

# Mid-Atlantic residents see ocean health as major economic issue

December 6 2017, by Karl Vilacoba

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Eight in 10 residents of Mid-Atlantic states believe the ocean and beaches are important to their economies, including 95 percent of those living in coastal communities. Eighty-three percent of residents living in

coastal communities believe that climate change is real—13 percentage points higher than a national survey taken by Monmouth University in 2015. Support for offshore oil and gas drilling plummeted from 46 percent in 2009 to 22 percent now among residents living closest to the coast.

These are some of the findings from a pair of survey reports released today by the Monmouth University Polling Institute (MUPI) and Urban Coast Institute (UCI). The surveys present the first region-wide snapshot of public opinion on ocean issues since the 2016 elections and offer a glimpse at how views have changed since major storms like Sandy and Irene impacted the Mid-Atlantic coast.

A regionwide survey was conducted with residents from Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia to gauge opinion of a wide range of coastal issues and elements of the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Action Plan, which was adopted in December of 2016 by the six states, federal agencies, tribal entities and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. A second survey was conducted specifically with year-round residents of Mid-Atlantic coastal communities that asked the same questions regarding ocean issues as a 2009 MUPI-UCI poll in order to track how opinions have changed over time among those living closest to the coast.

"The responses show that Mid-Atlantic residents see support for a healthy ocean as support for a healthy economy," UCI Director Tony MacDonald said. "They are broadly opposed to any actions they perceive as threats to the ocean and support government initiatives that would protect and improve it."

## **Mid-Atlantic Regionwide Survey**

The following are some of the findings of the regionwide survey

conducted with residents of the six Mid-Atlantic states:

- Only 1-in-3 Mid-Atlantic residents say they have either a great deal (11 percent) or some (24 percent) confidence in how the federal government will handle coastal management issues over the next few years, while 6-in-10 have just a little confidence (24 percent) or none at all (37 percent). About half have either a great deal (11 percent) or some confidence (40 percent) in their states on these issues, while a significant minority have just a little (27 percent) or no confidence (17 percent).
- Majorities of residents believe both the federal (59 percent) and state governments (51 percent) should be doing more to deal with the impacts of [sea level](#) rise.
- If federal funding were cut, a clear majority of residents (60 percent) would support their states taking over ocean health monitoring responsibilities even if it means their states' taxpayers will have to foot the bill.
- Just 26 percent support oil and gas drilling off the Atlantic coast, while 40 percent oppose it and 34 percent express no opinion. A majority (54 percent) say it would be a bad idea for the federal government to loosen recent restrictions on new drilling in parts of the Atlantic Ocean, while just 20 percent say it is a good idea.
- Nearly 6-in-10 (58 percent) support placing electricity-generating windmills off the Atlantic coast, 10 percent oppose it and 32 percent express no opinion.
- Only 32 percent say the government is doing an excellent or good job protecting coastal wetlands and wildlife habitats.
- About one-quarter (27 percent) say the government is doing an excellent or good job managing fish and other marine life and a similar number (26 percent) say the government is doing an excellent or good job collecting data that tracks the health of the ocean's ecosystem.
- Only 22 percent say the government is doing an excellent or [good](#)

- [job](#) managing growth and development in coastal communities.
  - Nearly all (90 percent) say it's important for the government to collect information and maintain databases that track the health of the oceans. The UCI is currently part of a team developing such a system, the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal ([portal.midatlanticocean.org](http://portal.midatlanticocean.org)).

## Mid-Atlantic Coastal Community Residents Survey

Below are some key findings from the survey of residents who live in the Mid-Atlantic region's coastal communities:

- More residents rate protecting the coastal and [ocean](#) environment as a high priority (81 percent) than improving public education (71 percent), improving the local economy and creating jobs (65 percent), lowering taxes (60 percent) and controlling growth and development (50 percent).
- Residents are more concerned today about the threat of sea level rise and storm risks than in 2009 (+19 points), with 60 percent now saying it is a very serious concern. The increase was highest among New Jersey residents (39 percent to 67 percent), followed by Delaware (39 percent to 60 percent), Virginia (34 percent to 48 percent), New York (49 percent to 59 percent) and Maryland (37 percent to 46 percent).
- Support for offshore wind farms has declined since 2009, with 72 percent (down 10 points) supporting windmills that are not visible from shore and 52 percent (down 15 points) supporting those that are visible from shore.
- Most (57 percent) residents say their communities are prepared to deal with the threats of sea level rise and coastal storms, while 40 percent say their towns are not prepared.

"Sandy clearly changed how coastal residents view the threats of climate

change and [sea level rise](#)," MacDonald said. "There is a much firmer acceptance of the warnings coming from the scientific community along with an expectation that government should be doing more about it."

The regionwide survey was conducted from Aug. 3 to 16 with 1,512 adult residents and has a  $\pm 2.5$  percent margin of error. The Mid-Atlantic coastal [survey](#) was conducted from April 26 to May 31 with 1,005 permanent residents of [coastal communities](#) and has a  $\pm 3.1$  percent margin of error.

Final reports for the statewide and coastal surveys are available at [www.monmouth.edu/uci](http://www.monmouth.edu/uci) .

Provided by Monmouth University

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