

Ocean Observatories Initiative (OOI) Public Meeting
University of Rhode Island Coastal Institute
October 5, 2010, 4:00 – 6:30 PM

OOI Participants:

Jean McGovern, National Science Foundation
Sue Banahan, Consortium for Ocean Leadership
Jennifer Dorton, Consortium for Ocean Leadership
Al Plueddemann, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution
Adrienne Fink, Tetra Tech
Rob Munier, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

Community Participants: See attached attendance list.

Summary:

Jean McGovern provided opening remarks, including an overview of the proposed Ocean Observatories Initiative (OOI) network and an outline of the micro-siting process for the Pioneer Array. Al Plueddemann presented the science requirements/objectives for the Pioneer Array. During the presentation, public attendees offered comments and asked questions. The below sections provide a summary of the overarching comments made during the meeting and action items for OOI. Note that numbering used is for reference purposes only and does not imply any prioritization.

1. The members of the audience felt that an economic analysis should have been included in the Draft Site-Specific Environmental Assessment (Draft SSEA). This is a comment for the draft SSEA. The audience suggested that the analysis look at scenarios from the 0.5 nautical mile (nm) buffer zone to restriction of the Pioneer Array mooring footprint, and potential fishing gear losses.
2. Several fishermen commented on their lack of trust for federal agencies.
3. Some members of the audience want written assurances and/or legal guarantees that the Pioneer Array will not result in fishing restrictions.
4. It was noted that the 0.5 nm buffer zone around each of the seven mooring sites is requested based on the scope of the mooring lines. While OOI is estimating a 0.5 nm buffer, many expressed the concern that negative interactions with the moorings on the part of commercial fishing vessels (e.g., gear entanglements) could result in a full closure of the area to fishing by the US Coast Guard. There is also concern with the potential for fines associated with entanglement. Audience members asked that the US Coast Guard provide documentation that they will not shut down the affected area.
5. There was a question as to whether OOI moorings would have break-away tackle to mitigate gear snagging or prevent capsizing of snagged vessels.
6. Audience members felt that the OOI team did not reach out to them early enough in the project planning process. It was requested that NSF establish a separate committee for fishermen.

7. Concerns and questions were raised about impacts to marine mammals. It was explained that the Draft Site-Specific Environmental Assessment and final document will address the comments received during the comment period.
8. Community members requested that state and federal agencies be invited to the public meetings. It was noted by Jean McGovern that other federal and state agencies were invited to the meeting; however, none of the invited federal agency representatives attended.
9. There was a request that there be a comment period for the Final SSEA; however, Jean McGovern stated that she could not make that decision but she would discuss with NSF legal counsel. The Final SSEA will be available to the public.
10. There was some concern about interactions between the gliders and the commercial fishermen, especially trawlers. Glider activity has been on-going in this area for over 10 years. Al Plueddemann noted that WHOI has experience operating gliders without adverse interactions with the fishing community, but has not yet operated 6 gliders in a heavily fished area. It was noted that if a glider is caught in a net, the fishermen can just put the glider back in the water. If it is found that gliders are being repeatedly caught or run over by vessels, then the OOI team would adjust the glider operating parameters to reduce negative interactions.
11. A suggestion was made to develop an agreement with NSF stating that NSF would be willing to modify infrastructure, locations, and missions to minimize interaction with fishing vessels gear and vessels. It was explained that the micro-siting process is being used to address these concerns.
12. It was felt that the moorings will be most impacted by mobile gear; mobile gear fishermen work throughout the water column along contour depths. There may be times when 20-30 trawlers are working the area. This is usually in the winter months when weather is bad and possible impact to OOI infrastructure would be greatest. Several attendees suggested alternate locations both in the gray box and outside the gray box. These suggestions were made during the poster sessions and during the public meeting portion.
13. The suggestion was made to move the Pioneer Array to a different part of the shelf. The micro-siting science requirements and process was reviewed again. The letter sent to the community indicating the micro-siting within the gray box area of Figure 1 was reviewed. The question of the possibility of reducing the number of sites or exploring other rearrangement of the Pioneer Array was posed.
14. It was noted that many of the fishermen have extensive temperature data from within the region and have worked cooperatively with NOAA to collect/share temperature and other collected data. Additionally, fishermen were interested in funding for or research into species-specific acoustic signal signatures to help the fishermen reduce by-catch. This is the kind of research fostered by the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation.

Actions:

1. NSF will address the comments related to the Draft Site-Specific Environmental Assessment as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. A comment about the economic analysis was received during the comment period and this will be addressed. Marine mammal comments were also received and they will be addressed in the final document.
2. The project will investigate the alternative locations within the gray box in preparation for on-going micro-siting discussions.
3. Micro-siting public meetings will continue as a series of public meetings. As this is a federal project, all meetings must be open to the public; NSF will not establish a separate committee. NSF wants to assure that all members of the public are invited to participate.
4. The announcement for the next meeting will be established once the proposed site locations are investigated and ready to present. We are anticipating that we can be ready by November 15 or 16. Notification of the next meeting will be done via the OOI website (oceanobservatories.org).
5. NSF is stating that the agency has no interest in seeing fishing areas closed by deploying OOI, and will continue to emphasize this point with its US Coast Guard contacts, state officials, and the public. A 0.5 nm diameter buffer around these moorings will be requested. NSF will contact the US Coast Guard to get a first person, referenced answer to the questions about the affected area.
6. The OOI website (oceanobservatories.org) will be used to communicate with the community. Public meeting notices, meeting summaries, and associated correspondence will be posted on this site.

Public Meeting - URI Coastal Institute
October 5, 2010

Community Participants:

1. Robert Campanale, Narragansett, RI
2. Chris McGuire
3. Bonnie Spinazzola, Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen's Association, Bedford, NH
4. Jameson Risser, Wakefield, RI
5. Norbert Stamps, Charlestown, RI
6. John Curzake, Wakefield, RI
7. William J Mulvey, Narragansett, RI
8. Richard Fuka, Rhode Island Fisherman's Alliance, East Greenwich, RI
9. Lanny Dellinger, Rhode Island Lobstermen's Association, Wakefield, RI
10. Fred Mattera, Narragansett, RI
11. GM Garrett, Westport, MA
12. Grant Moore, Broadbill Fishing Inc, Westport, MA
13. Kathryn Ford, MA Division of Marine Fisheries, New Bedford, MA
14. Dave Preble, New England Fishery Management Council, Newburyport, MA
15. Todd Sutton, Westerly, RI
16. Jan Margesan, Brewster, MA
17. Jenny Margesan, Brewster, MA
18. Glen Gawarkiewicz, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, Woods Hole, MA
19. Roy Campanale, Narragansett, RI
20. Tina Jackson, American Alliance of Fishermen and their Communities, Wakefield, RI
21. Buck Briggs, Wakefield, RI
22. Bob Ballou, RI Department of Environmental Management, Jamestown, RI
23. Christa Bank, University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, New Bedford, MA
24. Bill McCann, Wareham, MA
25. John Reardon, New Bedford, MA
26. Michelle Backman, New England Fishery Management Council, Newburyport, MA
27. Ian Parente, Little Compton, RI
28. Glenn Westcott, Narragansett, RI
29. Mike Marchetti, Eastern New England Scallop Association, Wakefield, RI
30. John Moore, Newport, RI
31. Diana Puleston, Ocean State Lobster, Wakefield, RI
32. Donald Fox, Wakefield, RI
33. Tom Williams