

Comments on April draft of the Status and Trends Report
RMS 5/16/08

General document comments:

The document would benefit from a significant amount of reorganization. Right now it's all over the place and difficult to follow. It should be as focused as possible, and present the data and science to help inform management actions. I see this as a technical document and don't believe pure speculation is beneficial. It should be strictly factual. Perhaps using a hierarchical approach may help the organization, such as numbering each section as appropriate (1.2, 1.2.1, 1.2.2 etc.)

I don't think it's necessary to include a lot of detail as to why these indicators are important; a few sentences would be sufficient. Much of that has been documented elsewhere. Citations for these reports would be sufficient.....this refers to your other citation layer. In addition, it's important to cite the source of any data used.

For each chapter placing a discussion of system drivers at the front of each section followed by the chosen metrics would provide some perspective. Then a brief explanation of why the drivers were chosen. Present the status and trends in graphic form. Finally summarize data gaps and how these metrics can be influenced by management decision.

As Mel noted, there should also be a conclusions section at the end of each chapter or the report.

Comments on Sections:

For me, the organization of each chapter could be improved; I found it difficult to follow. For example, if the chapter is on estuarine waters, it should include a discussion of both driver, and response variables. Both drivers and response variables can be used as metrics. This includes water quality variables such as DO, or chlorophyll as well as living resource variables such as seaweed, SAV, fisheries etc. Also there is excessive language not relevant to the focus of the document. Overall, much of it could be removed. A general explanation of why certain variables were chosen would be sufficient. No need to talk about those that were not used. In addition, a discussion of what constitutes a good or bad condition for each variable is necessary. For example, if SAV acreage is used as a metric, how many acres would be necessary to indicate a healthy ecosystem?

In some instances it might be useful to separate the discussion of each habitat based upon geographic location. In this case, a separate section on Greenwich Cove might be valuable when talking about estuarine habitats. Again, this would represent a hierarchical organization of the document and could take advantage of specific data sets.

1) Overview:

I believe this chapter needs to be significantly restructured to improve the flow of ideas. I don't think that leading with climate change is appropriate. Climate change is an important driver of ecosystem response, but if this is a status and trends document then it falls secondary to presenting appropriate metrics and their actual status as an indicator of ecosystem health. Presenting and evaluating actual trends or lack thereof is necessary for this document. This section would be appropriate to review the ecosystem approach this report is taking.

A lot of the language in this section is imprecise. Greater specificity in what is being referred to is necessary. For example, the term "water quality" needs initially to be defined and how it's measured. It's not appropriate to just refer to water quality because it's too generic.

This document also needs much more focus. Right now it's trying to be all things to all people. It might be more useful to focus on fewer indicators.

Is it really within the scope of this document to try and explain any patterns identified in detail? It might be worth a short analysis at the end of each section. Wouldn't the analysis of changes to determine drivers and those factors we can influence be part of the CCMP?

2) Estuarine Waters:

After a brief intro, there should be a section presenting what specific data are being used to assess status and trends and what water bodies these apply to.

After describing metrics used for each segment or water body, there should be specific notes where data gaps exist.

Under the section of pollution, it would be useful to distinctly define which pollutants are being discussed up front as possible sub-headings. It's also important to really focus on data gaps.

You have a very general discussion of a number potential indicators such as phytoplankton, sav, DO, but you don't discuss how they are used to indicate status....good vs. bad. You also need to discuss how a trend would be detected and what data would be needed. Headings need to be organized a bit better to remove confusion.

It seems you have a section on inter-annual variability, but it should be presented at the beginning of the section to frame some of the changes in data. Maybe at this time it would be appropriate to refer to the relatively recent changes caused by climate change...if appropriate. But the issues are drivers of the system and offer possible explanations for changes or variation in the data.

Odd Changes to the Bay: I have no idea what you are trying to say in this chapter. This may be more appropriate as section on general variability.

Living Resources:

As with the previous chapter, the intro should discuss what metrics or indicators have been chosen and how they reflect the health of the Bay.

Each subsection needs to explicitly identify metrics! As written it provides little useful content as a status and trends document.

Watershed Lands:

As with other chapters it needs to be more precise and define metrics. The intro needs to be concise and put metrics into a framework.

Issues of Concern section seems out of place. These issues may be more appropriate to discuss at the very beginning of the document.

Watershed indicators section lists a broad range of possible indicators, but should be reduced to those that can be used.

It seems to me that Impervious surface is an indicator. It should be plotted and examined. The consequences of changes in impervious surface could be briefly summarized before the data is presented.

Transportation impacts:

We all know that too many vehicles are bad. It's only necessary to briefly summarize some of the effects. As written it's too diffuse. Again, specific metrics need to be presented....like what was presented at the workshop.

Bay Management

I'm not sure this needs to be a whole chapter if included at all in this report. I would think those ideas would be included in the CCMP.