

BioAquamatics

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Dr. Susan F. Tierney, Chair
Ocean Management Task Force
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs
251 Causeway Street
Boston, MA 02114

Re: Draft Principles and Recommendations--Comments

Dear Ms. Tierney:

The work of the Task Force to focus attention on Massachusetts ocean management is a worthwhile exercise. Our ocean resources are a key dimension of Massachusetts' quality of life and economic well-being.

The draft principles acknowledge but do not fully reflect the inescapability of the choices that have to be made in establishing public policy. The first Principle is especially confusing. It states, "Management of ocean resources should maximize societal benefits while minimizing harm to the public's right to use and enjoy the ocean." First, except in rare cases, it is not possible to maximize one thing and minimize another simultaneously. A more useful construct would be to maximize the net societal benefits of our ocean resources. Second, the statement implies that maximizing societal benefits harms the public's right to use and enjoy the ocean. In fact, societal benefits come from the public's right to use and enjoy the ocean.

The Principles also give sustainability a prominent role. Sustainability is a slippery concept. On the one hand, it can be defined and measured in terms of allowing future generations to sustain their quality of life by making resource choices appropriate to their circumstances and values. Unfortunately, it has also become a political buzzword associated with an environmental agenda. But it could also refer to economic sustainability, lifestyle sustainability, or other dimension. While the term's current use as an environmental attribute is not necessarily a bad thing, it does mean that appealing to sustainability as a management principle is not sufficient. It must be defined. Effective assessment of sustainability is itself the result of related criteria. Such criteria could include the current state of the resource (biological, mineral, thermal, wind, etc.), the biological dynamics of the ecosystem, the management systems in place relative to the resource, the economic uses and potential of the resource, and the other societal dimensions (food security, energy policy, local involvement, lifestyle, etc.).

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