

Analysis of the Implementation of the  
Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Program

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## Introduction

During the late 1960's there emerged a growing concern over the degradation of the nation's vast coastline. Problems such as the loss of wetlands and estuaries, overfishing, oil spills, and deteriorating water quality received increasing attention from the public, the media, and Congress. In 1967 Vice President Hubert Humphrey introduced the concept of coastal zone management. In 1969, the Stratton Commission elaborated upon this new concept. The Commission suggested that the coast could best be protected through a management scheme which established the states as the primary regulators of the coastal zone. As a result of this surge of interest in coastal issues, Congress passed the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) in 1972. 1972.<sup>1</sup>

The CZMA is representative of what is called the "quiet revolution" of the 1960's.<sup>2</sup> The states and the federal government began demanding more control over land and water use planning. Historically, land and water use authority has been left to "local businesses, property owners, and governments. At least in theory, the rule has been the less government control, the better."<sup>3</sup> The piecemeal and uncontrolled, manner in which land use decisions have been made at the local level have produced adverse

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<sup>1</sup> Armstrong, J. and Ryner, P., Ocean Management: A New Perspective, p.59.

<sup>2</sup> Mazmanian, D. and Sabatier, P., Implementation and Public Policy, p.273.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.274.

environmental impacts over the long-run. It has become obvious that comprehensive land and water use plans which look beyond local interests are necessary for preventing the deterioration of land and water resources. The CZMA is an attempt to stimulate the formulation of management programs designed to protect the coastal environment.

The goals of the CZMA are fourfold. The most obvious objective of the Act is to protect and enhance the coastal environment. A second goal is to increase the potential use of coastal lands and waters, while simultaneously preserving coastal resources. Thirdly, the Act provides a mechanism for resolving conflicts between the various interests who wish to utilize coastal resources. Finally, the fourth goal of the Act is to increase inter-governmental cooperation with the intent of upgrading the efficiency and predictability of coastal policy.

The CZMA, however, does differ from other federal legislation designed to protect the environment. For example, the Clean Air Act spells out federal policies with which each individual state must comply. The CZMA, on the other hand, stipulates that each coastal state must devise its own policies and procedures for managing its coastal zone. In addition, it is not mandatory for each coastal state to establish a management program. However, states are only eligible for federal monies if they initiate such a program. The CZMA, then, establishes only the broadest of federal guidelines for the regulation of the coastal zone. The primary authority to manage the coastal zone lies with the states.

In Rhode Island a coastal zone management program has been in effect for twelve years. The success or failure of the implementation of this program has important implications for the coastal environment. The state's coastal resources provide Rhode Islanders with a whole array of indispensable services, supporting recreation, industry, tourism, agriculture, and the important coastal ecosystem. As Rhode Islanders' demands on coastal resources begin to compete and interfere with one another, the resources are subject to more demands than they can accommodate. Consequently, it becomes crucial to effectively manage the state's coastal resources. The Coastal Resources Management Program was created, charging a single regulatory body, the Coastal Resources Management Council, with the task of regulating activities in the coastal zone. An analysis of the implementation of this program will help to reveal the extent to which it has attained its goals.

Policy implementation has begun to receive increasing scholarly attention. The study of implementation is important because it augments our understanding of what happens to a program after it has been enacted. Recently, Mazmanian and Sabatier have presented a formal framework for analyzing the implementation process. The hypothesis upon which the the authors framework is based is that the policies formulated by an implementing agency are "essentially a function of the interaction between legal structure and political process."<sup>4</sup> Mazmanian and Sabatier accept the view that

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<sup>4</sup> Mazmanian and Sabatier, p.30.