

Virginia Sea Grant Program
Virginia Institute of Marine Science
School of Marine Science

January 4, 2011

Dorn Carlson
Federal Program Officer
National Sea Grant Program
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

RE: Virginia Sea Grant Response to SRT Final Report, July 7-8, 2010 Visit

Dear Mr. Carlson,

On behalf of Virginia Sea Grant (VASG), I would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to you and the entire Site Review Team (SRT) for your hard work and dedication during and after the July 7-8, 2010 SRT visit with the VASG program. VASG was pleased to see many of the SRT Findings that clearly recognized VASG's progress, including for example, that VASG "has successfully addressed significant issues from the previous PAT review and other external reviews involving strategic planning, governance and effective use of advisory and oversight bodies. Other issues from these previous reviews have also been addressed, including communication consolidation, and improved branding." (pg 7)

The SRT Final Report contained three recommendations. Below is a summary of VASG's immediate actions, analysis, and intent in regards to the three recommendations.

Recommendation 1: *The charter that the Program is working on should be in as final a draft form as possible for inclusion in College Status application. The charter should clarify Program structure, goals and objectives, institutional partner relationships, roles and membership principles of the advisory and oversight bodies and should address how transparency and inclusion of the Program will be maintained.*

VASG remains committed to developing a comprehensive multi-institutional charter, laying out broad organizational goals and objectives, partner relationships, as well as clarity in operating principles and procedures with the multi-organizational VASG program. We fully expect the final institutional charter and organizational operating procedures will meet the expectations identified by the SRT.

We have fulfilled an informal suggestion made by the SRT during the July 8th debriefing meetings and have solicited examples of charters, MOUs, and other partner documentation from the national Sea Grant network. Very few programs have documents at the level of detail discussed by VASG and the SRT, with only four providing sample materials. While VASG believes these samples, along with others we have collected from outside of the Sea Grant network, are helpful frameworks to review, our multi-institutional partner relationships and multi-organizational operating procedures demand a charter and operating procedures that are tailored to the landscape of Virginia. We believe we are well prepared to

continue to develop and finalize a charter and operating protocols. Our next steps toward developing a charter include:

- Further solicitations of sample charters, MOUs, and partnership documentation.
- Circulation of a draft institutional charter and organizational operating procedures to Research and Education Advisory Committee (REAC) members and key leaders in partner institutions.
- Targeted invitation of high-ranking administrators at partner institutions (i.e., prospective Policy & Oversight Board members) for meetings designed to solicit comments and seek agreement on the charter and operating procedures.

It is not possible to identify a specific end-date for completion of the charter and organizational procedures, since the charter needs to include new organizational incentives for partner institutions (see response to Recommendation 3 below). However, VASG would hope to complete negotiations within a year, a goal which results in a substantial change in our intent and original timeline for restoring College Status certification.

As you know, VASG has very keen interests in obtaining College Status and hopes the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) shares this interest. VASG had originally intended to initiate the development of a charter in parallel with the submission of a letter of intent to apply for College Status. A September 2010 letter of intent was drafted, consistent with the December 2005 Topical Advisory Team (TAT) Report conclusion that stated, “as soon as possible, the Director of the National Sea Grant Office should initiate a process that will lead to the recertification of a Sea Grant College in the Commonwealth of Virginia under an organization capable of overseeing and promoting the Program and supporting and promoting the Sea Grant mission” (pg 5). Nevertheless, VASG will accept the recommendation of the SRT and defer our request for College Status until such time as a charter is in near final form.

Summary of VASG’s response to Recommendation 1:

- VASG is developing a detailed multi-institutional charter and multi-organizational operating procedures.
- VASG accepts the SRT recommendation and elects to defer the request for College Status consideration until such time as the charter is nearly complete.

Recommendation 2: Consider the pros and cons of having a direct reporting relationship of the head of MAS [VIMS Marine Advisory Services] to the Sea Grant Director.

In existence for over 70 years, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) has a legally mandated three-part mission to conduct interdisciplinary research in coastal ocean and estuarine science; educate students and citizens; and provide advisory service to policy makers, industry, and the public in Virginia, the nation, and the world. Within VIMS, the Marine Advisory Services (MAS) center is a key component of this advisory function. While all VIMS faculty and scientists are from time-to-time involved in providing expert advice to the Commonwealth, the MAS is home to staff whose sole responsibility is for advisory programs on behalf of Commonwealth citizenry, marine industries, and government. The MAS currently reports to the VIMS Director of Research and Advisory Services (DRAS), who ensures that MAS fulfills its statutory role to provide advisory services for the Commonwealth. DRAS is a member of the VASG institutional advisory committee (i.e., REAC). This arrangement is consistent with other Sea Grant programs in the national network; for example, see the attached organizational charts from Florida and Rhode Island compared to Virginia.

With this context in mind, VASG and VIMS have considered the pros and cons of changing the reporting relationship of MAS, altering the current sub-contractual relationship with VASG to a direct reporting arrangement. While there are drawbacks and opportunities with both organizational design options,

VASG has determined that at this time a change is not warranted and MAS (and Virginia Tech AREC Hampton Lab) will remain sub-contractors. Further, given the SRT's acknowledgement of the achievements in the VASG extension and education programming, we are confident that leaving the organizational reporting unchanged at this time will not harm the program's overall productivity.

At the same time, NSGO should be aware that VASG's engagement with MAS enables input into MAS's agenda. VASG and MAS are committed to an open, transparent and inclusive partnership, with each engaged in the other's planning and operations. For example, a representative from VASG and MAS sit on each other's program and project management committees (i.e., VASG's executive management team [EMT], and MAS's advisory boards for Clean Marina, Fisheries Resource Grant Program). VASG holds monthly programmatic consultation and coordination meetings of its EMT comprised of VASG Director, Assistant Director for Research, Communication Center Director, Education Program Leader, and the Extension Program Leader. Recently, meetings between the VASG Communication Center and MAS were initiated to ensure production cost efficiencies, and appropriate branding and cost sharing, particularly with regards to the web-site. Further, VASG provides MAS and Virginia Tech AREC Hampton Lab with annual contracts, supplying an opportunity for annual negotiations and adaptation to emerging coastal and marine resource issues.

In addition, VASG will institute measures to further enable regular communication and consultation, e.g.,

- 1) Annually, the VASG Directors office will submit a formal review of the MAS's Associate Director's performance as VASG extension program leader to the VIMS Director of Research and Advisory Services (DRAS).
- 2) VASG and MAS staff will participate on each other's job search committees, particularly when Sea Grant funding supports the hire.
- 3) VASG will invite the Virginia Tech AREC Hampton Lab subcontractor leader or representative to participate in the monthly EMT meetings.
- 4) Consistent with the response to Recommendation 3 below and to avoid real or perceived conflict of interest, MAS (and Virginia Tech AREC), as members of the VASG EMT, will not be eligible for research RFP funding and will not vote on Program Development fund allocation, although their comments may be solicited.

Summary of VASG's response to Recommendation 2:

- VASG has considered the pros and cons of changing the reporting relationship of MAS and has determined that at this time a change is not warranted.
- VASG will implement additional measures to facilitate an open, transparent and inclusive partnership.

Recommendation 3: To address possible perceptions of Conflict of Interest, consider not allowing sitting REAC members to be Principle Investigators on active Sea Grant projects.

After consultation with all the partner institutional representatives, VASG will update its RFP eligibility requirements and integrate into the developing institutional charter and organizational operating procedures a policy that makes sitting partner institutional representatives ineligible for VASG's competitive research funding.

There was not complete consensus among advisors on this point, as some felt that steps taken to address conflict of interests—i.e., REAC's RFP involvement only in the development of the strategic plan (the highest priority items from the strategy plan become the research priorities in the RFP) and advice on broader tactical options (e.g., administrative design of student-only, seed-funding, large award options)—

were successful in VASG's 2010 RFP and consistent with other federal funding programs who seek community input without barring potential researchers from participating as potential principal investigators.

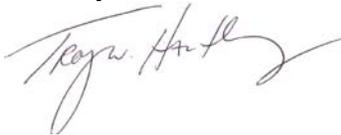
Further, fulfilling this recommendation fundamentally alters the institutional incentives to participate in VASG as an advisor and partner. Thus, VASG now needs to pursue and create alternative incentives, particularly in order to expand the number of partner institutional members as suggested by the SRT. These new incentives, opportunities, roles, and responsibilities will be negotiated through and articulated in the institutional charter and organizational operating procedures.

Summary of VASG's response to Recommendation 3:

- VASG accepts the recommendation and will alter the research RFP eligibility requirements and develop corresponding institutional charter and organizational operating practices to ensure that sitting partner institutional representatives are ineligible for VASG's competitive research funding.

If you have any questions about VASG's response, please feel free to contact me at (804)684-7248 or via email at thartley@vims.edu.

Sincerely,

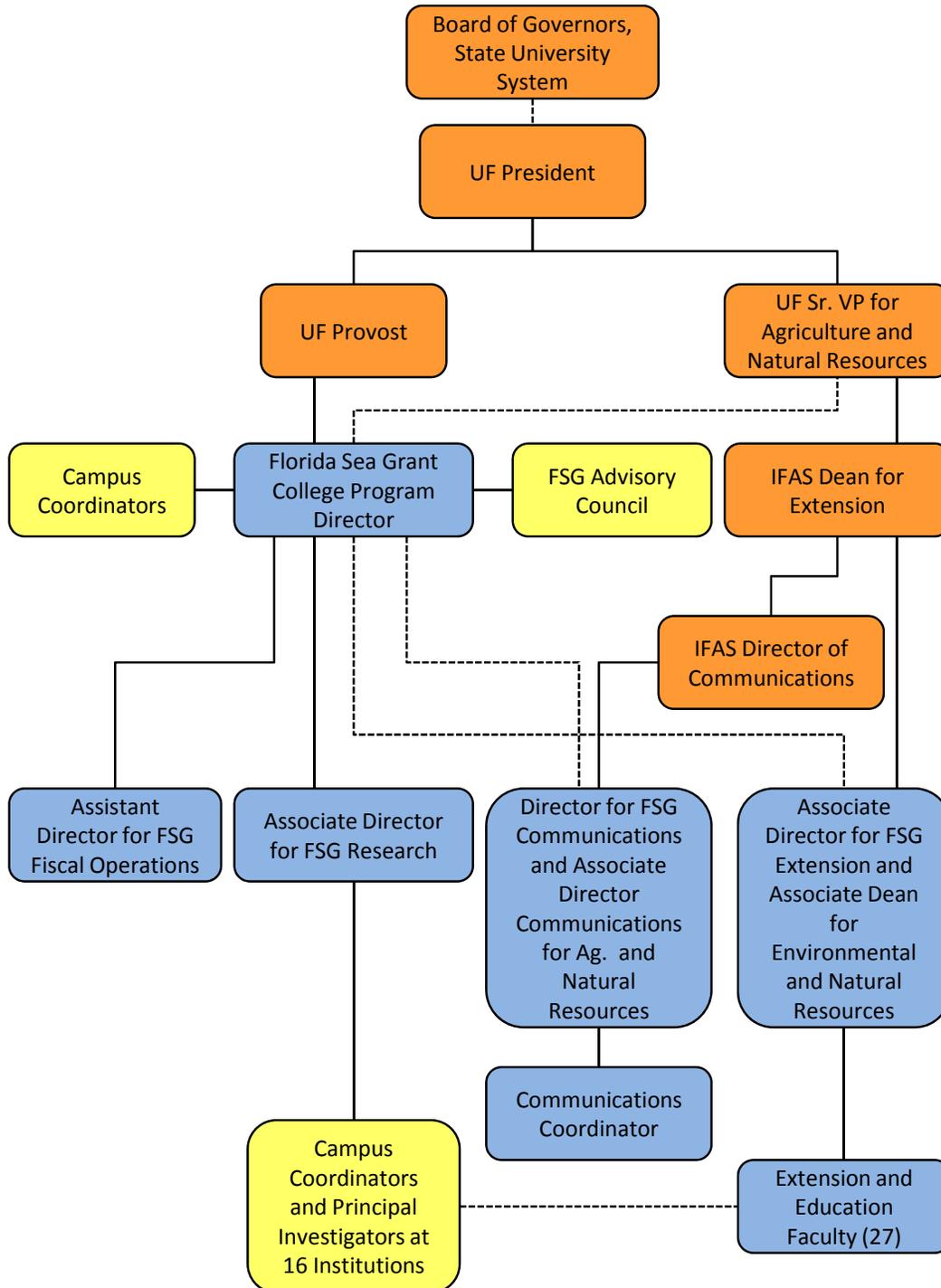


Troy W. Hartley, Ph.D.
Director

cc: Dr. John Wells, Virginia Institute of Marine Science
Dr. Leon Cammen, Director, National Sea Grant College Program
Ms. Sami Grimes, Director of Planning and Evaluation, National Sea Grant Office
Mr. Michael Liffmann, Associate Program Officer for VASG, National Sea Grant Office

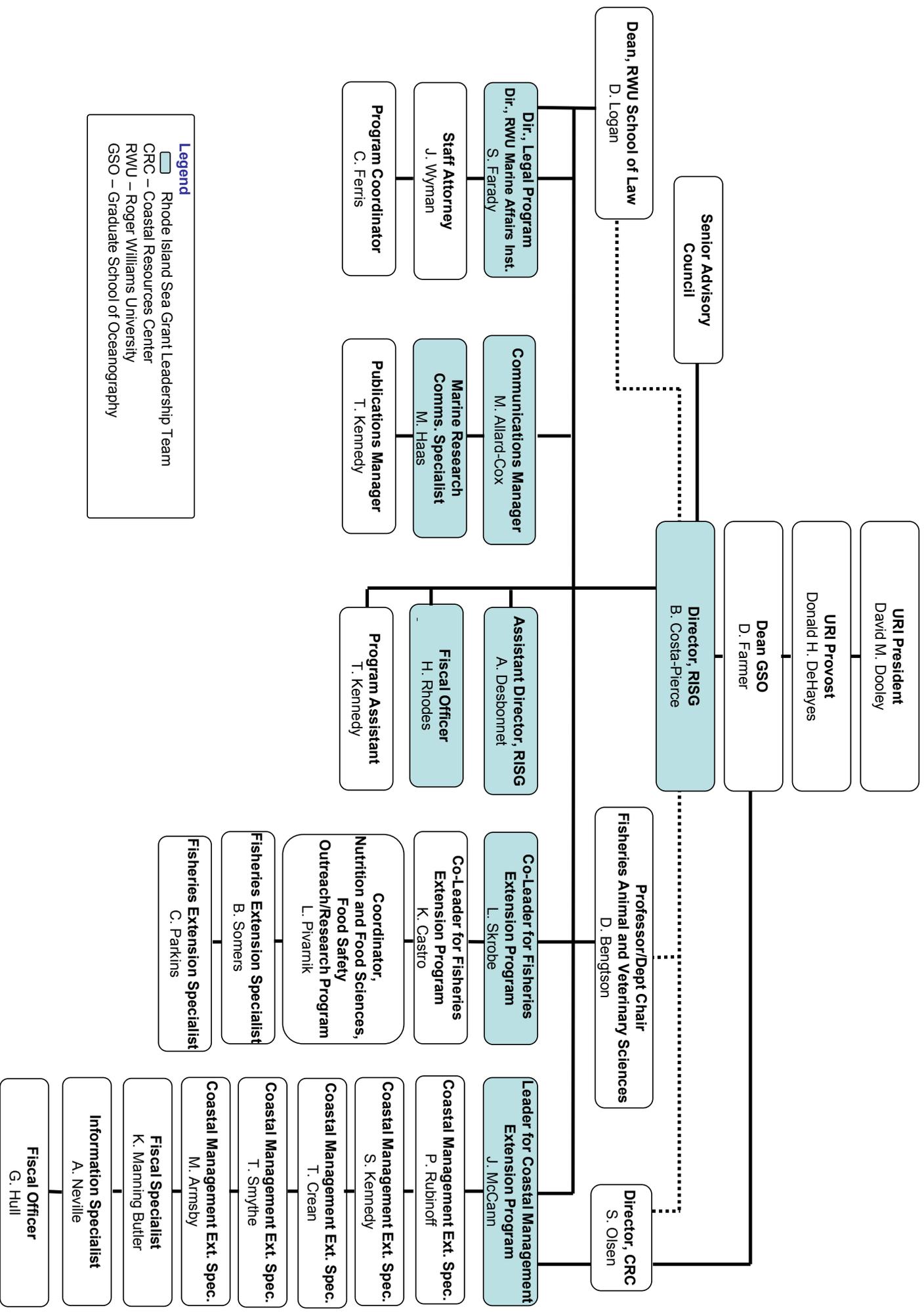
Encl. Florida Sea Grant Organizational Chart
Rhode Island Sea Grant Organizational Chart
Virginia Sea Grant Organizational Chart

2010 Management Organization Chart



Blue = Sea Grant staff; Orange = University of Florida staff; Yellow = staff at other universities in Florida or external advisors.

Organizational Structure of Rhode Island Sea Grant



Legend

- Rhode Island Sea Grant Leadership Team
- CRC – Coastal Resources Center
- RWU – Roger Williams University
- GSO – Graduate School of Oceanography

Virginia Sea Grant Organization

