don't let initial consultation end- should be continuous feedback
  - Different phases of process – different communication
    - More with possible new sites
  - Clear definitions of what trying to accomplish
    - Goals of sites communicated to stakeholder to prevent misinformation or lack of information
    - Let stakeholders help prioritize list in Questions 1&2
  - User groups – parity re\_\_\_\_\_ (those that sue)
    - Recreational fishermen (Coastal Conservation Association)
    - Commercial fishermen
    - NGOs
  - NOAA has important role in communicating info/ research we have
  - Local knowledge early
  - Need categories of MPAs (and subsets)
  - Enough info in newsletter
    - Broaden stakeholder base so they can help spread word (list serves, etc.)
    - Include research results, priorities
    - Newsletters and annual meetings of other organizations
    - Sea Grant networks and industry networks
  - Maps and graphics to help w/ messages
  - Regional structures – coordinate state agencies/ levels of government (Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission)
  - Minerals Management Service has staff member as liaison in MPA Center/ inventory
  - Minerals Management Service has examples of different managed areas
  - Real coordination amongst states
    - Information-sharing (data, experiences)
  - Information sharing w/ public
  - Involving stakeholders from bottom up
    - E.g., fisheries councils and stakeholder involvement to manage fisheries
    - Go to meetings, not just call meetings (don't just limit self to the same people who attend all meetings)

- Involve media to help inform public
- Implement a general education program given through local sources and government materials (e.g., Press releases)
  - Clear up definition of “MPA” – does not equal no take
- Integrate science to distill # of resources people need to review
- Target public by giving them audience appropriate resources in laymen’s terms
- French, Vietnamese, & Spanish (for various audiences)
  - Translators
  - Churches = contacts
  - Newscasters
- Broaden scope – not focusing on one species of resource – looking at whole picture
- Need to avoid too much political interference
- Need to coordinate and make decisions together (federal, state, local, industry, non-governmental organizations)
- Engage governors
- Work through regional groups that already exist
- How would Gulf of Mexico Council interact w/ MPA decisions?
- Give freedom (and a voice) to groups that have been stewarding the resources
- Information exchange (ES, land cover)
- Communicate how MPA Executive Order and following decisions were made
- Confirm that this system is what people want?
- Difficult to react to ambiguous questions
- Recognize different conservation ethics/ definition around country
- Fix (talk about) the problems that are causing resource issues (through other federal/ state/ local actions)
- Work with all the right people to address these larger problems (dead zone)
- Need to share effective examples and models to learn from
- Proper data – quality control

4) How could your interests in the Gulf of Mexico’s natural and cultural resource issues benefit from some kind of national system of MPAs?

- Capture the most endangered resources/ places that represent the best examples that characterize the region (e.g., Flower Gardens)
- Monetary/ access to resource benefits
- Protection of resources that cannot be protected by current authorities
- Identify/ protect critical resources w/ goal of enhanced fisheries production
- Provide consistent definitions of MPA and enhanced coordination among stakeholders
- Aggregation of scientific information that would help to better understand impacts to resources/ access to that information to nontraditional users
- Better understanding of spatial and temporal natural systems through increased science funding
- Sound evaluation and monitoring program at sites
- Qualification standards for designation in national system must meet specific criteria
- Development program for aiding potential MPAs move towards inclusion in national system
- Help identify important research areas
- Help with reserve design (enforcement mechanism; management development; boundary design; evaluation) and ease of compliance
- Learning networks to address shared management challenges
- Consistent analysis tools
- Addressing common needs w/ economies of scale
- Providing too much info could lead to resource abuse (e.g., Poaching)
- Look at sanctuary advisory committee model
- How do we find more money?

- Less restrictive, less complicated (in theory)
- Potential more resources at regional level w/ national attention
- Clearinghouse to assess...
- Representative and replicated samples in one system
- Clarify who has authority and what the restrictions are
- Maps/ visuals to help communicate
- Identify conflicting authority
- Economic benefits – enhance resources so that they're at higher sustainable level
- Clear priorities list
- Generational and cultural benefits; legacy
- Implementing regional system important in Gulf (larval – more important than national b/c of nature of species)
- National provides awareness / understanding
- Regional governance has to exist (not just Fishery Management Councils); complex regulatory decision-making
- Power in addressing threats
- Coordination amongst various agencies and offices (federal and state)
  - Minerals Management Service, National Park Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, Fish and Wildlife Service
- Development of regional/ ecosystem management plans
- Assessment of an area's economic needs (maritime, fisheries, etc.)
- Protects the resources listed previously
- Forum for communication and education
- Allows for an adaptive framework to find compromise between differing views
- Learning from past experiences
- Data sharing
- When resource is restored, allow the use again (adaptive)
- Flexible, monitored to make good decisions
- Keeping cultures
- Clear roles/ boundaries for agencies
- Learning lessons from other states (positive and negative)

#### 5) Other comments?

- Enforcement – what's our vision? Need regionally but w/ federal funding
- Stay in touch w/ participants so this will succeed
- Needs: No more acronyms – consistent terminology to decrease confusion
  - Simplify; ease accessibility
- Integrate MPAs into NOAA's e-charts
  - Currently, already available in paper charts
  - Involve electronics companies
- Free information to the public
  - Government collected
- Provide info on mpa.gov – widely advertise availability
  - via boat shows, TV, and coozie cups