



2023 Big Blue Conference Speakers

The Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce's Blue Economy Foundation, with Avangrid, The Plymouth Foundation, and the Plymouth Area Chamber of Commerce, will host an economic development conference focused on the regional blue economy and workforce development at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy's new conference center on May 2 and 3, 2023.

Speaker photos and brief biographies below are listed in alphabetical order by last name.



Pedro Azagra Blázquez
Chief Executive Officer, AVANGRID

Pedro was appointed to the position of CEO in May 2022. Pedro has served as a member of the AVANGRID Board of Directors since 2019, and previously served as a member of the Board of Directors from 2014 to 2018.

Pedro formerly served as the Chief Development Officer for Iberdrola, where he executed more than 100 transactions and led the international expansion of Iberdrola. Pedro has a degree in Law and Business Administration from the Instituto Católico de Administración y Dirección de Empresas (ICADE) at the Universidad Pontificia de Comillas in Madrid, and an MBA from the University of Chicago.



Captain Michael R. Burns Jr
Executive Director of Maritime Center for Responsible Energy, Massachusetts Maritime Academy

Capt. Michael Burns currently serves as the Executive Director of the Maritime Center for Responsible Energy (MCRE) where he is involved in the development and delivery of a variety of training programs for workers in the maritime and offshore wind industries. Capt. Burns is a senior level deck officer with significant shipboard, management level experience. He is also an experienced professional maritime education administrator, and an approved instructor for several US Coast Guard and offshore wind training programs. He is a US Naval Reserve Officer as well as a part time instructor at the Naval Surface Warfare Officer School in Newport RI. Capt. Burns earned a BS in Marine Transportation and a MS in Emergency Management from MMA, and holds a USCG Master's license of unlimited tonnage. He is a Trustee of the Boston Marine Society and an Associate Fellow of the Nautical Institute in London.



Aubrey Church

Policy Manager, Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance

Aubrey has spent the entirety of her career working closely with the fishing industry. Before joining the Fishermen's Alliance in 2023, she was a Research Biologist for seven years with the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF), a nonprofit private research foundation based in Rhode Island. There, she managed the Lobster and Jonah Crab Research fleet, and a gillnet pre-construction fisheries monitoring survey for winter skate and monkfish in the South Fork Wind Farm area.

In 2022, Aubrey earned her Professional Science Master's degree from UMass Dartmouth's School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST). Aubrey also has prior experience as an at-sea monitor and northeast fisheries observer for NOAA, from 2011 to 2013, and was involved in several research endeavors, including working with artisanal spear fishermen in Turks and Caicos.



Mark S. Ells

Town Manager, Town of Barnstable

Mark Ells has served as the Town Manager in Barnstable, MA since 2016 and has served as a manager in the Town of Barnstable for 33 years. Prior to working in municipal government, he worked as an engineering consultant, and he has served as adjunct faculty at Cape Cod Community College since 2001. Mark serves on numerous state and regional committees in representation of the Town of Barnstable. He resides in Centerville with his wife and six children.



Representative Dylan A. Fernandes

Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket

Representative Dylan Fernandes has served Falmouth, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket in the legislature since 2017 where he has focused on combating climate change, advancing affordable housing, and addressing the opioid and heroin epidemic. He serves as the Vice Chair of the Committee on Tourism, Arts & Cultural Development, and has seats on the Committee on Ways and Means, the Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities & Energy, and the Committee on Global Warming and Climate Change.

A fourth generation Cape & Islands resident and the son of two small business owners, his great grandparents immigrated to the United States from the Azores before settling in Falmouth to work as strawberry farmers. Fernandes received his bachelor's degree with a double major in Economics and Political Science from the College of Charleston and he is a Master's of Public Administration student at Harvard where he is a Rappaport Scholar.



Paul Gasek
Stony Brook Films

Paul Gasek is an Emmy award-winning Producer, Director, Writer, and Narrator with 45 years' experience in broadcast television. From 2006 to 2011, he was Executive Producer and Senior Science Editor at Discovery Channel, supervising the production of hundreds of hours for the channel, including six seasons of Deadliest Catch and many of the blue chip Discovery/BBC Science co-productions. Between 2015 and 2018, he was Executive Producer of Shark Week, Discovery's longest running series into its 30th year.



Secretary Yvonne Hao
Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development

Yvonne Hao is the Secretary of the Executive Office of Economic Development. She has had more than 25 years of executive business experience as a senior executive, including as Co-founder, Advisor, and Managing Director at investment firm Cove Hill Partners and as an Operating Partner at Pillar Ventures. Previously, she was the Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer of PillPack, an online pharmacy that was acquired by Amazon in 2018. She is also a former Operating Partner at Bain Capital. In addition, Hao has been a Board Director of companies such as CarGurus, Flywire, Gen-therm, ZipRecruiter, and Bose. She also has been involved in the community, is the Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees of Beth Israel Lahey Health, and a Trustee Emeriti of her alma mater, Williams College. She lives in Williamstown and Cambridge, and is a graduate of Williams College and the University of Cambridge.



Steven Koppel
EXPRESSIONS Gallery

Steve Koppel is a professional photographer and owner of EXPRESSIONS Gallery in Chatham center, showcasing his fine art coastal photography from the beaches and tidal flats of Cape Cod. He spent 20 years as a business consultant with Accenture, leaving the corporate world to volunteer with non-profit organizations to help maximize social impact. Now a full-time Brewster resident, Steve is active in the greater Cape Cod business and social service community, serving on the boards of the Association to Preserve Cape Cod and the Chatham Chamber of Commerce, and as a board member and strategic advisor to the Aquacultural Research Corporation.



Florence Lowell

Owner and Executive Chef, The Naked Oyster

Florence Lowell, owner and executive chef of the Naked Oyster Bistro and Raw Bar, is a native of the Atlantic Coast of France, near Bordeaux, a region directly across the ocean from the Cape with amazingly similar beaches, vegetation, and animal life. She has spent much of the past 30 years in the restaurant business. From Austin to Houston and, for the past years, happily ensconced on Cape Cod, Florence brings her extensive knowledge of wine and food to her restaurant. Having spent many summers of her youth in Arcachon, a major center for oyster farming in France, she was thrilled to be able to have the opportunity to farm oysters in Barnstable.



Nora McCarthy

Workforce & Outreach Coordinator, Vineyard Wind

Nora McCarthy is the Workforce and Outreach Coordinator at Vineyard Wind – the nation’s first commercial-scale offshore wind farm. She began working at Vineyard Wind last summer as an intern right after graduating from UMass Amherst, where she got a degree in environmental science. Nora is looking forward to an exciting and long-lasting career in offshore wind!



Connie Merigo

President & Executive Director, National Marine Life Center

Connie Merigo has over 30 years of experience in conservation, research and marine mammal and sea turtle rescue and rehabilitation. She led a renowned marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation program, and later built an internationally recognized sea turtle rehabilitation, research and conservation program. Connie recently took over as the Executive Director at the National Marine Life Center and is currently working to build a world-class rehabilitation and conservation center for endangered sea turtles and marine mammals.



Senator Susan L. Moran
Plymouth & Barnstable District

State Senator Susan L. Moran proudly represents the Plymouth & Barnstable District, made up of Bourne, Falmouth, Kingston, Pembroke, Plymouth, Sandwich, Mashpee, and Plympton. The Senator has an extensive legal and municipal background, having previously served in multiple capacities at the local level through the Falmouth Select Board, the Cape & Islands Selectmen and Councilors Association, Cape Economic Development Council, and Cape Cod Coastal Resources Water Collaborative.

As State Senator for a wide swath of coastal communities, Senator Moran is an active advocate for the development of the Commonwealth's blue economy, believing that long-term economic development is built by providing a full spectrum of opportunities for innovation. The Senator currently serves as Senate Chair of the Joint Committee On Revenue and the Vice Chair of the Joint Committee On Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure.



Paul Niedzwiecki
Chief Executive Officer, Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce

Paul Niedzwiecki assumed the role of chief executive officer of the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce on July 1, 2021. Niedzwiecki, of West Barnstable, is a public policy professional and attorney with more than two decades of experience in public administration and crafting environmental and economic policy on Cape Cod. As former executive director of the Cape Cod Commission, Niedzwiecki worked to reorganize the region's planning and regulatory agency to reduce red tape and assist communities to balance protection of the natural environment and fuel economic growth, while increasing transparency and community engagement. He was also the first chairman of the Cape Cod Water Protection Collaborative.



Kelsey Perry
Community Liaison Coordinator, SouthCoast Wind

Kelsey Perry is the Community Liaison Coordinator for SouthCoast Wind, serving as the link between the project and local communities, and joined the team in September 2020. She holds a Master of Science in Sustainability Science from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Bachelor of Arts in Chemistry from Clark University. Prior to working for SouthCoast Wind, she worked as a MassCEC Intern with the Cape and Islands Self-Reliance, with the UMass Clean Energy Extension as a greenhouse gas analyst and as lab assistant at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Kelsey grew up in Mashpee and has a deep affection for Cape Cod's wildlife and people.



Rick Sawyer
President, A.R.C. Shellfish Hatchery

Rick Sawyer is the President of Aquacultural Research Corporation in Dennis, one of the largest commercial shellfish hatcheries in New England and the only one in Massachusetts. After 25 years owning an advertising and marketing agency, Rick joined A.R.C. in 2018 as their first Sales and Marketing Manager. A year later he was promoted to President, and he now directs a staff of 30 people who go to work every day knowing they support over 1,300 jobs in the aquaculture industry.



Kristy Senatori
Executive Director, Cape Cod Commission

Kristy Senatori leads the Cape Cod Commission in designing innovative land use policies, environmental and community resilience strategies, and comprehensive economic development initiatives through a multi-disciplinary approach. She promotes collaboration among communities through data and information projects and the implementation of decision support platforms designed to enhance community engagement. Ms. Senatori worked in the private sector for several years before joining the Commission in 2008 and is a member of the Massachusetts Bar.



Marianne Walsh
Education Director, Atlantic White Shark Conservancy

Marianne Walsh is the Education Director at the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy. Walsh leads the AWSC's efforts in outreach and education, engaging the public in white shark education opportunities. Prior to working in the nonprofit world, Walsh was a middle school science teacher and outdoor educator.