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Marine Policy Seminar
Fall 2013

Sea Level Rise Planning and Policy in the State of Delaware

“Because of its location, low average elevation, and dependence on the coast, Delaware is particularly vulnerable to the effects of rising sea levels including loss of low-lying land and structures, saltwater intrusion into ground and surface waters, and increased coastal flooding from storm events.”

– Delaware Sea Level Advisory Committee, *Preparing for Tomorrow's High Tide: Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment for the State of Delaware* (July 2012)

Sea level rise represents a significant threat to Delaware's coastline and its citizens. The Sea Level Rise Technical Workgroup, established by Delaware's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) and comprised of scientists from several agencies throughout the state of Delaware, has determined scenarios for sea level rise on the state's coastline over the course of the century. The group gave a low scenario of a .5 meter sea level rise and a high scenario of 1.5 sea level rise between now and 2100. Even with a scenario on the lower end of the spectrum, rising seas will present several problems to natural resources, residents' homes, infrastructure, and much more.

Several groups in Delaware, including the Delaware Sea Level Advisory Committee (mentioned above and comprised of members of numerous state agencies), have begun to plan for sea level rise. That being said, legal and planning improvements that could have strengthened adaptation measures have been challenged or questioned by conservative and industry groups. How do stakeholders make judgments about risks for events that will unfold over the decades? Is risk a prominent part of the decision-making process for state actors?

This presentation will briefly outline the problem of sea level rise in Delaware, describe the stakeholders in the sea level rise policy process in the state, and suggests ways in which at look at policy planning through the lens of risk management can contribute to further research on sea level rise policy.