

**Participation in Policy Making:  
Case Study Observations  
and Options for the  
EPA National Estuary Program**

by

**Marie Sylvia O'Neill**

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## ABSTRACT

The U.S. Congress directed the Environmental Protection Agency to establish a National Estuary Program (NEP) in 1985. Program participants were charged with preparing comprehensive conservation and management plans (CCMPs) to protect and improve water quality and enhance the living resources of estuaries identified as nationally significant. The EPA guidelines for establishing the management conferences who prepare these CCMPs are flexible and NEP programs have structured their committees differently.

In this thesis, I describe the committee structures of the Buzzard's Bay Project, the Long Island Sound Study, and the Narragansett Bay Project (NBP). I present the results of interviews conducted with several members of the NBP Management Committee, a particularly interesting case study as this committee is unique in including both regulatory officials and citizen and interest group representatives.

I conclude that this broad representation presents some obstacles to successful group decision making, given the constraints facing the NBP Management Committee and staff. I present two options for the role of the Management Committee in relation to the NBP staff: a "watchdog" role, where the Management Committee is advisory and members are concerned mostly with protecting their own interests, and that of a "seeing eye dog", where the Management Committee serves a guiding function to the NBP, and members have an allegiance to the success of the CCMP deliberations. For any NEP participant, a committee structure which enables the project staff to present information specific to the audience's needs and training is the best model for group decision making, because meaningful participation in the CCMP development process is best achieved when individuals are well informed and committed to the success of the policy recommendations..