

Dear ***,

The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) respectfully requests your review of the attached report, titled “Condition Report Addendum for Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary.” Sanctuary staff has identified you as a particularly suitable expert who could provide substantive comments that would improve the document prior to dissemination. **We request your written comments by April 6, four (4) weeks after receiving this message.**

In December 2004, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review (OMB Bulletin) establishing peer review standards that would enhance the quality and credibility of the federal government’s scientific information. Among other information, these standards apply to Influential Scientific Information (ISI), which is information that can reasonably be determined to have a “clear and substantial impact on important public policies or private sector decisions.”

ONMS has developed reports on the status and trends of natural and archaeological resources within the marine sanctuaries as part of its System-Wide Monitoring (SWiM) Program. These “condition reports,” which will be revised approximately every five years for each marine sanctuary, are appropriately considered Influential Scientific Information. For this reason, these reports are subject to the review requirements of both the Information Quality Act and the OMB Bulletin guidelines.

Charge

This condition report addendum provides a summary of the current state of the sanctuary. The primary purpose of the condition reports (which will be drafted for each site) is to report in a standardized way across all marine sanctuaries on the status and trends of water quality, habitat, living resources and maritime archaeological resources and the human activities that affect them. Resource status is rated on a scale from good to poor, and the timelines used for comparison vary from topic to topic. Trends in the status of resources are also reported, and are generally based on observed changes in status over the past five years, unless otherwise specified. Evaluations of status and trends were made by sanctuary staff with the assistance of a Science Advisory group, based on interpretation of quantitative and, when necessary, non-quantitative assessments and observations of scientists, managers and users. Therefore, ratings reflect the collective level of concern among participants based on their knowledge, perceptions and confidence of local problems. Reports summarizing resource status and trends will be prepared for each marine sanctuary approximately every five years. This information is intended to help set the stage for management plan reviews.

As you review the document, please do so recognizing that the report is much like an executive summary that is based on site specific data that may not be presented in detail within the report. To the extent possible, references and links to existing data are given, and appropriate summary graphics or data are shown, but original sources are likely to

contain much more information than the condition report. The report will also be graphically improved, so please focus your comments on the substance of the report text and ratings, rather than on the graphical layout.

The 17 questions listed in the report and in Appendix A of the report are asked of all sanctuaries. The interpretation of the questions by sanctuary staff, and their responses to the questions are standardized according to the descriptions and explanations provided in Appendix A. (Please see “A Monitoring Framework for the National Marine Sanctuary System” for a complete description of SWiM at:

<http://sanctuaries.nos.noaa.gov/library/alldocs.html>). We are not requesting your review of this portion of the report, as these standards were established by the original panel of experts who designed SWiM, and in subsequent design modifications. Your review should be limited to the State of Sanctuary Resources section of the report and should be based on your relevant experience and knowledge of the resources of Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary. We are particularly interested in your expert opinion of our judgments of resource status and trends, the bases for judgment, and whether you feel that other data could or should have been incorporated into the ratings of status and trends. We welcome any recommendations you may have regarding additional data or information sources that may improve assessments of resource conditions. Please note that once all reviewer comments have been addressed the final report will be appropriately formatted to meet the National Marine Sanctuary Program's publication requirements.

Posting of Review Comments

Current OMB Bulletin guidelines require that reviewer comments, identities, and affiliations be posted on the Department of Commerce (DOC) website: http://www.osec.doc.gov/cio/oipr/pr_plans.htm.

Reviewer comments, however, will not be attributed to specific individuals. As you know, this is not consistent with traditional scientific peer review standards, which generally call for anonymity. This issue has been raised with OMB, and guidance may change in the future. Until then, we will comply with the published guidelines.

Therefore, by agreeing to be a reviewer for this report, you must agree to allow your comments to be posted on the web, along with those of other reviewers, and have your name and affiliation posted, though the names will not be linked to specific comments.

Conflict of Interest

For this review process, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) adapted the National Academy of Sciences’ (NAS) policy for committee selection with respect to evaluating conflicts of interest when selecting peer reviewers who are not NOAA employees. Please read the attached conflict of interest policy and complete and return the attached Conflict of Interest form by mail or fax (301-713-4306).

Specific Instructions

Please send your comments directly to Mrs. Kathy Broughton who is serving as the Point of Contact for this project (Kathy.Broughton@noaa.gov, 301-467-5877). Attached to this email is a pdf of the report. A Word version of the report will be sent to you via <http://www.yousendit.com>. Comments and suggested edits may be made directly to the report using the “track changes” and “comment bubble” functions. If you would like a hard copy of the report, please contact Kathy directly and she’d be happy to send it to you. Please note that this a draft report and should not be distributed.

On behalf of the staff of the Gray’s Reef Sanctuary and ONMS, I thank you for taking the time to review this report. I am confident that your assistance will improve the quality of the document and ensure that management decisions can rely on the best available science and dependable judgments of knowledgeable experts.

Sincerely,

Bill Douros
Acting Deputy Director
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries