

Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee Meeting Summary

May 21, 2024

12:00pm – 2:00pm (AKST) via Teleconference

Managing Board

Captain Buddy Custard, President

Committee Members Present

Chris Woodley – At Sea Fish Processors, Primary
Steven Gabelein – Passenger Vessels, Primary
Captain Seth Chase – Barges & Associated Tugs, Primary
Ernie Weiss – Local Government, Primary
Todd Duke – Salvage, Primary
Kyle Watson – Salvage, Alternate
Andrew Hartsig – Conservation Organization, Primary
Captain David Arzt – Marine Pilots, Primary
Andrew Mew – Ship’s Agents, Primary
Karen Pletnikoff – Subsistence User, Primary
Captain Chris Coutu – Vessel Monitoring & Tracking,
Primary

Ex-Officio

Ethan Nichols, ADF&G
LT Caroline Wilkinson, NOAA
Carley Lowe, NOAA/NMFS
Bridget Crokus, USFWS
BMC Stephen Braun, USCG Sector Western
Alaska & U.S. Arctic

Other

Sierra Fletcher, Nuka Research and Planning
Haley Griffin, Nuka Research and Planning

The seventh meeting of the Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee was called to order at 12:02 PM AKST by AIWSC President, Captain Buddy Custard.

Motion Mr. Chris Woodley, Mr. Seth Chase to approve the agenda as presented. Motion passes with no objection.

Opening Comments and Introductions

Committee and Ex-Officio members took turn introducing themselves and their committee roles. Captain David Artz introduced Captain Nick Garay and stated his intent for Captain Garay to apply for the alternate Marine Pilots seat. Karen Pletnikoff thanked the Committee and expressed excitement for the Committee to offer their support in solid waste planning and management in the Region.

Ex-Officio Reports

LT Caroline Wilkinson stated that NOAA has recently obtained the 2023 Bristol Bay Survey Report showing that sandbars near Cape Constantine have shifted farther offshore, approaching a nearby lightering area. She sent the preliminary data to Haley Griffin, who will forward it to the Committee.

Bridget Crokus reported that the USFWS has received funding to bring the 40-hour HAZWOPER training course to communities in the Region. Committee members are invited to reach out if they have any communities in mind that may want to participate.

Ethan Nichols reported on recent commercial fishing activity, mentioning that the 58-vessel cod fishery in Unimak Pass is 91% complete and vessels have begun to move on to other species. Most vessels are currently working on their Individual Fishing Quotas (IFQ) and targeting Sablefish in the Aleutians. There is also a Dungeness crab fishery of about 15 vessels that has been slow to get started. He also reported on the successful untangling of a Humpback whale in Unalaska’s Iliuliuk Bay in April from derelict fishing gear. Ed Lyman, Sadie Wright, and Ethan, assisted by others from NOAA and ADF&G, helped to successfully untangle the animal. Read the story here: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/entangled-humpback-whale-near-unalaska-successfully-cut-free>.

Managing Board Report

Captain Custard stated that the Managing Board is seeking funding for the Committee, the bank account has been set up, and the Board is working with Nuka Research to draft a letter. He asked the members to consider making a contribution and hopes to have the letters sent out no later than next week. He then reported his

recent interactions with the state legislature during their last session and his conversations around obtaining state funding for the AIWSC. Funding for the AIWSC will be considered during the next session. Overall, there were good discussions around obtaining state funding as long as funds were also coming from stakeholder or public contributions.

Facilitator's Report

Haley Griffin reported that she is in the process of creating a LinkedIn page for the Committee to increase its visibility to the public. Nuka Research also recently helped the Board create a letter of support for the Port Intermodal Development Program (PIDP) grant application to upgrade infrastructure at the Port of Dutch Harbor.

Emergency Response Work Group Updates

Todd Duke first reported that the MV Dali was successfully refloated and brought alongside a dock. He then spoke to how the Genius Star XI incident brought forward the need to reevaluate potential places of refuge (PPOR) in the Aleutian Islands. The latest work in identifying PPORs happened in 2013, and some of the equipment at these sites are being found in poor condition (such as the mooring in Dutch Harbor). Todd stated he is working with Dan Payne to look at these areas, consider whether they should remain PPORs and begin providing recommendations as to which sites may need to change. The current list of PPORs in the Aleutian Islands can be found here: <https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/response-resources/ppor/aleutians/>.

Todd went on to report the creation of a new Salvage section within Area Maritime Security Plans currently being overhauled to increase usability. This will relate to the Area Contingency Plans. Todd also reported that he has been appointed to a national task force charged with writing new Marine Fire Fighting Plan guidance. He will provide updates on this process in future.

Captain David Arzt commented how beneficial it will be to review the PPORs and that he has already looked at identifying safe options with Peggy McLaughlin in Dutch Harbor for docking. He stated his interest in being involved in the Emergency Response Work Group and added that a dredging project in Dutch Harbor will begin in the Fall, allowing deeper-draft vessels to dock at the Port.

Captain Coutu stated that Todd's brief was timely and thanked him for bringing it up and working with the U.S. Coast Guard. He reported a few recent issues of vessels crossing into state pilot waters without a pilot or traveling/drifted into areas they are not allowed to due to heavy weather. He also stated an effort from the previous COTP, Captain Leanne Lusk, to create an alert system for vessels in need of refuge or shelter during heavy weather. While the PPORs are typically used for vessels in distress, this issue is similar in the sense that areas are needing to be identified for vessels to go for different reasons, whether they're in distress or not.

Andrew Mew reiterated sensitivities surrounding PPORs and stated the need for communicating the proper information to vessels based their condition and needs. He encouraged continued discussion around vessels in distress versus those that are not.

Captain Arzt added that the results of this work can be included as recommendations in the Best Practices/Standards of Care section of the Waterways Safety Plan (WSP) or the Area Contingency Plan. Many vessels have been engaging in weather avoidance and some have drifted close to shore, but more and more vessels are contacting Marine Exchange Alaska (MXAK) when they are in need of a place to dock. Karen Pletnikoff stated that APIA is concerned about recommendations that may negatively affect subsistence practices.

(Information was added to the Chat pointing to a current project being conducted by Safeguard Marine to assess PPOR in the Arctic and Western Alaska COTP Zone. The final report is understood to be forthcoming.)

Captain Coutu volunteered for Marine Exchange Alaska to Chair this work group, named the "Storm Avoidance Work Group" and will include Captain David Arzt, Karen Pletnikoff, Andrew Mew, and any other interested members. Captain Custard recommended for this group to collaborate with the Emergency Response Work Group to align efforts.

New Business

Waterways Safety Plan Discussion

Captain Custard asked the Committee if there are other areas of the WSP that are out of date or need to be reworked. Karen Pletnikoff stated that APIA wrote into the EPA Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling

(SWIFR) grant support for the AIWSC to come together to learn from transportation experts and other partners so APIA can support recycling in the Region. APIA is looking to identify which shippers are available on a regular basis, to potentially help transport things from the Islands. She is looking forward to supporting at least quarterly meetings of the AIWSC and potentially forming a work group to focus on solid waste issues. APIA is also interested in including best practices for recycling in the WSP, making the Stop Rats initiative clear in the WSP, updating the Wildlife Guidelines, and examining the implications of how marine mammal identification is being addressed in the Polar Code.

Chris Woodley commented on NOAA's consideration to list the Northern Pacific right whale as threatened or endangered in southwest Alaska and their critical habitat. Some current measures to protect this species on the East Coast are altering ship routes, reducing ship speed, and reducing underwater entanglement risks. He asked the NOAA representatives on the call if the agency is on track to release updates on this topic by September. Carley Lowe, a representative from the National Marine Fisheries Service branch of NOAA, commented that this species is classified as endangered and NOAA is revising critical habitat, but it won't change the currently established shipping routes or speeds. If this were to happen, the proposal would need to go through litigation and public comment, so it is not a part of the new critical habitat revision. Carley stated that NOAA is considering expanding the species' critical habitat for funding and research purposes.

Ethan Nichols commented that Bridget Crokus is interested in revising the Oil Spill Response and Preparedness section of the WSP and any other sections that involve oil spills. Bridget added that including specific references to the relevant Alaska plans in the Oil Spill section of the WSP would be very helpful. She also recommended that Carley Lowe review the Marine Mammal section of the WSP, as it is in need of overall updates.

Ernie Weiss commented that one of the PPORs within Alaska DEC's link (above) in the WSP needs to be updated to include a harbor that is currently missing.

Captain Seth Chase asked about inserting the marine mammal protection zones into the electronic navigation charts (ENC) and provided the stellar sea lion protected areas as an example. He stated that some large ships travel in the close vicinity of some of these areas and could be fined if they travel within them. Carley Lowe reported that NOAA is planning to release a 1-pager on critical habitats and what they mean.

Captain Custard asked if Steven Gabelein would be interested in chairing the WSP Review Work Group, to which he agreed. He encouraged members of each work group to reach out and include external subject matter experts in these updates to continuously improve the WSP. He suggested that the revisions could be proposed by the second half of September.

Closing Comments

Andrew Mew commented that he is looking forward to solidifying PPORs and routing measures for vessels in the Region and including more definitive language in the WSP. Chief Stephen Braun reported that LT William Mason will be departing his post at the end of May and will send Haley Griffin the contact information for the individual who will be taking his place. Karen Pletnikoff expressed her excitement for the support to APIA and expertise of the Committee in improving solid waste management in the Region.

Next Steps

Review Action Items

- Ms. Griffin will forward the preliminary data provided by LT Wilkinson from the 2023 Bristol Bay survey to the Committee.
- Chief Braun will send Ms. Griffin the contact information for LT Mason's replacement.
- Ms. Griffin will draft a meeting summary for the Committee's review.
- Ms. Griffin will send a Doodle Poll to the Committee to determine availability for the next meeting.

Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will take place in late September or early October. A doodle poll will be sent out to determine member availability.

Meeting adjourned by Captain Custard at 1:08pm AKDT.

Meeting Materials: 1) Meeting Protocols, 2) Current Roster, and 3) Waterways Safety Plan.