

May 16, 2005

TO: Coordination Team
Environmental Monitoring Collaborative

FROM: Science Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: Environmental Monitoring Strategy

Based on an initial review of the environmental monitoring strategy, the Science Advisory Committee offers the following findings:

1. The strategy is a very significant step forward for the state. For the first time, it provides a detailed, integrated picture of major monitoring programs. The Environmental Monitoring Collaborative as a whole and DEM, in particular, deserve a great deal of credit for developing this strategy in a very short time.
2. The strategy should be recognized as still developing and, even when mature, will be dynamic. The Coordination Team should support its continued development as a high priority. Each member of the Coordination Team should ensure that his or her agency consults with the Environmental Monitoring Collaborative when new monitoring plans are being developed and informs the collaborative on status. Mechanisms should be established to keep close track of monitoring and related research supported or conducted by federal agencies and other entities. The present picture of monitoring is incomplete. The Coordination Team should also seek to provide the collaborative with at least a minimal level of support for staff to facilitate continued development and implementation of the strategy.
3. Monitoring programs and, particularly, new proposals should be tightly coupled to management needs. Specific agency needs and the management actions that will be affected should be identified and considered strongly in the design or redesign of monitoring programs. Tracking of management actions should be linked to monitoring so that the effectiveness of those actions can be assessed. Also, although much of the monitoring is supported by federal funds and driven by federal requirements, agencies and the collaborative should think more about management needs specific to this area and about interconnection of programs to move toward ecosystem management.
4. The recommended monitoring programs listed on pages 11-13 of the DEM Water Monitoring Strategy should significantly improve the state of knowledge of Rhode Island's bays, rivers, and lakes. It is our understanding that a combination of state, federal, and other resources are expected to support these programs for FY2006.
5. The proposed supplemental monitoring program topics are on target but the proposals themselves could be strengthened, some significantly, with agency input, particularly DEM. Agency staffs are well positioned to understand monitoring needs and how

expanded monitoring can assist in improving environmental management. The committee expects to continue its review of the monitoring strategy and provide a more complete and detailed report to the Coordination Team and the collaborative by July 1, 2005 as requested.

6. The proposed supplemental monitoring program for riparian buffers represents an under-emphasized aspect of the monitoring program, the land areas, including wetlands. The committee expects to offer further comments on terrestrial monitoring when its review is completed. This specific proposal should be more closely connected to management needs and reflect a relationship to recently completed and on-going monitoring of riparian buffers.

7. The proposed supplemental monitoring program for bioinvasives addresses an important emerging issue. This specific proposal is targeted to freshwater. The proposal is well-developed and should be supported if possible. Further coordination with DEM and CRMC staff working on invasive species should be done to broaden invasive monitoring coverage. In addition, the committee suggests that careful thought is needed about what a management program for invasives should be and how it can be put in place to allow necessary actions to be taken quickly.

8. The proposed supplemental monitoring programs related to nutrients (monitoring of benthic community structure, zooplankton, and secondary productivity) may be timely in light of scheduled management actions. However, the committee felt that all of the proposals need to be developed more fully in the context of scientific and technical review, interaction with scientists already conducting monitoring programs, and connection to management actions. The SAC felt that these proposals had probably been developed quickly to respond to deadlines, but that it was important to “get it right” before plowing ahead. The committee, with the cooperation of the collaborative, will investigate what similar efforts may be undertaken in FY2006 with support by Sea Grant and other NOAA funds and EPA.

9. It is our understanding that support is expected in FY2006 for efforts toward the aims of the proposed supplemental monitoring programs for eelgrass and macroalgae. The committee encourages any aerial surveys to cover the coastal ponds, Little Narragansett Bay, and the Sakonnet River in addition to Narragansett Bay if possible. The committee expects to offer further comment on these monitoring programs when its review is completed.

We hope that the comments offered here are constructive and helpful toward the evolution of a truly effective monitoring system for Rhode Island.