Final Charge for Chesapeake Bay Program Plastic Pollution Action Team

In response to the presentation at the November 2019 Management Board (MB) meeting on the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) workshop on microplastics in the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed, the MB approved the creation of a Plastic Pollution Action Team (PPAT). The action team will ultimately report to the MB, but the Scientific, Technical Assessment & Reporting team (STAR) will play an active role in helping to draft the membership and charge for the action team in early 2020, will help coordinate staffing needs for the team, and will periodically review report-outs from the team.

As background, the 2019 STAC report made the following recommendation:
The Scientific, Technical Assessment and Reporting Team should incorporate development of Ecological Risk Assessments (ERAs) of microplastics into the CBP strategic science and research framework, and the Plastic Pollution Action Team should oversee the development of the ERAs focused on assessment of microplastic pollution on multiple living resource endpoints.

Below is a proposed charge for the PPAT to address this recommendation:

The PPAT seeks to reduce the presence and impacts of plastic pollution on the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. The PPAT will begin to address this issue by overseeing research that will help to determine the effects that specifically microplastics have on the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. This will be accomplished through the following actions:

1) Provide oversight of the development of preliminary ecological risk assessments of microplastics for one or more subwatersheds to the Chesapeake Bay (e.g. Potomac). For example, this oversight will include advising researchers on assessment endpoints for the ERA, such as restoration goals for species already being prioritized by the CBP and advising on the development of conceptual models in the ERA. The PPAT will not conduct the ERA – the ERA will be undertaken by EPA, its contractors, or grantees, or another organization.
2) Use the components and results of the preliminary ERAs to develop a strategy that identifies and if possible, prioritizes gaps in information concerning the effects of microplastics pollution on the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem, and highlights future research questions that need to be answered. The strategy should highlight monitoring needs that are necessary to address information gaps.
3) Present results from ecological risk assessments to the MB in order to guide future action on addressing plastic pollution.
4) Monitor policy advances at the state and federal level that could potentially impact, advance or complement this work to inform the science strategy and to identify potential policy or management options that could be utilized for source reduction strategies.

The PPAT will meet periodically to:

- Discuss updates on ecological risk research being conducted.
- Provide guidance to EPA on conducting ecological risk research.
- Formulate a science strategy to address questions and research gaps discovered during execution of ecological risk research.
- Discuss current source reduction efforts or policies.
- Report out to CBP groups for feedback as requested including MB, STAR, STAC, Goal Implementation Teams, the Integrated Monitoring Networks Workgroup, and Toxics Workgroup.

Timeline:
The planned timeline for the PPAT to undertake the charge as drafted is 2 years from the date of the membership and charge approval. The first year will focus on guiding the development and execution of the preliminary ERAs. The second year will focus on reviewing the results of the preliminary ERAs, and using the results to develop a science strategy that identifies gaps in knowledge. If information arises during the two-year timeline that warrants additional time or effort from the PPAT beyond the current charge, the charge and timeline may be amended with approval by the MB.

Membership representation:
STAR is compiling membership suggestions and is especially looking for representation from the across following groups:

- Academia – especially with expertise in trophic ecology, fisheries, water quality, monitoring, etc.
- Federal and State Representation
- CBP GIT representation
- Crossover (multiple representation from same member)