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September 30, 2015

TO: Northeast Regional Planning Body
Ecosystem Based Management Work Group

Submitted via email to the RPB Secretariat

Dear Members of the Northeast Regional Planning Body Ecosystem Based Management Work Group:

The Nature Conservancy is writing to express our strong support for the Ecosystem Based Management Working Group (EBM WG) as it begins its work on behalf of the Northeast Regional Planning Body (RPB). The work group has at its disposal the resources it needs to take many important steps to advance ecosystem approaches to management in the Northeast. We stand ready to support your efforts to do so. As you begin your work this week, we encourage you to focus on short term deliverables that will become critical pieces of the Northeast regional ocean plan.

First and foremost, the Conservancy supports the work group's focus on developing a process and criteria that may be used by the RPB to identify Important Ecological Areas (IEAs). As pressures from new and existing ocean resource uses increase, we need a shared understanding about where the most diverse, vulnerable, and ecologically valuable places are located. The work over the past year by the Marine Life Data and Analysis Team (MDAT) represents a major step in developing a new level of understanding of marine resources. When combined with the growing body of knowledge relating to IEAs in the Northeast, the EBM workgroup has a robust foundation from which create and refine the process and criteria that may be used to identify IEAs. The Conservancy encourages the work group to use products from the MDAT team and others to develop such a process that then may be included in the regional ocean plan.

Second, the Conservancy strongly believes that developing a compatibility framework is essential for successful ocean planning. Consistent with term of reference #3, providing clear guidance on "compatibility considerations" will create a shared understanding among RPB member agencies to support consistent decision making.

By developing methods to identify IEAs and a compatibility framework, the working group and the RPB will provide useful context for the regional ocean plan, for government agencies implementing the plan and for stakeholders. Once the IEAs and a compatibility framework are implemented through the regional ocean plan, the work group and the RPB can turn their attention to longer term essential activities like ecosystem monitoring and identification of science/research priorities.

Thank you all for your dedication to advancing EBM. The health of our shared marine resources will benefit from your hard work.

Sincerely,

Sally McGee, Northeast Marine Program Director
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