

Coordinated effort begins to stop sewage dumping in Nantucket Sound

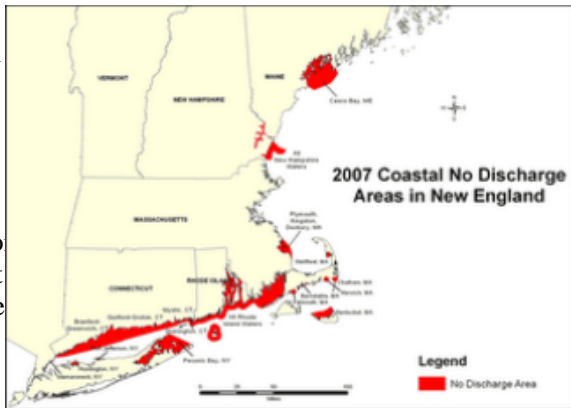
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By Jack Coleman, capecodtoday.com reporter

HYANNIS - A drive to designate the state waters of Nantucket Sound as a No Discharge Area (NDA) where pleasure boats and passenger ferries can no longer discharge sewage has begun.

Nearly two dozen people turned out Thursday morning for an informational meeting at Barnstable Town Hall on working

toward acquiring an NDA designation for Nantucket Sound within the state's three-mile jurisdiction.



"We're trying to get a sense from this meeting if the designation is desired," said **Scott McKenna**, Cape and Islands' coordinator for the state Office of Coastal Zone Management, which arranged for the meeting to be held. Attending the meeting were state, federal and town officials, Cape harbor masters, representatives from environmental non-profits and local residents.

The issue of sewage dumping in Nantucket Sound gained traction in recent months since it was [first reported by Moses Calouro at capecodtoday.com](#) last May, followed by a series of stories by capecodtoday correspondent **Sam Pearsall**.

No Discharge Area designations are already in place in Wellfleet, Chatham, Harwich, Hyannis, Falmouth, Nantucket, all of Buzzards Bay and the Connecticut coastline, Narragansett Sound and the inland waters of Rhode Island, and the waters surrounding Block Island. An effort to designate all of Cape Cod Bay as an NDA has been underway for two years, McKenna said.

As defined in a fact sheet distributed at Thursday's meeting, a No Discharge Area (NDA) is "an area of coastal or inland waters where all discharges of boat septage are prohibited regardless of treatment. The federal regulations pertaining to NDAs are found at 40 CFR - 140.4(a). The process for designating an NDA requires actions at the local, state and federal levels."

Attending Thursday's meetings were harbor masters from Barnstable, Yarmouth and Falmouth, local residents, staffers from environmental non-profits such as Nantucket Soundkeeper, an offshoot of the anti-Cape Wind Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, and a representative from Hy-Line Cruises.

As described during the meeting, the process of receiving NDA designation can be time-consuming and unwieldy, involving a single town or city, a group of communities or the state applying to the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

EPA officials review the application, visit the site of the proposed designation, meet with state environmental officials and decide in favor of the submission if certain criteria are met: adequate pumpout facilities, an ongoing public education campaign and public support.

"That's what we're trying to do now, get a sense of that," said Stephen McKenna of the state Office of Coastal Zone Management.

Obtaining adequate funding for pumpout facilities, from a combination of private and public sources, could prove pivotal in receiving the designation.

If new or upgraded stations are needed, state and federal grants can help offset the costs. The state Division of Marine Fisheries administers Clean Vessel Act grant funding from the federal government that cover 75 percent of purchase and operation costs of pumpout facilities. The Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management office has a similar program, Coastal Pollutant Remediation, that provides money for facility design and installation.

How likely is that funding, asked **Eric Shufelt**, assistant harbormaster in Barnstable and manager of the town's four marinas.

Federal officials may decide to change the allocation formula in the future, warned **Scott Callahan** of Coastal Zone Management, with the state receiving less money as a result. "It might not benefit us in the same way in the future," Callahan said.

Sue Nickerson, representing Nantucket Soundkeeper, asked about the difference in cost between pumpout facilities for pleasure boats and commercial vessels.

That type of analysis has not yet been done for the towns on "the south side of the Cape," those facing Nantucket and Vineyard sounds, McKenna said. But based on work toward acquiring an NDA designation for Cape Cod Bay, "it's pretty significant," he said.

Whale-watch vessels out of Provincetown, McKenna pointed out, require "fast turnaround" between trips and "high volume" discharge.

Similar trips are made out of Plymouth Harbor, Callahan said, where Coastal Zone Management provided \$50,000 to the town for a pumpout facility. But the town footed part of the cost, laying the pipe and maintaining the facility. He estimated a cost of \$50,000 to \$100,000 for pumpout stations for larger commercial vessels but "closer to the high end."

Even if NDA designations were acquired for Cape Cod Bay and the state waters off the southern shore of Cape Cod, getting boaters and ferry operators to comply with the measure could be difficult.

Often when spills or accidents occur, Shufelt said, "the hard part is finding out what boat did it."

The best route is through educating the public, said Falmouth Harbormaster **Gregg Fraser**, a sentiment repeated several times during the meeting. Boaters entering Waquoit Bay see a large sign declaring its waters a No Discharge Zone, he pointed out.

"I don't think enforcement is ever going to be the way to

resolve this," Fraser said.

Hy-Line Cruises, represented at the meeting by **Martin Reilly**, supports "the concept of a No Discharge Zone in state waters, and we are also supportive of a No Discharge effort in federal waters."

Hy-Line ferries plying Nantucket Sound discharge untreated sewage into federal waters, while Steamship Authority vessels treat their waste before dumping it in the Sound. The Steamship Authority was not represented at Thursday's meeting.

Hy-Line officials have already met with State Senator **Robert O'Leary**, Reilly said, and are looking into acquiring state funding for a large pumpout facility needed for their vessels.

The next step in the process, McKenna said, would formation of a working group to coordinate efforts toward the designation, as being done for Cape Cod Bay.

[Nantucket Soundkeeper](#) volunteers have been collecting water samples around Nantucket Sound for data to be included in the NDA application.