

Developing a Comprehensive Marine Debris Strategy for the West Coast Governors'
Agreement on Ocean Health:

Proceedings from the Marine Debris Action Coordination Team
Marine Debris Alliance Workshop

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Invited Experts

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Workshop participants in Portland, Oregon

Introduction: WCGA MD Alliance Workshop

In September 2006, the Governors of Oregon, Washington and California signed the West Coast Governors' Agreement (WCGA) on Ocean Health. Under this agreement, the three states pledged to work together on bold actions to improve the health of our ocean and coastal resources. Marine debris was identified as one of the areas requiring urgent action. Therefore, a Marine Debris Action Coordination Team (MD ACT), comprised of representatives from the three states and the federal government, non-governmental organizations, Tribes, and industry was established to generate a strategy and to address marine debris collaboratively in the three states. This was the last of three workshops; the first was on derelict fishing gear and the second was on land-based debris.

During this workshop, MD ACT members reviewed and made comments regarding the Marine Debris Strategy, discussed the marine debris database Request for Proposal and the function of the database and mainly focused on how to create an effective marine debris alliance that will benefit its members who will carry out recommended actions from the Strategy. The MD ACT discussed about the following alliance-related topics:

- Vision and Alliance Model Options
- Alliance Scope and Charter
- Goals and Objectives
- Membership
- Organizational Structure
- Funding for Alliance
- Steps to Move Forward

Review of the Marine Debris Strategy

The Strategy has its own set of goals and objectives different from the alliance and can serve as a guiding document for the alliance or stand on its own. This document was created based on recommendation from the MD ACT through the previous workshops. The approach to this Strategy adopts a performance-based, non-prescriptive approach towards meeting the goals and objectives. MD ACT members recognized that circumstances are significantly different across geographic regions and that regional differences warrant a high degree of flexibility in achieving common goals. This approach allows individuals to leverage their own resources and chose action items that suite their needs and priorities. During the review of the Strategy, numerous changes were suggested. These include:

Vision Statement: Striving towards a zero waste environment will be added as the vision statement. This vision statement will also include a caveat that recognizes risks of lost fishing gear associated with fishing, and that the Strategy is not promoting the end of fishing. We will create a lofty vision statement for now and edit as we get feedback from the Executive Committee.

Prioritization: Team members thought that with limited funding and resources, including prioritization as an additional objective would be beneficial. The Strategy will provide general guiding principles for prioritizing marine debris with the recognition that prioritizing land-based debris and derelict fishing gear are different. Criteria for prioritizing include; human safety, species impacts, lethality, habitat impacts, economics, aesthetics, protected areas and legacy.

Moving forward, there will be one more revision incorporating all team members' comments and feedback prior to sending the document to the Executive Committee for their comments. Ideally, this document will make it up through the governors' offices, get approved and made available for public comment.

Changes to the Marine Debris Strategy:

- Add new objective to prioritize actions for alliance to use when carrying out projects and include criteria.
- Eliminate the word "ghost fishing".
- Add vision statement that "strives towards a zero trash environment".

Marine Debris Database

Creating a marine debris database to establish baseline estimates of marine debris and derelict fishing gear off the west coast is one of the action items identified in the WCGA's Work Plan. In order to meet this action item, plans are moving forward to create a west coast marine debris database. The MD ACT received a grant in the summer of 2010 and is currently working to finalize a Request for Proposal (RFP) in order to start the bidding process to hire a contractor to create the database. The prior two workshops have provided direction of what should be included and how the database should be utilized. This database will be a beneficial tool for decision making, on the ground operations, research and education.

Based on guidance from experts, a draft RFP was created which requests the contractor to create a workplan with the following database attributes:

- Link to existing west coast databases
- Uniform format for new data
- Link to documents related to marine debris
- Easily accessible and internet based
- GIS interface and strong search capability
- Ability to import and export data
- Storage of new data
- Data analysis
- Password protection
- Smart phone applications
- Easy operation and maintenance
- Quality Assurance/Quality Control

There was discussion over password protection and who should have access to inputting data. A tiered approach was suggested where individuals and professionals could input data. We could also have a QA/QC rating system depending on who uploads the data. The database could have a standardized data card that people could download and use. The Ocean Conservancy is currently revamping their data cards for International Coastal Cleanup Day, so using their card may be an option depending on how comprehensive the data cards are.

Furthermore, because the database is a project of the MD ACT/Alliance, it will be put in the context of the WCGA. We will need to determine what data, research and/or surveys are appropriate to be uploaded into the database. Some research studies will be harder to transfer data due to the nature of the information. Also, derelict fishing gear will be harder to assess because most of the fishing gear listed is beyond diver depth and harder to recover than land-based debris.

Overall, the MD ACT is optimistic about the database and sees value added to their current work by this project. Some benefits include influencing policy, identifying hotspots to prioritize clean up areas, using it as an educational tool and identifying a baseline. The database team will include the core team with Nir Barnea as lead, Kate Peet, a University of Washington graduate student and MD ACT members who are interested in participating. The next steps include receiving comments from the MD ACT on the draft RFP, getting the RFP out and selecting a contractor and launching the database.

Marine Debris Alliance

Vision and Alliance Models

Core team members presented on five different alliance models that may be applicable to the Marine Debris Alliance. The five models were the Washington Clean Coast Alliance (WCCA), Restore America's Estuaries (RAE), Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA), SOLV, and Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC). Once the information was presented, there was an open discussion regarding how effective these models were, what members wanted the alliance to do, and what the vision of the alliance should be.

Washington Clean Coast Alliance (WCCA): This alliance started in 2007 and includes a broad range of members including nonprofits, community groups, corporations, and public agencies. They implement priorities from their strategy document and mainly conduct beach cleanups. On average, 20-25 tons of trash is collected annually through volunteer efforts organized by the WCCA. More information can be found at: <http://www.coastsavers.org/index.html>.

Restore American's Estuaries (RAE): RAE is an alliance of eleven community-based conservation organizations and is a national 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization. They work on on-the-ground restoration projects, produce an array of collaborative tools, reports and resource to guide the restoration process, and hold biennial national conferences. More information can be found at: <http://www.estuaries.org/>.

SOLV: SOLV is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization that brings together individual volunteers, conservation organizations, businesses and government agencies in restoration and cleanup activities. Annually, SOLV provides resources to more than 250 Oregon communities focusing on cleanup, habitat restoration and environmental maintenance projects. More information can be found at: <http://www.solv.org/>.

Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA): Initiated in 2004, GOMA is a partnership with the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. The Alliance has identified six priority issues and promotes collaboration at the local, state and federal level to address these issues. The six priority issues include water quality, habitat conservation and restoration, ecosystem integration and assessment, nutrients and nutrient impacts, coastal community resilience, and environmental education. More information can be found at: <http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org>.

Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC): The PFMC is one of eight regional fishery management councils and is made up of 14 voting representatives from Oregon, Washington, California, and Idaho. This council utilizes a bottom-up process and encourages public participation and involvement in fisheries management. Once approved by the Secretary of Commerce, management measures developed by the Council are implemented by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). More information can be found at: <http://www.pcouncil.org/>.

Table of Alliance Models

	WCCA	RAE	SOLV	GOMA	PFMC
Type	Informal, volunteers	Community-based (NGOs)	state-driven, highly structured	State-driven, top down, highly structured	Regional, bottom up, Highly structured
mission	Implement priorities from strategy document	Assist orgs. doing work Leverage funding Coordinate advocacy Info sharing	Bring Oregonians together to improve environment and stewardship	Increase regional collaboration to enhance ecol and economic health	Recommend fisheries mgt for west coast to federal government
members	public agencies, NGOs, industry organizations	11 NGOs, with federal and corporate partners	Oregon lead: 21 state & regional agencies, businesses, individuals	5 state partnership; federal, NGO, industry partners	14 voting members: State agencies, 1 tribe, 1 NMFS, at-large, nonvoting
decisions	Consensus	Vote of board	Vote of the board	Consensus	voting
Duties	Donate funding, time	Pay dues, lead projects, annual conference	Committees, advisors to board	Participate in committees	Committees; recommend mgt measures
leadership	Steering committee: voluntary leads	Board of directors, executive director	Board of directors, executive director	Complex tier: Exec Cmte; coordination teams; issue teams	Council members, advisory bodies, public involvement
funding	Lack of funding.	Well funded, grants, dues, conference		Federal and state	federal
	No staff	Paid staff	Paid staff	Paid staff	Paid staff

Pros and Cons for Alliance Models

	WCCA	RAE	SOLV	GOMA	PFMC
Type	Informal, volunteers	Community-based (NGOs)	state-driven, highly structured	State-driven, top down, highly structured	Regional, bottom up, Highly structured
PROS	Diverse membership Regional collaboration Nimble	Well funded Federal, industry partnerships Nat'l scope Conference Ability to lobby and advocate	Diverse membership One entity to coordinate cleanups	Strong support Regional approach Secure funding	Broad representation Public input Bottom up decisions Secure funding
CONS	Funding uncertainty Voluntary participation Hard to organize Small scope	Alliance comprised only of NGOs	Small scope Top down Other?	Top down-government heavy Many layers=lots of process State and federal funding	Advisory role Other?

Following the overview of the different alliance models, there was discussion about what members would want the alliance to do. In general, MD ACT members want the alliance to:

- Facilitate and encourage recommended actions in the Strategy.
- Fill gaps that individual organizations cannot do. The Alliance would identify these gaps and provide lessons learned to other states. This could be a between states as well as international.
- Add value to members such as increased collaboration, information exchange, create tangible products and help acquire funding.
- Create progress/status reports that highlight the state of the coast.

Based on the discussion of what members wanted the alliance to do, a draft vision statement was created.

Draft Alliance Vision:

The Marine Debris Alliance is a diverse coordination body that adds value by providing a conduit to a higher level of government decision making*. It provides a means to further efficient action in addressing marine debris by identifying gaps, finding funding, focusing attention on priorities, sharing information on effective actions, tracking work in standardized ways, coordinating education, and measuring progress towards goals.

(*Breaking barriers between state agencies, federal government, NGOs to advance actions that implement the strategy)

Alliance Scope and Charter

The scope is what the alliance intends to do such as establishing membership and developing operational structures and functions. Prioritized work plans and timelines were identified as important actions that should be accomplished within the alliance. The charter is the document that describes the structure and purpose of the alliance. It would include the vision, scope, goals and objectives of the alliance. Eben has volunteered to draft a charter based on this workshop.

Alliance Goals and Objectives

MD ACT members thought that having a clear understanding of how the alliance could benefit each member of alliance was an important topic. In order for MD ACT members to participate and be engaged, they would want the alliance to:

- Add value and promote the marine debris cause.
- Elevate issue of marine debris in ways that drive action.
- Serve as a status symbol to engage businesses to take more of a leadership role and help build partnerships with industries so they will take on more volunteer actions and responsibilities.
- Influence and play an advisory role to marine debris projects and legislation.
- Produce tangible results and useful products.
- Promote cross-cutting actions to reduce and prevent marine debris.
- Help organizations secure and find funding through grants.
- Work with agencies to educate policy makers and managers.
- Provide a broader scale influence on marine debris legislation nationally.
- Increase coordination and collaboration among alliance members.
- Reduce duplicative efforts and provide an avenue for sharing new scientific information.
- Implement projects at a larger scale so there will be a bigger impact.

Membership

The discussion on membership mainly dealt with identifying the composition of the alliance and expectations of members. The overall agreement was to have the alliance open to any members who are interested in participating. At this point, it is unclear if the Executive Committee will approve each alliance member or set a maximum number of alliance participants. There was also discussion about keeping a structure similar to the core team. Some of the state representatives felt that they would not have enough time or resources to keep participating at their current capacity. Having a paid staff was also an important issue that was brought up. Regardless of who they are working for, someone to serve an administrative role would be beneficial, especially for getting the alliance started.

A need to bring in more tribal participation and industry members were also identified. Bringing in industry representatives is a tricky matter because we want to maintain the credibility of the alliance and also want people from industries that are interested in helping the cause and forward thinking. It will be important to identify what industries would want out of the alliance and what benefits they would attain from being a part of it.

Membership roles

Clear membership roles and expectations is an important component for maintaining a successful alliance. The group decided that new member should sign on to the alliance mission, vision and guiding principles of the alliance if they want to participate. The following is also expected of alliance members:

1. “Serve” on one action focused subgroup-with initial & regular meetings electronically.
2. Communicate with others in their state/agency/peer group.
3. Communicate with others in the membership to share information on activities.
4. Agree to focus on progress on a regional level.
5. Agree to help focus funding on priorities as they are set out by Alliance.

Alliance Operational Structure and Function

MD ACT members liked the idea of work teams carrying out projects and a rotating elected board determining which projects to pursue. There would also be a fixed term chair and vice-chair who are elected. Alliance members who were interested in a given project would participate in the work team, and after the completion of the project, the work team would dissolve. At any given time, multiple work teams could be working on various marine debris projects. Examples of potential board of representative members include:

- Federal: EPA, NOAA, USCG- one from each region
- Tribal: one from each state
- State: one from each state
- Interstate: PSMFC, Coastal States
- Industry-fishing, plastics, ports, others (harbor committees)
- NGO: two from each state
- Academia: Sea Grant

- Other organizations with similar regional missions: ex. National Estuary Programs, National Estuaries Research Reserve,

Pacific Marine Estuarine Research Reserve

A monthly, one hour call with the whole alliance could be feasible. Because the alliance is currently envisioned to be more action oriented, members would be updating the rest of the alliance on the projects work teams are currently pursuing. For example, the marine debris data base could be a topic that a work team is formed around. They would communicate internally based on a schedule that the team determines, but would also participate in monthly calls to update everyone on their status. Hosting an annual conference to showcase the projects and information is another option in the future.

Proposed Alliance Structure:

- Fixed termed chair and vice chair.
- Elected board members. The board would decide which projects and products to implement based on prioritization.
- Have teams by project topics working together, more similar to a working group.

Alliance Funding

Regarding funding, the MD ACT discussed whether or not the alliance should seek a 501(c) 3 status, how to fund a staff person, what the alliance could do with minimal funding, and how to secure funding. The benefits to having a non-profit status is that the alliance would be an entity that could receive grant funding. On the other hand, pursuing this status will take time and money. Funding a staff member would be beneficial in not only helping the alliance start up, but to maintain it as well. Rather than having a paid staff, another option is looking into an organization such as the Tides Center (<http://www.tides.org>) that can provide the administrative support so that the alliance could focus on projects. In order to cut down on cost, enlisting graduate students and/or fellows is also a viable option.

Another important discussion was making sure that the alliance does not compete against smaller organization for funding. Foundations may want to give grants to larger projects so this may be a benefit for joining the alliance. Also, with funding for a large group, the grant opportunities may be different from individual organizations. On the contrary, if the alliance is avoiding advocacy, grants may go to nonprofits that can take a bolder stance on the issue. This will most likely be a long term problem and can be addressed in the future.

Creating an action plan with priorities will help steer the direction of how to use the funding and gain support from other agencies. The alliance needs to determine the scope in order to get a better idea of the projects being implemented and how much everything will cost. Once the alliance has a better idea of the projects with priorities, we can start making connections with agencies such as NOAA and the EPA asking about funding opportunities.

Tsunami Response

The marine debris alliance has the opportunity to be the conduit for information and develop readiness and removal plans for the tsunami debris that may reach the west coast. It is reported that there is anywhere from five to 20 million tons of debris from the tsunami in Japan. The marine debris database will be crucial in determining the baseline if the tsunami debris reaches the west coast. The alliance could form new relationships to work with cleanup groups to prepare organizations to conduct rapid response.

Next Steps

Finalizing the Marine Debris Strategy, creating the marine debris database and starting alliance outreach are the next steps after this workshop. Regarding the alliance, once the scope is finalized, talking points need to be drafted for inviting new members to the alliance. The first actions of the Alliance are to:

1. Get endorsement from each Governor of the Marine Debris Strategy and assignment of an agency or governor office contact for Board.
2. Form a work team within the MD ACT to develop a standardized regional derelict gear and land based debris database (and GIS based mapping interface) using existing models such as North West Straits Commission (for derelict gear, CA Coastal Commission for land-based debris)
3. Draft alliance charter and workplan.
4. Contract a part time staff person (ex. Sea Grant fellow, graduate student, professional contractor).
5. Identify and recruit potential alliance members.
6. Identify examples of effective legislation or initiatives that have been passed or proposed that can be adapted for regional implementation to reduce marine debris.
7. Identify “hotspots” of gear hang-up sites nearshore and offshore and identify strategies for finding funds for removal, survey etc.