

**US ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

National Coastal Condition Report IV

Charge to the Peer Reviewers

This document represents a collaborative effort among EPA's Office of Water and Office of Research and Development, NOAA, and US Fish and Wildlife Service. Our objective is to provide regional and national assessments of the condition of coastal waters of the U.S.

Background:

The National Coastal Condition Reports represent collaboration among EPA (OW and ORD), NOAA, USFWS, and coastal state agencies. The first National Coastal Condition Report (NCCR I), published in 2001, reported that the nation's coastal resources were in fair condition. The NCCR I used available data from 1990 to 1996 to characterize approximately 70% of the nation's coastal resources. The second National Coastal Condition Report (NCCR II) was based on data from 1997 to 2000 representative of 100% of coastal area in the contiguous 48 states and Puerto Rico, and showed that the nation's coastal waters continued to be in fair condition. The third National Coastal Condition Report (NCCR III) assessed condition of the nation's coastal waters, including Alaska and Hawaii, based primarily on NCA data collected in 2001 and 2002, and indicated that the condition remained fair. For the first time, NCCR III also included comparison of changes in condition from 1990 to 2002, presented for the nation's coastal waters and by region.

The National Coastal Condition Report IV (NCCR IV) is the fourth in a series of environmental assessments of U.S. coastal waters and the Great Lakes. The report includes assessments of all the nation's coastal waters in the contiguous 48 states and Puerto Rico, south-eastern Alaska, Hawaii, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa. The NCCR IV presents four main types of data: (1) coastal monitoring data, (2) coastal ocean/offshore monitoring data, (3) offshore fisheries data, and (4) beach assessment and fish advisory data. The NCCR IV relies heavily on coastal monitoring data from EPA's National Coastal Assessment (NCA) to assess coastal condition by evaluating five indices of condition—water quality, sediment quality, benthic community condition, coastal habitat loss, and fish tissue contaminants. Coastal waters are valuable from both an environmental and economic perspective. These waters are vulnerable to pollution from diverse sources. EPA expects that this report on the condition of coastal waters will support more informed decisions concerning protection of this resource and will increase public awareness about the extent and seriousness of pollution in these waters.

The overall condition of the nation's coastal waters is fair, using five key indices of ecological health [water quality index (including dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll a, nitrogen, phosphorus, and water clarity), sediment quality index (including sediment toxicity, sediment contaminants, and sediment total organic carbon), benthic index, coastal habitat index, and a fish tissue contaminants index]. For each of these five key indices, a score of good, fair, or poor was assigned to each coastal region of the U.S. These ratings were then averaged to create overall regional and national scores illustrated using "traffic light" color scoring.

Purpose:

The purpose of this review is to obtain expert feedback and comments on the draft “*National Coastal Condition Report IV*.” In your review, please provide written responses to the questions below. Additional comments and recommendations for improving the report and associated methodology are also welcome.

Charge Questions:

- 1) Are the methods used to assess coastal condition supported by sound scientific principles?
- 2) Selection and use of coastal monitoring indicators are described in Chapter 1 (the Introduction). Do the coastal monitoring indicators used to assess coastal condition nationally and regionally and do the criteria for ranking condition as good, fair, or poor reflect the primary environmental concerns of state, regional, and national resource managers?
- 3) Are the report’s conclusions supported by the analyses and results?
- 4) Are the conclusions regarding changes in coastal condition over time supported by the data and analyses presented?
- 5) Does this report represent an important contribution to the state of the science for assessment of coastal waters?
- 6) Do the four approaches to assessing coastal condition (i.e., coastal monitoring data, coastal ocean/offshore monitoring data, offshore fisheries, and assessment and advisory data) clearly represent aspects of coastal condition that are informative and not redundant?
- 7) Are the shortcomings of available data and assessment approaches clearly articulated?
- 8) This report is quite lengthy. For those reviewing the entire document or individual chapters, do you have any recommendations for omitting parts of this report to shorten the length?
- 9) Please discuss any controversies that may be raised by the conclusions presented in this report.

Please provide written comments to EPA’s Peer Review Coordinator, Virginia Houk, **by March 31, 2011**. Your review may be sent by regular mail to the address below, by e-mail to hok.virginia@epa.gov or by fax to 919-685-3250.

If you have any questions concerning the draft report or the charge, please contact me at 919.541.2815 or hok.virginia@epa.gov. We sincerely thank you for your input to this important peer review.

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