

# Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee Meeting Summary

October 16, 2025

12:30pm – 3:30pm (AKDT)

University of Alaska Anchorage Gorsuch Commons – 3700 Sharon Gagnon Ln, Anchorage, AK 99508

## Committee Members:

Bryan Crisp, At Large – Primary  
Captain Justin Theriot, At Large – Alternate  
Steve “Vinnie” Catalano, CIRCAC – Primary  
Frank Smith, Dry Cargo Ship Operators – Primary  
Suzann Speckman, Environmental – Alternate  
Captain Brad Kroon, Harbor Tug Operators – Primary  
David Griffin, Port MacKenzie – Primary  
Jim Jager, Port of Alaska – Primary  
Bryan Hawkins, Port of Homer – Primary  
Todd Paxton, Response Organization – Primary  
Andrew Mew, Ship Agents – Alternate  
Captain Ian Maury, SWAPA – Primary, *HSC Vice-Chair*  
Captain Christopher Buckley, SWAPA – Alternate  
Captain Mark Maxim, Tanker Operators – Primary  
Ingo Rose, Tanker Operators – Alternate  
Mark Theriault, Tug & Barge Operators – Primary

## Managing Board:

Mike Munger, Secretary/Treasurer  
Captain Paul Mehler, *HSC Chair*

## Ex Officio:

Captain Christopher Culpepper, USCG (COTP)  
CDR Christine Brown, USCG  
LT Brett Woodward, USCG

BMC Stephen Braun, USCG  
David Dellinger, NOAA/NWS  
Colonel Adam Shockley, DOD ALCOM  
Jordan Boghosian, AK Marine Exchange  
Jade Gamble, ADEC  
David Blossom, ADEC  
Anna Carey, ADEC  
Chief John Harris, Nikiski Fire Department

## Other:

Haley Griffin, Nuka Research  
Sierra Fletcher, Nuka Research  
Anthony Williams, Alaska Chadux Network  
Carolyn Crawford, Fairwater Tankers  
Alistair Pepper, Global Diving & Salvage  
Kendra Bulawa, Global Diving & Salvage  
Kerry McClelland, K.s.M. Foundation  
Mason Reed, Matson  
Lucas Juon, Marathon Petroleum  
Arthur Seaman, Marathon Petroleum  
Bryant Bancroft, OSG  
Captain William M’Carthy, OSG  
Charles Salerno, OSG  
Captain Christopher Ponthurai, Synergy  
Captain Minjun Gang, Synergy

## Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Captain Paul Mehler, HSC Chair, reviewed the agenda and called the fifteenth meeting of the Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee (CIHSC) to order at 12:36 pm AKDT.

Captain Mehler led the Pledge of Allegiance, reviewed meeting protocols and general housekeeping items, and began introductions for meeting attendees. This meeting followed the Cook Inlet Pre-Winter Meeting. Several participants from that meeting joined the CIHSC meeting as well.

## Approval of Agenda

**Motion Todd Paxton, Andrew Mew to approve the agenda as prepared. Motion passes by no objection.**

## Meeting Summary April 17, 2025

**Motion Vinnie Catalano, Andrew Mew to approve the April 17, 2025, meeting summary as prepared. Motion passes by no objection.**

## Presentation

### Port MacKenzie: Navigating Tides, Currents, and Ice in Upper Cook Inlet

David Griffin, Port MacKenzie’s Director, presented an overview of the port’s facilities, operations, and ongoing developments. On the west side of Knik Arm, the port is two miles across the water from the

Port of Alaska, and 90 miles from Anchorage by road. Much of the area's ice forms in the Knik River. Infrastructure improvements are halfway complete, with \$184 million already invested. Efforts are underway to regain momentum to finish construction projects, including processing and barge facilities. A proposal is being considered to build a 100-mile access road to connect the port to the processing facility. The old wood chip loading facility, inactive for 15 years, will soon have its conveyor belt dismantled, generating concern among some potential users of the port.

The waterfront facility includes a 1,200-foot deep draft dock, built in 2004, which typically receives only one ship a year. Last year, however, two ships docked here. The entire port district, including tidelands, shoreline, and upland areas, is owned by the borough. In 2010, the bulk carrier JP Azure completed one of the port's largest coal shipments, and in October 2024, three operators (a vessel offloading salt, a Fire Island Wind barge at berth, and a docked ship) used the facility simultaneously.

Port MacKenzie is positioned as a "gateway to the Interior," linking to the road system and rail belt, and offering opportunities to move minerals, construction materials, and military-related cargo. Less than one percent of Alaska is privately owned, and much of that land lies within the port district. The port experiences strong tidal activity, with 30-foot tide swings and currents reaching 6-7 knots on ebb tides and 3-4 on flood tides. The 375-foot barge dock is the most frequently used, mainly for salt distribution around the state. Although sediment is present, dredging is not required because natural currents maintain depth through Port MacKenzie and the Cairn Point Narrows – about 20 feet at the barge dock during MLLW and 60 feet at the deep draft dock during MHHW.

Ice tends to build on the pilings, and with roughly 20% freshwater in the inlet, maintenance is ongoing. In summer 2024, sleeve installations were completed on 32 of 64 pilings, prioritizing deep-water locations. A cathodic protection system failed but is being replaced with passive anodes. A separate grant will fund a barge haul out ramp at the north end of the quay.

Additional projects include a proposed bridge with 95% of right-of-way acquired, and a partially completed rail extension connecting to the Titan Plant. The graded area could support an Alaska LNG site. A rail loop and switchback road are under consideration to improve cargo movement. A new master plan is also being developed—the last was completed in 2016—to guide future upland and maritime industry development.

### **Round Table Committee Member Updates**

Brad Kroon noted ongoing tug and articulated tug barge (ATB) operations in Dutch Harbor, the Aleutian Chain, and Cook Inlet. Bryan Hawkins reported a successful red salmon season that maxed out ice supply in Homer. Ice production increased from 1,600 tons in 2024 to about 4,000 tons this year, though not everyone was provided for. Homer Harbor's chosen expansion project plan was presented publicly in July, with costs rising by \$880,000 due to material increases.

Vinnie Catalano shared that CIRCAC continues collaborative work on exercises, drills, ice camera maintenance, ongoing vessel traffic studies, and a surface current radar project to support oil spill trajectory modeling. Nine ice cameras now operate at the mouth of the Kenai River, on several platforms, and at Port MacKenzie and the Port of Alaska. He also introduced a new project to highlight industries, people, agencies, and operations within Cook Inlet as a guide for incoming USCG personnel.

Captain Ian Maury completed simulation training in Houston to refine operational best practices around construction at the Port of Alaska, including ship maneuvering techniques. SWAPA is exploring current monitoring opportunities in the Port of Alaska and seeking collaboration with partners. Captain Mark Maxim continues to work closely with OSG to ensure tanker safety. Lucas Juon reported Marathon's successful Ice Week at AVTEC, which brought together more than 45 participants from 14 organizations for training exercises. Mr. Griffin added that discussions continue around the Alaska LNG project. Though its future remains uncertain, it could bring increased pipe shipments into the state, likely via rail due to highway congestion concerns.

Jim Jager reported completion of the Port of Alaska's north extension as part of the modernization program. Demolition of one of the fuel docks is planned for spring 2026 to expand capacity. Andrew Mew said preseason winter prep are complete, with focus now shifting to winter operations and fielding

LNG inquiries. Twenty-five pilots are currently active – half based in Anchorage and half in Homer. He also referenced the potential global impacts of new federal requirements related to Chinese-built or - owned vessels.

## **Ex-Officio Reports**

### **USCG**

Captain Culpepper expressed appreciation for the CIRCAC orientation project and the Port of Alaska's outreach to the USCG to provide tours. A recent multi-agency strike team operation at the Port of Alaska targeted smuggling and national security concerns, including fentanyl and illegal transport of alcohol to dry communities. He thanked the port for the use of their facility. The USCG has increased container inspections in Anchorage, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor. A subcommittee is forming in Kodiak within the USCG's Marine Safety Unit (MSU) to address increased traffic density in the region.

Work is beginning to establish a Bering Strait Waterways Safety Committee. With the other existing committees in Alaska and a tremendous increase in traffic through the Bering Strait in recent years, the USCG is looking to gain momentum in forming a similar group in the north. He advised the group to stand by for communications regarding this effort.

Captain Culpepper outlined a new cybersecurity rule (33 CFR 101.650(d)). USCG personnel are completing training on implementation and oversight of the rule. Cybersecurity awareness programs are being implemented across the COTP Zone.

LNG operations in Cook Inlet require an LNG waterways suitability assessment, which is currently being conducted by the USCG in coordination with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). These operations are projected to occur during summer months and involve 6–10 vessel transits per year.

The USCG is embarking on a \$25 billion modernization effort, including accelerated icebreaker procurement, plans for 40 commissioned icebreakers, river icebreakers, buoy tenders and enhanced Gulf of Alaska search and rescue coverage in the summer months through fast response cutters and patrol boats. They are also reassessing personnel needs and port security capacity.

Typhoon level storms have caused major flooding (6-8 feet) and led to ongoing rescue and recovery operations in coordination with the Alaska National Guard, including the evacuation of more than 50 people. The USCG continues to mobilize personnel to conduct infrastructure, shoreline, and waterways damage assessments and identify pollution risks. Freeze-up is coming soon, which will hinder the ability to re-establish safe living conditions. State DOT drone operators are monitoring for locations where OSROs may need to be deployed, and USCG is working with DEC and EPA to triage which facilities with oil are at risk of spills (e.g., homes with oil heating tanks). Visit [ready.alaska.gov](http://ready.alaska.gov) for more information.

### **NOAA**

David Dellinger reported that NOAA is supporting rescue efforts in Western Alaska by providing ice forecasting and spot forecasts for search and rescue operations. Forecasting for winter ice is on track to be a normal year. Mr. Dellinger encouraged anyone with questions to reach out.

### **DOD ALCOM**

Col. Adam Shockley reported a busy summer with increased activity in the region, including combined Arctic Edge and Northern Edge exercises involving U.S. and Canadian partners. Homeland defense readiness is the focus. The DOD also conducted port operations between North Star Terminal and Port MacKenzie, validating the port's capacity to support contingency operations and munitions transport. He thanked Port MacKenzie, the USCG and NOAA for providing support for environmental protection and safety. A command change occurred on October 15, with Gen. Davis succeeding Gen. Cunningham. Although DOD is involved in Western Alaska disaster response coordination, no official disaster relief requests have been received yet.

### **ADEC**

Anna Carey reported a busy fall exercise season with Delta Western, Andeavor, BlueCrest Energy, and Anchorage Fueling & Service Company. Since January 1st, 368 spills have occurred in Cook Inlet, 36 over 50 gallons; 24 originated from vessels, with only two reaching 50 gallons. Three Oil Discharge

Prevention and Contingency Plans (ODPCPs) were recently renewed for Marathon Kenai Pipeline Company, Marathon Anchorage Terminal & Pipeline, and Idemitsu Apollo Corporation. The Arctic and Western Alaska (AWA) Area Committee met, with upcoming meetings scheduled for November 12, 2025, May 13, 2026, and October 21, 2026.

### **MXAK**

Jordan Boghosian, newly hired by the Marine Exchange of Alaska (MXAK), introduced himself and highlighted MXAK's mission to enhance maritime safety through communication, data, and compliance support. He noted the recent installation of a new VHF radio site in Nikiski, expanding coverage in Cook Inlet. There are now 25 VHF VoIP sites statewide. He encouraged all involved in harbor safety to explore the Marine Exchange of Alaska Data Platform, MXAK Blueview: <https://blueview.mxak.org>.

### **HSC Chair Report**

Captain Mehler reported his participation in radio segments on KSRM (July 2) and KDLL's Kenai Conversations (August 25; aired October 8 and 11) with Mayor Peter Micciche to promote CIHSC initiatives. On September 19, members participated in a CIHSC-sponsored cleanup effort at the Ship Creek Boat Yard, supported by CISPRI and the Port of Alaska. Captain Mehler plans to attend the National Harbor Safety Committee Conference in Seattle (March 24–25, 2026) and possibly participate in a panel on Harbor Safety Committee challenges, with travel sponsored by Marathon. Members were invited to consider attending. Earlier that day, the Pre-Winter Meeting addressed the finalized 2025/26 Cook Inlet Ice Guidelines, best practices from prior seasons, port conditions, vessel and dock readiness, and overall expectations for winter operations.

Captain Mehler also noted the National Transportation Safety Board's September 10 safety alert on land-based firefighters and knowing the risks and challenges of responding to vessel fires. Firefighters do not all have the necessary training and familiarity with the layout of vessels or their fire protection systems, presenting an opportunity to develop shipboard firefighting training for local departments to improve readiness for future incidents. He plans to make this a focus of the CIHSC and will follow up with Todd Duke to discuss needs for re-establishing the shipboard marine fire department training program.

### **Workgroup Reports**

#### **Navigation Work Group**

The group continues to seek a work group chair. Carolyn Crawford volunteered to take on the position. Captain Mehler focused the discussion on anchoring and pilotage requirements in Cook Inlet, noting inconsistent understanding among mariners and first time callers in Cook Inlet. He asked the work group to research regulations, develop or share a clear definition, and propose best practices for inclusion in the Harbor Safety Plan. In the entrance to Cook Inlet, there is a CISPRI zone that causes vessels to make a sharp right turn before transiting into the Inlet. Captain Mehler asked the work group to review available information on conditions in the CISPRI Zone to determine if environmental or navigational factors are driving turning movements.

#### **Harbor Safety Plan Work Group**

Mr. Catalano reviewed the timeline for the 2025 Harbor Safety Plan (HSP) review and the proposed changes to the Plan.

**Motion Bryan Hawkins, Captain Brad Kroon to approve the Harbor Safety Plan with 2025 updates. Motion passes by no objection.**

Suzann Speckman presented marine mammal avoidance regulations and guidelines for Cook Inlet, focusing on protections for humpback whales, beluga whales, and Stellar sea lions. She asked whether it would be appropriate to include vessel-based avoidance and impact minimization measures in the HSP. Existing National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regulations protect humpback whales within 200 nautical miles of Alaska, prohibiting vessels from approaching within 100 yards and requiring a "slow, safe speed" near whales, with exemptions for certain government and commercial fishing vessels. Vessel speed limits for marine mammal protection exist in other regions – typically 10 knots or less for vessels

over 65 feet – to reduce strike risk and underwater noise, though no such restrictions currently apply in Cook Inlet.

The Susitna Delta Exclusion Zone was highlighted as a key protective area for Cook Inlet beluga whales, an important feeding and calving region. Project vessels in this zone must maintain speeds under 4 knots, monitor for belugas, and ensure a 100-meter clearance before moving. Operations are prohibited during low-visibility conditions unless necessary for safety. The zone, typically closed to activity from mid-April to mid-October, has existed informally since around 2016 and applies mainly to federal projects. For stellar sea lions, NMFS regulations prohibit vessels from approaching within 3 nautical miles of major rookeries at Sugarloaf and Marmot Islands. These rules reflect species-specific management approaches, acknowledging differing distributions across marine mammal populations. The HSP Work Group will review this and other information regarding marine mammal avoidance, and draft proposed language for inclusion in the HSP.

### **Facilitator's Report**

Haley Griffin shared the current vacancies and the process for members to recommend interested applicants. She also listed individuals with expiring seats and mentioned that she will reach out later in the year to confirm interest in retaining their committee seats.

### **Public/Final Comments**

Mr. Catalano and Sierra Fletcher presented the most recent Cook Inlet Vessel traffic report and stated that it will be included on the CIHSC's webpage: <https://www.circac.org/wp-content/uploads/250902-CI-Vessel-Traffic-2021-2024-Report-fnl.pdf>

### **Review Action Items & Set Next Meeting**

Captain Mehler and Ms. Griffin outlined the action items.

- ❖ Captain Mehler will follow up with Mr. Duke to discuss needs for re-establishing the shipboard marine fire department training program.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will coordinate with Captain Mehler to post materials from the Pre-Winter meeting, including the finalized Ice Guidelines, onto the CIHSC webpage.
- ❖ The Navigation Work Group will research regulations, develop or share a clear definition, and propose best practices on Cook Inlet anchoring and pilotage requirements for inclusion in the HSP.
- ❖ The Navigation Work Group will review available information on conditions in the CISPRI Zone to determine if environmental or navigational factors are driving turning movements.
- ❖ The HSP Work Group will review information regarding marine mammal avoidance and draft proposed language for inclusion in the HSP.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will distribute the approved Harbor Safety Plan.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will continue outreach to members of the HSC for *On the Waterfront* LinkedIn reports.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will add the Cook Inlet Vessel Traffic report to the CIHSC webpage.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will share the summary and materials shared during the meeting with the HSC.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will reach out to members with expiring seats on the HSC for re-appointment.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will reach out to CIHSC members and venues to schedule the next Committee meeting for the Kenai/Soldotna or Homer areas.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place in mid-April of 2026 during the weeks of April 13 or April 20.

### **Adjourn**

Captain Mehler thanked everyone for attending. Motion Andrew Mew, Bryan Hawkins to adjourn the meeting at 2:57pm AKDT. Meeting adjourned.

**Meeting Materials:** (1) Meeting Protocols, (2) CIHSC Roster, (3) April 17, 2025, Meeting Summary, (4) List of Work Group Members, (5) Harbor Safety Plan – 2025 Review Version