

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 14, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

We write in support of the recently released Draft Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan. As Senators from three Mid-Atlantic coastal states—Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey—we recognize the fundamental role of the Atlantic Ocean in our region’s culture and our economy. We have learned in recent decades that the ocean does not observe state boundaries, and we are more successful at managing the ocean when we work together across the region.

Since 2013, thanks to your National Ocean Policy, a Regional Planning Body made up of the states we represent among others, a dozen federal agencies, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and sovereign tribes from the Mid-Atlantic Region has worked to develop an Ocean Action Plan for the federal ocean waters off of our coasts. This plan has two simple goals: to ensure a healthy ocean economy, and to ensure sustainable ocean uses.

The plan aims to accomplish these two goals through collaborative and transparent solutions. For example, the plan:

- Compiles maps and data layers for the first time in a user friendly, online, and publicly available data portal so that all government decision makers and every constituent who cares about our ocean have access to the same accurate information.
- Incorporates data and perspectives from ocean users and industries in the region, and lays out best practices for ensuring that our constituents are properly consulted before any decision is made that impacts the ocean.
- Utilizes revolutionary marine life data to map out the biodiversity and richness of our Mid-Atlantic Ocean and chart a future in which our ocean is healthy and thriving.
- Improves communication and cooperation among the many federal agencies with overlapping jurisdiction and responsibilities in our ocean waters.

We applaud the more than three years of work by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body to develop the Ocean Action Plan. If well-crafted and implemented, it will reinforce agency decision-making by providing a comprehensive template for strengthening policies and practices, allow for the protection of coastal and marine habitats and wildlife, and enhance the ability of our states to work alongside federal agencies and Tribal nations as full partners. We urge the Administration to take the necessary steps to finalize the Ocean Action Plan this calendar year, and move forward with efforts to implement the plan.

It is of the utmost importance that areas that are critical habitat for wildlife, ecologically vulnerable to man-made impacts or of special biological significance be properly identified for their protection. While establishing Ecologically Rich Areas (ERAs) ensures that these ecosystems are protected for future generations, we must also ensure that areas not designated as ERAs are not viewed as areas unworthy of protection from ecological degradation.

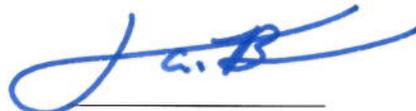
Our constituents deserve and depend on a healthy ocean ecosystem. As such, we urge the Administration to incorporate a robust public and stakeholder engagement process beginning with the review and response to public comments submitted during this open comment period. As you know, public engagement must remain at the core of ocean planning. Federal agencies must keep the commitments they are making in this plan to effectively engage our citizens in decision-making that directly impacts their lives.

Again, we applaud the Administration and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body on such a significant accomplishment. We look forward to working with you, as well as Mid-Atlantic Ocean stakeholders and members of the public, as the Administration works toward the implementation of the first-ever regional ocean plan for the Mid-Atlantic.

Sincerely,



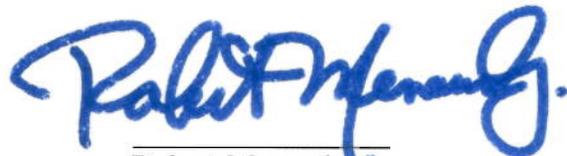
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



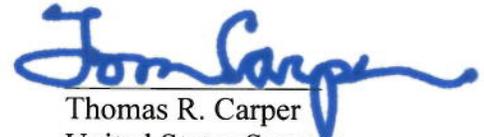
Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator