

Environment Council of Rhode Island

Public Statement on Rhode Island's Response to Climate Change

ADOPTED April 7, 2014

The Environment Council of Rhode Island is a coalition of over 60 Rhode Island environmental organizations with a combined membership of over 45,000. The Environment Council of Rhode Island's mission is to serve as an effective and united voice for developing and advocating policies and laws that protect and enhance the environment.

Climate change poses significant threats to Rhode Island's health, economy, and environment. Several initiatives, including the Executive Climate Change Council and the Resilient RI Act, have been proposed in recent months in order to address Rhode Island's growing vulnerability to climate change. The Environmental Council of Rhode Island applauds these and other efforts to address climate change.

In order to inform these and other statewide efforts, the Environment Council of Rhode Island has composed a list of recommendations that should be incorporated into any state effort if it is to adequately address the great challenges climate change poses to our state.

Part 1: Agency guidance and coordination:

Recommendation 1: Develop statutory language to continue the work of the Executive Climate Change Council, coordinating statewide action on climate adaptation and mitigation.

Recommendation 2: Establish an independent climate science board to guide the Executive Climate Change Council. This board should include agency staff and academics with expertise on mitigation and adaptation issues.

Recommendation 3: Build staff capacity in agencies in key areas to allow rapid state planning for climate-resilient development. Future state budgets should add full time jobs (FTEs) for critical climate change work at the Department of Environmental Management, Department of Administration and the Office of Energy Resources and other state agencies and quasi-public corporations.

Recommendation 4: Create mechanisms for strong community engagement in confronting this issue, integrating public comment and participation throughout the planning processes.

Part 2: Building a Resilient Economy:

Recommendation 5: Set baseline energy use and greenhouse gas emissions levels based on internationally-utilized 1990 levels and agree on scientifically-adequate targets, including interim goals. The Environment Council of Rhode Island supports the

greenhouse gas reduction targets in the Resilient Rhode Island Act (HB 7904): 25% by 2025, 50% by 2035, 85% by 2050.

Recommendation 6: Measure and require efficiency improvements: These will drive job creation and long-term savings from fossil fuel costs, one of the largest drains from the Rhode Island economy.

Recommendation 7: Adopt consumption-based emissions accounting: These are fairer to Rhode Island, which has become a net exporter of electricity, and show the state has reduced emissions below 1990 levels and is projected with “business as usual” to reach 14% reductions by 2020.

Recommendation 8: Develop sector-based emissions reductions approaches: The Environment Council of Rhode Island proposes priority actions such as changing financing tools for efficiency and renewables investments; targeted efforts with federal support in addressing inefficient housing in older and poorer communities; investing in public transportation; exploring policies including incentives to combine heat and power, expanding the renewable energy standard, expanding the use of biodiesel, and addressing natural gas leaks.

Part 3: Reducing Vulnerability, Protecting the Economy and the Most Vulnerable

Recommendation 9: Disaggregate data collection based on socioeconomic status: To elevate fairness and equity, and target communities that stand to benefit the most, the planning process should take into consideration income status, race and ethnicity throughout the planning process.

Recommendation 10: Develop and implement a statewide plan to reduce human and natural vulnerability and build resilience. This should include attention to green infrastructure, low impact development, adaptive management and economic diversification, among many other strategies.

Recommendation 11: Conduct review of legal and executive tools available to avoid building and rebuilding in zones likely to be affected by imminent sea level rise and storm surge.

Recommendation 12: Identify and protect priority natural areas and features that protect Rhode Island communities and are central to creating the sense of place and quality of life in Rhode Island.

Recommendation 13: Require climate projections to be considered formally in the production and implementation of urban and community planning documents.

With these steps, Rhode Island stands to meaningfully protect and support our communities and environment in the face of climate change.