



Representative Eileen S. Naughton

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Memorandum

December 2, 2004

To: Dr. Peter August, Chair, RI Environmental Monitoring Collaborative
From: Representative Eileen Naughton
Cc: Rep. Peter Ginaitt
Rep. William Murphy, Speaker of the Rhode Island House of Representatives
Peg Petruny-Parker, House Policy Office
Sandra Whitehouse, House Policy Office

Re: Statement of Purpose and Core Principles for the RI Environmental Monitoring Collaborative

On behalf of my fellow colleagues in the House of Representatives who, together with myself, sponsored the legislation creating the Rhode Island Bays, Rivers, and Watersheds Coordination Team and the Rhode Island Environmental Monitoring Collaborative, I would like to offer some comments in response to the draft list of core principles and statement of purpose developed for the Collaborative.

I should begin by saying that in the General Assembly we recognize and strongly support the work begun by the Collaborative to develop an environmental monitoring strategy for the state as required by law. It is a critical first step in meeting the management challenges before us. Secondly, we concur that it is important for the Collaborative members to have a clear sense of the purpose of their charge, and to utilize guiding principles as they go about their work. Perhaps the best approach to developing this understanding is to explain the intent of the legislation passed last session, and the structure and process it established.

The Environmental Monitoring Collaborative's primary purpose is to provide solid information on environmental conditions in order to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of a systems-level plan for the state's bays, rivers, and watersheds. This means the information obtained from existing and future monitoring efforts should serve as a guide in identifying and prioritizing management measures, including capital expenditures, and should serve as the basis for assessing progress over time.

The work of the Collaborative is two-fold: 1) to develop a long-term monitoring strategy for environmental parameters, and 2) to assist the Coordination Team in implementing the strategy. The development of the monitoring strategy includes review and comment on existing monitoring programs; identification and prioritization of proposed monitoring activities, beginning with the indicators listed in law [RIGL 46-31-9 (e)]; and preparation of an accompanying draft budget for a proposed monitoring strategy, clearly identifying who will do what, how funding is to be allocated, and targeted sources of funding, including sources outside the state and resources already being applied to monitoring. The budget should include an analysis of the work that is currently being done and work that is not being funded, and the Collaborative should put forth to the Coordination Team any budget requests for their own operations.

The implementation of the monitoring strategy includes coordinating the activities of those doing the monitoring [state, federal, regional, local government and non-government entities]; compiling, synthesizing, analyzing the resultant data; and assisting in the dissemination of the monitoring data and results, including the report on the current condition of the environmental health of the state's bays, rivers, and watersheds to be developed by the Coordination Team within 6 months of completion of the systems-level plan and every four years thereafter. As the monitoring strategy is implemented, the Environmental Monitoring Collaborative may propose adjustments as needed. The overall monitoring strategy should include information on how these implementation tasks will be carried out.

While the RI environmental monitoring program ultimately may encompass a wide range of indicators related to air, water, land, physical, and biological components of environmental systems, the initial focus should be on the indicators specified in the law [RIGL 46-31-9 (e)]. The intent was to build on previous work that identified these

indicators as key components of a monitoring strategy, and to quickly move into an implementation phase. The Collaborative may also make recommendations to the Team if a key indicator that was not included in RIGL 46-31-9 (e) should be a priority item.

The Environmental Monitoring Collaborative itself is intended to function as a standing committee of the Coordination Team, with communication flowing in both directions [from the Team to the Collaborative and vice versa] throughout the process. The deliberations conducted at the Team level should assist the Collaborative by providing clear information on what state agencies view as the data needed to support management and policy decision-making; in turn, the work carried out by the Collaborative should serve as a continued source of information to the Coordination Team of what is actually happening in the environment. In addition to reporting to the Team on the environmental indicators, the Collaborative should make recommendations to the Team if management changes are needed or if a sudden change in the environment requires immediate attention such as the introduction of an invasive species.

In terms of geographic scope, it is important to note that the Environmental Monitoring Collaborative is charged with developing a monitoring strategy for all of the state's bays, rivers, and watersheds, including the territorial sea out to 3 miles. In addition to coordination with monitoring activities being conducted in neighboring states, coordination should also extend to federal and regional monitoring activities in these areas. This would include such activities as NMFS fish surveys, U.S. EPA/U.S. Army Corps of Engineers monitoring programs for dredged material disposal sites, etc.

Legislative proceedings leading up to the enactment of legislation last spring highlighted the need for consistent methods, protocols, and quality assurance procedures among all monitoring programs so that managers and policy decision-makers can consider monitoring data comprehensively, and be confident in the results. The requirement that the Coordination Team's Scientific Advisory Committee review the monitoring strategy developed by the Environmental Monitoring Collaborative should assist in attaining this goal.

The Environmental Monitoring Collaborative should be looked at as a working team, whose mandate and scope of work is focused on monitoring. Members of the Collaborative and the agencies and organizations they represent are to be the principle players in getting the work done.

Finally, I would reiterate that the primary goal of the environmental monitoring program is to support the development and implementation of the systems-level plan, and to monitor progress. The key issues and subject areas to be included in the systems-level plan, as specified in RIGL 46-31-5 (e) need to be addressed utilizing current, reliable, and pertinent information. The Environmental Monitoring and Economic Monitoring Collaboratives were established with this goal in mind.

