

PUBLIC INTEREST ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PIAC) MEETING
November 4, 2003 Conference Call
MINUTES

Attendance

Members Present: Patty Foley, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay (Chair); Bruce Berman (Save the Harbor/Save the Bay (Alternate) Sal Genovese (Safer Waters in Massachusetts); Tara Nye, Association to Preserve Cape Cod (Alternate), and Steve Tucker, Cape Cod Commission.

Observers: Cathy Coniaris (MADEP), Winifred Donnelly (MADEP), Matt Liebman (EPA) and Andrea Rex (MWRA).

MINUTES

Review of September 9, 2003 minutes

Minutes were approved with a comment by S. Tucker that the Cape Cod Commission is not supporting all of the changes to the ambient monitoring plan.

Flounder lesions

Andrea Rex gave a synopsis of a report given by Michael Moore at the last OMSAP meeting regarding lesions discovered on the blind side of flounders during the April 2003 flounder sampling survey. NMFS and MADMF have also sampled flounder with similar lesions. Skin lesions on flatfish are common, not well understood, and may be caused by a combination of stressors. These lesions seem to occur in the spring and are not observed in the fall. MWRA will add a special study to the ambient monitoring plan that includes working with the other agencies to develop a lesion identification protocol, and conducting additional sampling and laboratory analyses to try to identify the cause and extent of the lesions. MWRA will be meeting with NMFS, MADMF, and Michael Moore in a couple of weeks.

PIAC members would like this flounder lesion meeting open to everyone. M. Liebman replied that Jack Schwartz from MADMF is hosting the meeting and would like to keep it small to focus on development of the lesion identification protocol. S. Genovese said that Northeastern University (NEU) has a research vessel that drags in western Mass Bay and Broad Sound. He offered to have NEU help with sampling. A. Rex said that they could share the identification protocol with NEU when it is completed. T. Nye asked about sampling in the spring of 2004. A. Rex said that they will sample and will work with the other agencies to make sure that there is good coverage. S. Tucker suggested putting observers on commercial fishing vessels as a way of broadening the sampling. A. Rex thought that was a good idea and that MWRA will ask the fisheries agencies if this would be possible.

B. Berman asked if the skin lesions coincided with an increase in liver tumors. A. Rex replied no. B. Berman said that he wishes there was a procedure in place to bring unusual observations like this to our attention sooner. PIAC has a responsibility to tell OMSAP and the public how we feel and six months is too long to wait for information. A. Rex replied that MWRA waited for Michael Moore's report to better understand what was going on. It took him a while to compile all of the information and try to figure out what was going on. P. Foley asked if there was a public health issue with the flounder lesions. A. Rex replied that Michael Moore said no. She noted that when MWRA conducts its ambient monitoring, they record unusual observations such as large algae blooms and ctenophore

blooms and these events are reported. We do not know if these flounder lesions are due to a high population of flounder, a new disease, or some other factor. T. Nye cautioned that we need to be careful what we tell the public because we don't really understand what is going on.

Implementing strategies discussed at September PIAC meeting

P. Foley said that at the September PIAC meeting, members supported the proposed changes to the ambient monitoring plan. She asked the group if they felt the proposed changes should go forward given the uncertainty regarding the flounder lesions. B. Berman thinks yes, but there needs to be increased attention to flounder monitoring immediately. There also should be flexibility in addressing problems as they arise. We need to say that the review of the ambient monitoring program went forward successfully but we should also be able to discuss monitoring results in a timely fashion.

P. Foley reminded the group that at the September PIAC meeting, the group discussed drafting a letter, attaching a summary of the monitoring revisions, and distributing it to the public. The letter would note that the monitoring review was necessary, OMSAP's review was done with integrity, and though PIAC didn't agree with everything, the process worked. It was also suggested to write a similar letter to OMSAP. Now we need to work to roll these out. B. Berman thinks that the press will only be interested in the flounder lesions and not the changes to the ambient monitoring plan. P. Foley set-up a PIAC conference call for November 14th at 4:00 PM [later postponed].

ADJOURNED

Summary prepared by W. Donnelly and C. Coniaris. Post-meeting comments are included in [brackets]. All such comments have been inserted for clarification only. They do not, nor are they intended to, suggest that such insertions were part of the live meeting components and have been expressly set-off so as to avoid such inference.