

The Blue Economy of Rhode Island

by Richard Hittinger



Blue Economy is the concept which encourages better stewardship of our ocean or “blue” resources which aims for improvement of human well being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.

Yes, Rhode Island is well positioned to be a leader in the burgeoning Blue Economy. We are the Ocean State. We have one of the best Oceanographic institutions in the world at URI Graduate School of Oceanography (GSO) and we have the nation’s first offshore wind installation.

I hope we can take this natural trend that is already in place and take a leading role in what is quickly becoming one of the world’s fastest growing economic sectors.

There are many here in Rhode Island who use the ocean and our beautiful Narragansett Bay to create our livelihood. Boat building, marinas, marine service business, sailing- related operations, commercial fishing, recreational fishing, tackle businesses, aquaculture, submarine construction, ocean acoustic and electronic businesses, and many more industries that already support thousands of Rhode Island jobs and provide billions of dollars in economic output.



So yes, we are already enjoying the benefits of the Blue Economy. What we need now is careful planning to assure that we do the right things to promote wise use of our ocean, bay, and the existing Blue Economy that we have in place to position Rhode Island as a leader moving forward.

One part of the Blue Economy that I have participated in for over 40 years is fishing. I am primarily a recreational fisherman, but also do some commercial fishing.

I came to Rhode Island to attend the URI Graduate School of Oceanography more than 45 years ago and, after finishing my Masters work, I decided to stay in Rhode Island largely because of the natural environment here and our tremendous saltwater fishing. I gave up the lure of higher pay in other areas during my career and I have stayed in this higher tax situation after retirement in order to enjoy the quality of life here in the Ocean State.

If we develop the Blue Economy properly we will continue to attract talent that will help push us ahead of other competitors for ocean business.

My point in this brief article is not to describe all of the ways that I think we should promote clusters of ocean related businesses or to detail where our Economic Development Corporation should invest seed money, but rather to point out that recreational saltwater fishing is a large economic contributor and all planning for Blue Economy development must be sure to protect this existing part of the Rhode Island economy.

According to Federal Government (National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration – NOAA) figures, in 2016 **recreational fishing contributed over \$412 million to the RI economy** and supported over 4,000 jobs. In comparison commercial fishing supported over 5,000 jobs and generated \$332 million during that same year. But can we grow these numbers to be even more significant?

The Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association has met with many recreational anglers to find out how recreational fishing can be improved and grow. The one answer that comes back repeatedly is that we need to make it easier for anglers to have success at catching fish. This means increasing the populations of fish in areas where recreational anglers go fishing.

The bottom line is that while developing the new Blue Economy we must be sure to protect the existing Blue Economy including both commercial and recreational fishing. This should include steps to not only protect fish populations at current levels, but to *grow the populations of fish to greater levels*, ensuring that all fishers have a higher likelihood of having success while out fishing.

Let’s include fishing trips for our grandchildren in our plans for a new Blue Economy in RI.

I ask Governor Raimondo to include all ocean and bay stakeholders in the process while developing a plan to move Rhode Island forward as a leader in the new Blue Economy.

Capt. Rich Hittinger is a lifelong fisherman and the 1st Vice President of the RI Saltwater Anglers Association

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