

**REPORT OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL  
MARCH 3, 2004**

**Executive Summary**

The Intergovernmental Panel is charged with improving coordination between branches and levels of government in Rhode Island as well as between the states within the Narragansett Bay watershed. Increased coordination is a critical foundation to the development of a clear and unified “vision” for the future of the Bay. The Panel will consider how best to cooperate on legislative and budgetary initiatives. The Panel will also build on the regional effort supported by the U.S. Oceans Policy Commission and Pew Oceans Commission. Endorsement of this approach may lead to federal support of the Commission’s work, including financial support. The Panel will initially focus on adoption of a multi-state agreement on Bay issues with Massachusetts and potentially Connecticut. Finally, in reviewing those recommendations made by the other Panels, the Intergovernmental Panel will provide the Commission with legislative and governance recommendations.

**Background**

In explaining the need for the Governor’s Bay and Watershed Planning Commission, Governor Carcieri noted that the current Bay planning and policy framework lacks strong coordination. This has hindered our effectiveness in protecting and conserving the Bay and its watershed. The many agencies and organizations working on Bay and watershed issues are not linked by a common vision or a mechanism by which they can effectively work together to produce solutions. Many key areas of Bay management and policy have not received the attention they deserve because of this missing link. In addressing this issue, the recent Senate Report “Habitat-Based Management for Rhode Island’s Marine Environment” states, “[t]o optimize what is possible as a result of these activities [projects currently underway such as the CSO construction and East Providence waterfront development] we must revise the existing state marine planning structure and provide a coordinated means for achieving habitat-based goals.” The report further explains that “[t]here are approximately seven federal agencies, six state agencies and countless other organizations and institutions that carry out planning and management activities for Narragansett Bay and the marine environment in Rhode Island.”

It is also well understood that improving the health of Narragansett Bay can only be accomplished if watershed issues are addressed as well. To this end, we must better coordinate our efforts in Rhode Island with our neighbors in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Sixty percent of Narragansett Bay’s watershed lies in Massachusetts and approximately 10% is in Connecticut. Both the draft report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission report detail the importance of regional efforts and recommend establishing regional councils. The 1993 Bay Plan stated similar goals while including federal and municipal governments.

Many view our current fractured approach to governance as a hindrance to Rhode Island's ability to receive more federal funding for Bay projects.

### **Membership**

The members of the Intergovernmental Panel are: (1) Jeff Grybowski, Governor's Office; (2) Senator Paiva-Weed; (3) Senator Lenihan; (4) Senator Gibbs; (5) Representative Long; (6) Karl Honkonen, MA Executive Office of Environmental Affairs; (7) Ken Payne, Senate Policy; (8) Bob Ballou, DEM; (9) Townsend Goddard, EDC; (10) Grover Fugate, CRMC; (11) Dan Geagan, Warwick City Planning; and, (12) Keith Stokes, Newport Chamber of Commerce.

### **Status**

The Panel met on February 23. Karl Honkonen, the Director of Water Policy of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs briefed the Panel on Governor Romney's environmental priorities. Mr. Honkonen identified four ongoing priorities: (1) World-class Parks; (2) Targeted Land Protection & Development; (3) Ocean Management; and, (4) Lean & Green Protection. The Panel agreed to investigate further options for promoting regional tourism focused on natural resources. The Panel also discussed the possibility of increasing coordination on federal grants being in order to maximize our joint return. In addition, the possibility of some level of bi-state response to the U.S. Commission on Oceans Policy was discussed and will be further reviewed once the report has been received.

The Panel also discussed the Multi-State Agreement as drafted by the Partnership for Narragansett Bay (attached). In promoting the regional focus that both the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission have recommended, Rhode Island must begin with its neighbor and partner in the Bay. Although this has long been recognized as a necessity, the renewed national focus on this approach will likely translate into additional federal dollars for states clearly promoting such an approach. In addition, the acceptance of the Multi-State language will be a critical first step in formalizing a regional approach.

A sub-Panel consisting of Ken Payne of the Senate Policy Office, Virginia Lee of Coastal Resources Center, Bob Ballou of DEM, Grover Fugate of CRMC, and Mark Adelman of the Governor's Office subsequently met to consider the following questions:

1. Should the three states enter into an agreement?
2. Do we have the substance of an agreement as reflected by the draft?

Bob Ballou briefed the Panel on Governor Carcieri's Cesspool Phase-out legislation. This legislation has been introduced in both the House and Senate. The bill requires the phase out of all high-risk cesspools over a 15-year period, targeting cesspools that are located in close proximity to surface waters, groundwater, or wells.

The House and Senate Policy Offices informed the Panel of the status of their Bay reports.

### **Recommendation Actions**

The Intergovernmental Panel has identified two short-term work priorities:

1. Develop a framework for regular coordination of federal grant applications on projects that impact regional environmental concerns and identify or structure initiatives that can attract new or enhanced federal funding.
2. Complete a multi-state agreement on Bay watershed issues that the governors of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut will sign and explore ways for the legislatures in those states to engage a multi-state agreement as well. Recommendation of a negotiating team for the Multi-State Agreement. An initial step is creation of a negotiating team for the State of Rhode Island.

The Panel also identified the following longer-term initiatives:

1. We must perform an assessment of inter-agency coordination within the state, state-municipal, and state to state. As described in the Senate report, multiple agencies have planning responsibilities. In addition, many additional organizations plan, monitor, and implement programs, which may or may not be coordinated with other ongoing efforts.
2. The Panel should identify recommendations made by other panels that have significant budgetary, legislative, or governance implications and provide appropriate guidance.