

## Hearing Officer's Report on the Public Hearing and Testimony Submitted on the Update of a Sea Level Change Scenario

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Submitted to: Robert J. Klee, Commissioner, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

December 21, 2018

In accordance with Public Act 18-82, the University of Connecticut shall update and publish the sea level change scenarios published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in Technical Report OAR CPO-1, and the Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection shall publish the sea level change scenario for the state. Such sea level change scenario shall guide municipal and state planning in the manner described in Public Act 18-82, including its use in the following planning documents:

1. Municipal evacuation or hazard mitigation plans;
2. The state's civil preparedness plan and program;
3. Municipal plans of conservation and development; and
4. Revisions to the state's plan of conservation and development.

The Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA) at the University of Connecticut has updated the sea level change scenarios as required in Public Act 18-82 and recommends a sea level change scenario that anticipates that sea level will be 0.5 m (1 foot 8 inches) higher than the national tidal datum in Long Island Sound by 2050. The analysis supporting this recommendation is available in the draft report entitled [Sea Level Rise in Connecticut by James O'Donnell, available online at CIRCA's website Sea Level Rise Projections for the State of Connecticut | Draft Report Released | Connecticut Institute for Resilience & Climate Adaptation \(CIRCA\)](#).

Prior to such scenario taking effect for the purposes described by Public Act 18-82, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and CIRCA shall conduct one public hearing concerning such update.

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) held the required public hearing on Tuesday, October 2, 2018, at 6 p.m., in the Gina McCarthy Auditorium, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, 79 Elm St., Hartford CT.

Notice of this public hearing was posted on the DEEP's website and Published in the CT Post, Hartford Courant, Waterbury Republican American, New Haven Register, The Day and the Stamford Advocate on September 4, 2018. DEEP also received written comments on sea level change scenario during the period ending October 5, 2018.

James O'Donnell, Professor of Marine Sciences at UConn and Executive Director of CIRCA gave a brief overview of the Draft Report Sea Level Rise in Connecticut which was followed by public comments by all members of the public who had signed up.

The hearing format did not allow for questions to be answered immediately on the record; however, DEEP staff and Professor O'Donnell were available in to informally answer questions.

After a full review of the record of public hearing and comments submitted on the Draft Report Sea Level Rise in Connecticut, I present the following Report. This Report includes the principal considerations raised at the public hearing and in written comments regarding the Draft Report Sea Level Rise in Connecticut and DEEP staff's response to all comments.

### **Principal Considerations Raised at the Public Hearing in Response to Draft Report on Sea Level Rise in Connecticut, and DEEP's Response**

The following table provides a summary of comments received in writing or at the public hearing.

#### **Comment #1**

**Commenter:** Victoria Hoyland, The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Comments were presented verbally and in writing.

**Comment Summary:** The commenter expressed support for the recommendation by CIRCA of the sea level change scenario of 0.5 meters by 2050. CIRCA has provided a sound and valuable report on the analysis behind its reasonable and moderate recommendation. The recommended scenario reflects that sea level change varies geographically and over time. The Nature Conservancy assists communities with planning for sea level rise and has developed a coastal resilience computer tool with assistance from NASA Goddard Institute of Space Studies which used a very similar sea level change gradient of 19.4 inches by 2050. TNC urges adoption of this scenario and continued planning by the State and municipalities to prepare for the impacts of significantly higher sea levels.

**DEEP Response:** DEEP appreciates the work of The Nature Conservancy assisting Connecticut municipalities to plan for adaptation to sea level rise and its comments in support of the report.

#### **Comment #2**

**Commenter:** Dick Dmochowski, Fairfield Flood and Erosion Control Board

**Comment Summary:** The commenter stressed the importance of decadal review of the sea level rise projection because the science is advancing quickly. The 30-year outlook should keep moving because infrastructure project life spans often exceed 30 years. DEEP and the legislature are urged not to cut funding for this decadal review and other studies needed maintain knowledge in the future.

**DEEP Response:** DEEP agrees that updates to sea level rise projections at a decadal or even higher frequency is important.

## **Principal Considerations Raised in Written Comments in Response to the Draft Report on Sea Level Rise in Connecticut and DEEP's Response.**

### **Comment #1**

**Commenter:** Rick Newton, Mystic, Connecticut; submitted September 9, 2018.

**Comment Summary:** The commenter notes that Rhode Island recently updated projections to plan for 3.25 feet in 2050 which is a difference of 1.45 feet from the west side of the Pawcatuck River to the east side in Stonington in 2050. He questions why is Connecticut is assuming a lower level of risk.

**DEEP Response:** The recommended sea level rise projection of 0.5m by 2050 is reflective of local Long Island Sound conditions. Professor O'Donnell's comparison of four approaches to projecting the upper bound of the range of likely future sea levels in 2050 concluded that 0.5m was in the middle of the four alternatives. A higher value, like that quoted by the questioner, though not impossible, is not thought to be very likely at the moment. The 0.5m level, together with a review and possible revision at 10 year (at least) intervals, is both a prudent and a practical strategy.

### **Comment #2**

**Commenter:** Claire Coleman, Climate & Energy Attorney, Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound; submitted October 5, 2018.

**Comment Summary:** CIRCA has provided a robust scientific analysis to recommend a reliable projection of changes in sea level over the next few decades. CFE supports establishing the regulatory mechanism to ensure that CIRCA's science-based scenarios and projection are incorporated into sea level rise planning in Connecticut. CFE urges adoption of the scenarios and standards proposed by CIRCA.

**DEEP Response:** DEEP appreciates the support for the recommended scenario and will continue to work with CIRCA and other interested stakeholders to develop guidance for implementation of sea level rise planning in Connecticut.

### **Comment #3**

**Commenter:** Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns; submitted October 5, 2018.

**Comment Summary:** COST acknowledges the importance of updating the state's sea level rise projections and notes the efforts of Connecticut towns to assess, plan for and undertake measures to increase resiliency. The commenter makes five specific comments seeking greater clarity about how the sea level rise scenarios will be implemented in accordance with PA 18-82 as it pertains to: updating municipal planning documents, DEEP's consideration of projects on the Priority List for Clean Water Fund grants, update to municipal coastal boundaries as required by the Coastal Management Acts, requirements relative to proposed developments in coastal hazard areas, and general assistance to municipalities with implementation

**DEEP Response:** The purpose of this hearing process is to hear concerns and receive input regarding the proposed sea level rise scenario. It is not intended to consider aspects of implementation in accordance with PA 18-82. Nonetheless, DEEP recognizes there is a need for clarifying guidance regarding implementation of the sea level rise scenario in general, and specifically with regard to the requirements of PA 18-82. DEEP will continue to work with CIRCA and other interested stakeholders to develop guidance for implementation of sea level rise planning in Connecticut. (It should be noted that the commenter appeared to misunderstand the requirements of PA 18-82, which does not change municipal requirements regarding the coastal boundary or consideration of development in coastal hazard areas.)