



The New York-New Jersey Harbor ♦♦♦ Estuary Program

History of the Citizens Advisory Committee

In August 1988 an EPA consultant prepared a proposal for a Citizens Advisory Committee to the NY/NJ Harbor Estuary Program, the result of many interviews with stewards and citizens throughout the region and meetings with several key leaders who had been attending all of the organizational meetings. A series of discussions with members of the Management Committee resulted in a decision to create three advisory committees: Science & Technical, Local Government, and Citizens. Four places on the Management Committee were made available to the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and all organizations on our databases were invited to come together and organize the CAC. By-laws were formulated specifying goals, open membership and organization of a 24-member Steering Committee to represent the following:

One person from each state from each of five program categories: Civic Sector - public interest groups, taxpayers associations, community boards, block associations; Commercial, Business & Port - chemical industry, utilities, professionals; Recreation - fishers, boaters, bathers, tourism industry, aquaculture operators; Environment - management councils, soil & water conservation districts, advocacy groups; Educators - school teachers, educational institutions.

An additional five representatives from each state would represent geographical diversity and two chairs would be elected who would each choose a delegate to the Management Committee.

The goals for the organization were adopted in the By-Laws as follows:

"The primary purpose of the CAC is to provide public input to program decision-making on behalf of the diverse stakeholders in the Hudson/Raritan Estuary and the NY Bight. To accomplish this purpose, its members will participate in formulating work programs, will monitor progress of principal investigators, and assist in developing and implementing the Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan as required by Section 320 of the Water Quality Act of 1987. The CAC will promote public awareness and understanding

of the program's issues, goals and recommendations, and will oversee the establishment of a public participation program which will insure two-way communication between the Management Committee and the Public throughout the planning period."

This was approved by the Management Committee.

In subsequent years until the CCMP was formulated, the CAC met frequently, initially every month, then every other month. CAC members attended workgroup meetings and negotiated with agency representatives on the content of the CCMP. Two major regional outreach meetings solicited input to the Plan's content and citizen representatives played a major role in the Manhattan College conference to determine priority areas for the CCMP.

After the CCMP was finalized and plans were formulated to hold Management Committee meetings quarterly, it was agreed that the CAC would meet one week before each Management Committee meeting to review the agenda and prepare CAC input.

As implementation progressed, workgroup meetings -- particularly for Habitat, Toxics, Nutrients and Dredged Material -- began to command time commitments from many CAC volunteers. Budget dollars for a professional Public Participation Coordinator and outreach tools disappeared, and as workgroups organized in many sub-committees, the CAC meetings became more and more an update of implementation progress and presentation of special studies.

It is now time to take stock, regroup and recharge our activities. The Regional meetings planned for February and March 2001, will again reach out to listen to constituents and begin to formulate priorities for future action and specific target dates for those goals. It will then be time to develop a strategy for reestablishing consensus among the different agencies and interests targeting: public action to implement those priorities, working cooperatively to establish support from elected officials and creating fundraising goals for priority actions.