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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO WATERS AND NAVIGATION -- COASTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Introduced By: Representatives Serpa, Fogarty, and Fellela

Date Introduced: February 27, 2026

Referred To: House State Government & Elections

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Findings. The General Assembly finds and declares that:

2 (1) The people of Rhode Island have a fundamental right to the use and enjoyment of the
3 state's natural resources, balanced with the preservation and protection of those resources for
4 present and future generations; and

5 (2) The General Assembly has the constitutional responsibility to conserve air, land, water,
6 plant, animal, mineral, and other natural resources and to adopt laws necessary to protect the state's
7 natural environment and promote the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens; and

8 (3) In 1971, the General Assembly passed legislation that delegated authority to the Coastal
9 Resources Management Council (CRMC) to manage and regulate the use of coastal and tidal waters
10 and adjacent lands in the state recognizing the importance that the coastal resources provide to the
11 social and economic welfare of the state; and

12 (4) In 1983, the CRMC adopted a water type classification system to manage state waters
13 based largely on upland land uses as of 1982, using tools and data that were limited at that time;
14 and

15 (5) Since the original water type designation, significant advances in data analysis and
16 changes in land and water uses have occurred, warranting a comprehensive review of all Type 1
17 through Type 4 waters to determine whether the original goals remain appropriate or if
18 reclassification is necessary; and

1 (6) Climate change has precipitated unprecedented changes to Rhode Island’s shorelines,
2 including sea level rise, increased erosion, and more severe coastal storms, creating new challenges
3 to infrastructure and coastal resource management; and

4 (7) Current CRMC policies and regulations were developed prior to the full recognition of
5 climate change impacts and may hinder future adaptation efforts and the health of coastal
6 environments; and

7 (8) It is critical to maintain our state's infrastructure and valued coastal resources that the
8 CRMC undertake a thorough review of all applicable policies and regulations to ensure they
9 adequately address sea level rise, erosion, and the increased severity of coastal storms.

10 SECTION 2. Chapter 46-23 of the General Laws entitled "Coastal Resources Management
11 Council" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

12 **46-23-31. Review of water type classifications and coastal adaptation policies.**

13 (a) Water type review.

14 In recognition of evolving coastal conditions and data availability, and the impacts of
15 climate change on Rhode Island’s shorelines, the coastal resources management council (CRMC)
16 shall conduct a complete reassessment of all waters classified as Type 1 through Type 4, evaluating
17 whether the original water type designations meet current goals or require revision based on
18 updated data, changes in upland and water uses, and emerging environmental conditions.

19 (b) Climate change adaptation review.

20 The CRMC shall review all existing policies and regulations under its jurisdiction to
21 incorporate appropriate measures addressing sea level rise, coastal erosion, and the increased
22 frequency and severity of coastal storms, ensuring regulations support effective climate change
23 adaptation.

24 (c) Advisory committee.

25 To assist in these reviews, by January 1, 2027, the CRMC shall establish a seven (7)
26 member advisory committee composed of:

27 (1) One representative from the Rhode Island commerce corporation appointed by the
28 governor;

29 (2) One representative from a statewide environmental organization appointed by the
30 speaker of the house;

31 (3) One representative from a marine trades organization appointed by the senate president;

32 (4) One representative from the planning department of a waterfront community with at
33 least thirty (30) miles of shoreline appointed by the speaker of the house;

34 (5) One representative from the planning department of a waterfront community with less

1 than thirty (30) miles of shoreline appointed by the senate president;

2 (6) The director of the department of environmental management, or designee; and

3 (7) One member with relevant expertise appointed by the CRMC chairperson.

4 (d) Action plan and reporting.

5 Within three (3) months following the first meeting of the advisory committee, the CRMC
6 shall present an action plan to the committee outlining the scope, methodology, and schedule for
7 the reviews. The CRMC shall provide monthly progress reports on the required reviews to the
8 advisory committee.

9 (e) Final recommendations.

10 No later than two (2) years after the advisory committee's first meeting, the CRMC shall
11 submit a report containing its final recommendations regarding water type reclassifications and
12 policy or regulatory changes to the advisory committee. The advisory committee shall then prepare
13 and submit a final report to the general assembly and the governor for consideration.

14 (f) Rulemaking authority.

15 The CRMC is authorized to initiate and promulgate any rules or regulations necessary to
16 implement the recommendations arising from this review consistent with the procedures set forth
17 in chapter 35 of title 42 ("administrative procedures").

18 (g) The provisions of this section shall sunset on July 1, 2030, unless extended by the
19 general assembly.

20 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

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RELATING TO WATERS AND NAVIGATION -- COASTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT
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1 This act would require the coastal resources management council to conduct a review of
2 certain water classifications and existing policies and regulations to properly account for sea level
3 rise.

4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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