



Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Science Advisory Committee Meeting

June 9th, 2023, 10:00 am – 12:00 am



Hybrid:
Five Rivers Delta Center, Blakeley Hall
Zoom Virtual Meeting

Agenda

Meeting Objectives:

- a) Evaluate candidates for the Scientist in Residence position
- b) Give status updates on past SAC initiatives in effort to wrap up longstanding projects
- c) Open nominations process for new SAC co-chairs

1. Welcome Back

SAC Co-Chairs:

Dr. John Lehrter, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Dr. Amy Hunter, ADCNR-DWH Restoration

2. Review and Approval of Minutes

3. Updates and Presentations

- a) Scientist in Residence Candidate Interview presentations- **Environmental Science Associates**
- b) Review of past SAC initiatives with status updates and discussion on paths forward- **Blair Morrison, MBNEP**
- c) Announcement of upcoming SAC co-chair elections- **Dr. John Lehrter, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Dr. Amy Hunter, ADCNR-DWH Restoration**

4. Announcements

5. Adjourn

**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Science
Advisory Committee Meeting Zoom Meeting**

June 9th, 2023

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Science Advisory Committee was established to bring area experts together to provide advice, guidance, and recommendations to ensure that MBNEP activities will be conducted in a scientifically relevant and rigorous manner.

In attendance

In person: Cassie Bates, Dottie Byron, Brian Dzwonkowski, Patric Harper, Amy Hunter, John Lehrter, John Mareska, Missy Partyka, Scott Phipps, Greg Pierce, Tim Thibaut, Chris Warn, Rita Peachey, Will Underwood,

Virtual: Becky Allee, Alex Beebe, Ronnie Bond, Rich Fulford, Steve Jones, Fred Leslie, LaDon Swann, Alyssa Outhwaite, John Valentine

MBNEP Staff: Blair Morrison, Jason Kudulis, Roberta Swann, Christian Miller, Vanessa Romero, Bethany Hudson

This meeting was held in a hybrid format – in-person with a concurrent virtual Zoom option.

Dr. John Lehrter, USA/DISL called the meeting to order at 10: 12 am CST. Minutes from the April 6th, 2023 meeting were shared via email prior to the meeting. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Brian Dzwonkowski and seconded by Tim Thibaut.

John opened the meeting with a description of the day's agenda.

Blair Morrison, MBNEP presented an introduction to the Science in Residence (SIR) Request For Qualifications (RFQ), the RFQ proposal review team, and the opportunity for SAC members to give feedback to the candidates. Blair then introduced the candidate team.

Chris Warn, ESA and **Tim Thibaut, Barry Vittor and Associates** presented their interview presentation to the SAC membership. The presentation walked through team member bios and experience, the four tasks listed in the RFQ, and the approach of the team to fulfill those tasks alongside input from the SAC. The full presentation is included in the meeting packet.

Following the presentation, the meeting moved into a Q&A and discussion session about the State of the Bay efforts and the role of the Science in Residence Team in coordinating.

Missy Partyka, Auburn asked the candidate team about the process in which they would like to determine the indicators used for *State of the Bay (SotB)*. Tim responded by asserting that the SAC membership would be integral in determining the indicators and sections of the document. He also discussed the need for SAC members to bring their work to the table in discussions to ensure that the past 15 years of work is adequately captured in this *State of the Bay*.

Roberta Swann, MBNEP mentioned the possibility of holding an off-cycle workshop to allow SAC members time to discuss and determine which indicators are most relevant to include in this *SotB* document. Also she discussed having two sections in the State of the Bay – one discussing broader watershed status (inputs from the Decadal Study) and one discussing local watershed status.

Blair shared a potential workflow for the SotB, where the SAC, SIR team, MBNEP staff, and external scientists create a technical report, which would then be given to the SIR team to create the public-facing document and returned to the SAC to be formatted as a synthesis manuscript.

LaDon Swann, MASGC asked about the quality and quantity of data needed to select which indicators should be included in the *SotB*. Tim responded that there will be a winnowing process with datasets and indicators, and that it would be an iterative process. LaDon mentioned that selection of indicators needs to be impactful (gave the example of # of miles of shoreline restored – what does that actually mean for conditions of the estuary?). He also suggested creating a list of indicators and the associated datasets for SAC members to evaluate; there is the possibility of expanding upon a list generated at the 2005 *SotB* workshop.

John asked what the timeline for the *SotB* process will be. Roberta replied that the timeline is roughly a year, with the SIR being contracted to start on July 1st.

Brian Dzwonkowski, USA/DISL brought up that the 2008 State of the Bay had very little mention of climate change. Given the changing temperatures, rainfall patterns, sea level rise, and tropicalization of the Bay flora and fauna, he highly encouraged making sure that these issues are covered in this iteration of *SotB*. **Dottie Byron, DISL/ALCOE** agreed but also urged that special care be taken with the wording of climate change related issues, given the current social and political climate; in a nutshell, we don't want to alienate folks from hearing the message by using buzzwords/charged jargon. Roberta applauded the initial discussion around effective messaging of the information to the public.

Roberta circled back around to the two-pronged approach to the State of the Bay (technical report feeding into public document and manuscript). Blair reiterated that the SAC realizes that the information has multiple audiences, so having a varied approach allows for the work to reach as many folks as possible. Missy also agreed that having the work in a citable format can help with future publishing and grant writing.

Chris gave a brief overview of how some other NEPs had approached their *SotB* documents and the evolution of their goal-setting.

John Valentine, DISL asked if there are plans to do a public opinion survey to determine what issues people are concerned about. Roberta responded and said that there will be public perception polls as a part of the CCMP rewrite process. Roberta and Missy asked LaDon if MASGC had any data. **Amy Hunter, ADCNR** agreed and said that the main findings of public opinion surveys tend to stay fairly consistent (concerns about water quality, seafood safety, etc.) LaDon suggested looking into the [EPA Environmental Attitudes of Alabama Coastal Residents: Public Opinion Polls And Environmental Policy](#) which was completed in 2000. Dottie suggested reaching out to Stephen Scyphers for any public opinion data on fisheries.

Roberta asked the SAC if the membership wanted to see the scope before moving ahead and scheduling a workshop. John asserted that he was ok with the scope being written broadly to allow for jumpstarting progress.

The need for “value judgements” to be included in the public facing document (i.e. miles of shoreline restored vs areas conserved with adequate migration space for sea level rise – which is “better” / what do these metrics mean?) was brought up. Additionally, the *SotB* could highlight ways that locals could get involved with restoration efforts (legally). Missy suggested having vignettes for each indicator to highlight the “What Does This Mean / Why Do I Care?” for each. Dottie mentioned an environmental calculator that could be integrated in to the *SotB* (i.e. amount of fish per acre of healthy marsh).

Missy asked if ESA being awarded the SIR would preclude them from being awarded other projects from the NEP (i.e. Western Shoreline Management Plan). Roberta responded that the *SotB* is the priority task for the SIR and that the SIR would be providing additional technical capacity for the Shoreline Management Plan, but that the Plan would be contracted to a different firm.

Roberta emphasized the opportunity that the *SotB* offers to synthesize the past 15 years of science from partners around the Bay . Dottie also brought up that this is a timely endeavor, as many other programs (federal and local) are working towards synthesis products.

John recommended that the SAC develop a list of quantitative indicators that are used for the State of the Bay and then returned to each year as a guidepost for a status report within the SAC and broader Management Conference. Roberta also mentioned that this exercise can be used to prioritize parameters for ongoing long-term monitoring efforts. **Fred Leslie, ADEM** reiterated that there is a lot more data out there now than there was in 2008, and that ADEM data is uploaded to [How's My Waterway](#).

Announcements following the discussion period included: the upcoming SAC Co-chair transition, Baykeeper scope presentation on next meeting's agenda, potential venue change for SAC meetings – moving to SOMES lecture hall at USA, Baldwin County monitoring meeting, and introduction to new ADCNR staff member – Dr. Rita Peachey.

- The Bylaws committee is still discussing and determining the procedure for electing new committee co-chairs, so current co-chairs may have their term extended to December 31st of 2023.
- Cassie Bates, Baykeeper discussed some of the strategic plan transitions to the organization; they will be sharing their oyster biological indicator scope to the SAC for feedback and comments at the next meeting.
- Upcoming SAC meetings may be moved to SOMES lecture hall at the University of South Alabama to alleviate some of the technological constraints associated with hosting hybrid meetings.
- The NEP is in the final planning stages for the Baldwin County Water Quality Monitoring Program; SAC members interested in monitoring are welcome to attend our upcoming planning meeting with Baldwin County officials to ensure that we have a plan completed for implementation in the next few months. Email invitations will be sent to the SAC listserv.
- Amy introduced Dr. Rita Peachey, joining the Oil Spill section of ADCNR as a natural resource planner.

Missy Partyka motioned to adjourn the meeting, seconded by John Mareska. The meeting adjourned at 12:02pm CST.