

**Terms of Reference**  
**Gulf Hypoxia Monitoring Stakeholder Committee**  
3 September 2007

**Background**

Hypoxia is one of the many symptoms of nutrient overloads to coastal ecosystems. Sustained or recurring low oxygen conditions can lead to faunal mortalities, food web alterations, loss of habitat, and impacts to fisheries. The largest zone of oxygen-depleted coastal waters in the United States, and the second largest for the world's coastal ocean, is in the northern Gulf of Mexico off Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi. The *Action Plan for Reducing, Mitigating, and Controlling Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico* calls for a voluntary and incentive-based management plan that is founded on science and lays out a strategy to reduce the size of the hypoxic zone. The *Action Plan* cited a critical scientific need for an expansion of monitoring efforts to better characterize the impact of nutrient loading from the Mississippi River watershed and other factors on hypoxic zone dynamics.

*A Summit on Long-Term Monitoring of the Gulf of Mexico Hypoxic Zone: Developing the Implementation Plan for an Operational Observation System* was held in January 2007. The Summit convened key officials, researchers, data users, and coastal managers to develop the foundation for a long-term comprehensive monitoring plan for the hypoxic zone that can be implemented in the near-term. The main management driver for the *Summit* was the need to provide sufficient monitoring data to ensure that management is adequately informed in efforts to reduce the hypoxic zone to an annual average size of 5,000 km<sup>2</sup> by 2015, down from the 2002-2006 average of 15,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The *Summit's* targeted outcome was an implementation plan that details the scientific, technical, operational, and financial plans for a 5-year (2007-2011) cooperative monitoring program for the northern Gulf of Mexico hypoxic zone.

**Gulf Hypoxia Monitoring Stakeholder Committee**

The Gulf Hypoxia Monitoring Stakeholder Committee is established to provide guidance to the Steering Committee for the Gulf Hypoxia Monitoring Implementation Plan on (1) the specific management questions and key management decisions of stakeholders relative to hypoxia, (2) the needs of the stakeholder communities for monitoring, measurements, and products related to hypoxia, and (3) the priorities for education and outreach activities that are necessary to make the U.S. public aware of what hypoxia is and how it can impact them.

The Stakeholder Committee will consist of a broad range of constituents and expertise, including representatives from resource management agencies, ocean observing systems, commercial and recreational fishing, tourism, education and outreach, modeling, and data management. Representatives from the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force, Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA), and Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System Regional Association (GCOOS-RA) will provide the initial portal to stakeholder groups that are identified for involvement.

The Stakeholder Committee will conduct its business through email and teleconference and with inputs from its Working Groups. Working Groups will conduct their business mainly through email and teleconference, with possible face-to-face meetings if necessary. Initially two working groups are established; others may be formed as necessary.

The Resource Management Working Group, which will consist of representatives of federal and state resource management agencies (e.g., Task Force members; TX, LA, MS, AL, and FL State agency representatives; and representatives from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, and/or the NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center), will provide advice on what are (1) the specific management questions and key management decisions relative to hypoxia for their respective groups, (2) the monitoring and modeling needs to address these questions and decisions, and (3) the extant monitoring and observing capabilities of their respective groups that contribute to data or products on hypoxia.

The Education and Outreach Working Group, which will consist of representatives of the GOMA Environmental Education Network, the GCOOS-RA Education and Outreach Council, and others identified by the Steering Committee, will provide advice on what education and outreach activities would reach the broad U.S. population, the farm-belt population, and the Gulf coast population.