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New England Fishery Management Council

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John F. Quinn, J.D., Ph.D., *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 5, 2019
TO: Council
FROM: Tom Nies, Executive Director
SUBJECT: **NROC Ocean Policy Committee (OPC)**

The NROC OPC met in Gloucester, MA on June 4, 2019. The OPC reviewed activities since its last meeting in November 2018, received an update on the federal Ocean Policy Committee, and discussed offshore wind. The bulk of the day was spent on the latter topic, with the goal of identifying additional data products and best practices that would be useful for evaluating wind energy projects. A detailed meeting summary will be available in a few weeks. A few highlights from the meeting are summarized below.

- There is a small amount of federal funding available for NROC and other regional bodies. The \$1.5 million will be divided between the various regions. NROC is a more established organization than those in other regions and expects to be successful in competing for funds.
- As discussed at the April 2019 Council meeting, wind energy development is proceeding on a fast track. There could be several documents circulated for review before our September 2019 Council meeting. **Perhaps most noteworthy is that attention is now shifting to the Gulf of Maine. BOEM expects to create a regional interagency task force by the end of 2019.**
- There is considerable frustration across many agencies, tribes, and stakeholders at the aggressive timelines pursued by BOEM. While BOEM staff are increasing to handle the demand, that is not happening with other agencies. There is also frustration with BOEM's approach to cumulative effects analysis, which discounts projects that are later in the pipeline. Much of the day's discussion focused on problems the BORM timelines cause and the lack of a measured approach to the development.
- The top priority for the OPC is to improve and update the fisheries data in the data portal. This task will be taken up by the Regional Data Working Group. I expect the NEFMC staff will be asked to participate.
- Many participants suggested that data relevant to wind energy development should be more readily available in order to facilitate informed comment. The data WG may take on this task.
- The Best Practices working group plans to tackle the timing issue, to develop recommendations that may help facilitate the review and approval of wind energy proposals. It's unclear if BOEM will implement recommendations that come from this group.