The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA) is a bi-state coalition of over 800 community and recreational groups, educational institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders committed to restoring and revitalizing the New York and New Jersey waterways. Our Harbor is our most precious shared resource, a resource for commerce and economic development, waterborne transportation and tourism, and active recreation. While our waterways are cleaner now than they have been in generations, much work remains to ensure that we continue on that trajectory, for safe use and enjoyment by all.

The Clean Waterfront Plan is a great start toward ensuring a world-class waterfront envied the world over. New York’s waterfront was once a place for disfavored uses, to hide or discard the things we do not want to see or no longer need. As New Yorkers have reengaged with the waterfront, MWA is encouraged by this report’s findings that “waterfront dumping is not a major problem in New York City today” and that “properties adjacent to the waterfront were, on average, cleaner than the City at large.” MWA supports this report’s recommendations for the City to conduct a detailed baseline survey of waterfront cleanliness; however, the proposed mechanism for handling the survey raises larger questions regarding governance and oversight of the waterfront across the city.

The City should designate a single agency or public entity with the responsibility of coordinating waterfront-related issues and stewardship over our waterfront. The plan cites robust, yet informal coordination across City agencies and calls for a formal coordination effort to standardize inspection, reporting, and enforcement. While this is a sound plan to address the issue of illegal dumping, it is indicative of the manner in which many disparate agencies, task forces and programs address issues at the waterfront. Informal coordination across City agencies relies too heavily on good-faith participation; while we are fortunate to have great, tireless public servants in this administration, we must do a better job of ensuring that there is a single point of public stewardship of the waterfront for the future.

The waterfront presents its own unique set of challenges that demand focused leadership, from ensuring protection against storm surge and sea level rise, to creating and ensuring good public access, to overseeing waterborne transportation, to maintaining critical coastal infrastructure. MWA will soon release a comprehensive set of Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines (WEDG) that is the result of a collaboration with experts in the design, engineering, and environmental science communities as well as City, State and federal actors to ensure that development along the water’s edge enhances ecology, promotes resiliency, provides equitable public access, and encourages maritime use. This work will not only provide a set of best practices for waterfront use, but will also serve as an example for how multiple uses at the waterfront are interrelated and must be governed accordingly.

The City’s Waterfront Management Advisory Board (WMAB) should be reconvened and consulted on the development of any plan to reorganize waterfront governance. The WMAB consists of 12 mayoral appointees representing the maritime industry, labor unions, transportation companies, real estate and hospitality businesses, and environmental and civic organizations, and will be an important resource as this administration refines its waterfront policy. Our alliance is pleased to call on strong partnerships across government at all levels, and we look forward to advancing this important work with all of you in the coming years.