

# Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee Meeting Summary

May 27, 2025

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

## Committee Members Present

Chris Woodley – At Sea Fish Processors, Primary  
Frank Vargas – Commercial Fishing, Primary  
Steven Gabelein – Passenger Vessels, Primary  
Capt. Seth Chase – Barges & Associated Tugs, Primary  
Patrick Burns – Barges & Associated Tugs, Alternate  
Ernie Weiss – Local Government, Primary  
Matthew Odum – Oil Spill Response, Primary  
John Silva – Oil Spill Response, Alternate  
Andrew Hartsig – Conservation Organization, Primary  
Capt. David Artz – Marine Pilots, Primary  
Andrew Mew – Ship’s Agents, Primary  
Karen Pletnikoff – Subsistence User, Primary  
Capt. Steve White – Vessel Monitoring & Tracking,  
Primary

## Managing Board

Capt. Buddy Custard (USCG-Retired), President  
Peggy McLaughlin, WSC Chair  
Shari Coleman, Secretary/Treasurer  
Martha Grabowski, Member

## Ex Officio

Ethan Nichols, ADF&G  
LCDR Caroline Wilkinson, NOAA  
Nadine Kochuten, ABSI  
USCG Sector Western Alaska & U.S. Arctic  
Capt. Christopher Culpepper (COTP)  
CDR Christine Brown  
BMC Stephen Braun  
CIV Daniel Payne

## Other

Sierra Fletcher, Nuka Research  
Haley Griffin, Nuka Research

The tenth meeting of the Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee (AIWSC) was called to order at 12:02 PM AKDT by AIWSC Chair, Peggy McLaughlin.

**Motion Andrew Mew, Chris Woodley to approve the agenda as presented. Motion passes with no objection.**

**Motion Andrew Hartsig, Andrew Mew to approve the meeting summary from January 23, 2025, as presented. Motion passes with no objection.**

## Introductions and Opening Comments

Haley Griffin welcomed new Committee members and conducted roll call. Peggy McLaughlin expressed appreciation for everyone's participation and is looking forward to working with Martha, Patrick, and John.

## Ex Officio Reports

### USCG

CDR Christine Brown announced a change of command at Dutch Harbor MSU, welcoming LT Annabella Farabaugh and thanking LT Lawrence Schalles for his service. She also thanked industry partners for their cooperation with USCG inspections. The USCG is also updating the First Class Federal Pilots License requirements in cooperation with SWAPA.

Captain Culpepper reported the decommissioning of three 110-ft cutters. One new fast response cutter, *John Witherspoon*, is stationed in Kodiak; the *Earl Cunningham* and *Frederick Mann* will arrive later this summer. The USCG aims to maintain a consistent cutter presence in the Bering Strait, supported by a C-130 aircraft. Increased USCG air activity is expected over the summer due to Arctic Edge operations. Admiral Kevin Lunday was also recently nominated as the 28th Commandant of the Coast Guard.

### NOAA

LCDR Caroline Wilkinson reported that one of NOAA’s hydrographic vessels is scheduled to survey the islands of St. Paul and St. George in June and early July, engaging with communities throughout the process. NOAA will continue updating navigational charts and develop S1 products.

## **ADFG**

Ethan Nichols reported that this is a quiet time of year for the state-managed commercial fisheries. Six vessels are currently signed up for the sablefish fishery, which has a large Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) in both state and federal waters. The Dutch Harbor Subdistrict Pacific cod fishery has 29 registered vessels with a 42 million pound harvest limit. The North Peninsula's Dungeness crab fishery has opened where vessels 58-ft and under are working, but no hauls have been reported yet.

## **ABSI**

Nadine Kochuten reported on ABSI's climate adaptation workshops focused on nature-based solutions and how these efforts have been built into the Sustainable Southeast Partnerships. ABSI is working with Tribes in and around Dillingham on climate adaptations such as rock walls for erosion control, invasive species, stream restoration, and clam gardens. Continuing erosion may impact a few key resources in Dillingham in the future (i.e., airport runway and hospital).

ABSI has hired two grant writers to provide Tribes with receive free technical assistance and support for funding opportunities. They are also preparing for an Aleutian Guardians workshop with Unanga Tribal representatives. ABSI is looking forward to starting the solid waste management efforts with APIA in the Aleutian Islands. Lastly, Aaron Poe will continue his role in ABSI remotely after moving to Ireland in a week.

## **Work Group Reports**

### **Waterways Safety Plan (WSP)**

Steven Gabelein reported that the WSP Work Group met throughout the winter, working with Ms. Griffin and Bridget Crokus (USFWS) most recently on next steps for updating the Plan. The group is now focused on reorganizing the Table of Contents (TOC) to improve the Plan's usability. Mr. Gabelein encouraged members with organizational skills to assist. Ms. Griffin will schedule the next meeting to continue TOC work. Ms. McLaughlin thanked the group and noted that future Committee meetings will prioritize WSP updates and eventual renewal.

### **Managing Board Report**

Captain Buddy Custard highlighted two priorities for the Managing Board: maintaining membership and fundraising. He noted strong member engagement and emphasized that, as a 501(c)(3) with no pay-to-play policy, the Committee relies on voluntary contributions. He thanked Captain Steve White and the Marine Exchange of Alaska for a recent generous contribution and said the Board will continue outreach for funding.

The Board, in collaboration with APIA, has developed a Subaward contract to AIWSC under APIA's EPA SWIFR Grant to support solid waste work in the Aleutians.

Custard thanked the group for volunteering their time and expertise and emphasized the importance of strengthening the WSP based on past incidents. He encouraged members to consider ways to improve the Committee's impact and shared that a National HSC conference may be held in Seattle in 2026. If confirmed, he hopes members can attend. The conference Steering Committee is also developing a best practices website and has worked with the USCG to produce a Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular (NVIC) for Harbor Safety Committees. Ms. Griffin will redistribute the NVIC to members. Ms. McLaughlin thanked Captain Custard for his ongoing leadership.

### **Facilitator's Report**

Ms. Griffin noted that Nuka Research continues supporting the WSP and Storm Avoidance Work Groups, including meeting logistics and record-keeping. Website updates are ongoing, and she encouraged members to reach out with any updates they see are needed to the website. Sierra Fletcher added that Nuka Research participated in two meetings with APIA and its partners on APIA's EPA SWIFR Grant.

### **M/V Pan Viva Incident Briefing**

Ms. McLaughlin stated that a very serious and dangerous situation occurred in October with the M/V *Pan Viva* near Dutch Harbor. Captain Culpepper welcomed new members and expressed appreciation for everyone's time and investment in this committee and other regional efforts. He explained that during Columbus Day weekend, the Marine Exchange of Alaska (MXAK) monitored the M/V *Pan Viva* as it traversed the Great Circle Route. A severe weather system impacted the vessel, which was in full ballast but unable to maintain headway. MXAK notified the USCG.

The vessel requested to moor in Dutch Harbor, but no tugs were available at the time. The captain was forced to make critical decisions, eventually steering the vessel south into the bay and dropping anchor. Notifications were made to the QI. Gallagher Marine Services quickly stood up an Incident Command Post (ICP) within hours. The vessel carried approximately 250,000 gallons of fuel oil, posing a significant pollution threat, with 19 crew members onboard. A USCG helicopter was deployed, evacuating four non-essential personnel while the rest remained to help manage the vessel.

The situation escalated as the vessel's anchor failed to hold and dragged for several miles. The area included both a charted and an uncharted undersea cable. Several proximity trip wires were placed, and one was triggered when the vessel came within 1 nautical mile of shore. Weather was expected to improve within the next 6–8 hours, with response vessels prepared to mobilize the following morning. Attempts to deploy the starboard anchor failed: it was lost entirely, raising additional safety concerns. Communication with the vessel's flag state classification society in Korea was established via Gallagher Marine's representative, resulting in a waiver for the vessel to sail with one anchor. The first anchor was eventually recovered, though entangled with crab pots, steel cable, and debris, which took hours to clear.

Captain Culpepper issued multiple Captain of the Port (COTP) orders requiring standby tugs, and efforts were made to secure tug support and arrange future approvals for the vessel's onward travel. He thanked Ms. McLaughlin for her role in coordinating logistics, as well as emergency response staff for their effectiveness. The M/V *Pan Viva* ultimately continued its voyage without casualties.

During post-incident hotwashes, several key lessons were identified including the importance of coordinated agency communication. Pilots should be engaged sooner in the process, and there was positive reflection on applying lessons from previous incidents such as the *Genius Star*, especially regarding the use of "trip wires" to trigger actions. Limitations in regional resources remain a challenge, and increasing mooring space in Dutch Harbor was flagged as a priority. There was concern about large vessels operating without adequate local knowledge and the importance of giving pilots confidence that they are part of a monitored and supported system. The group also discussed the challenges of relying on flag-state standards from foreign jurisdictions, particularly regarding enforceability in the region.

Seth Chase added that with upcoming dredging at the bar in Dutch Harbor, larger vessels will be visiting the area more frequently, raising the likelihood of similar situations. Captain White commended Captain Culpepper for delivering a thorough briefing despite technical difficulties. Ms. McLaughlin asked about ways for improving communication in the early stages of such incidents. Captain Culpepper responded by stressing the importance of making immediate phone calls to relevant parties and keeping communication consistent. He recommended maintaining an updated phone roster, possibly involving the Managing Board in communications, and utilizing Regional Response Team (RRT) meetings and broadcast communications to supplement MS Teams.

### **Discussion of Draft Storm Avoidance Guidance Document**

Ms. McLaughlin noted that significant work has gone into the Storm Avoidance guidance document, which is now in a draft form and nearly complete. She invited Steve White to present on the effort. Captain White stated that the document addresses options for how vessels should respond when deviating from planned routes due to emergencies or severe weather. Remaining additions to the draft including a contact list and the QI response card. Ms. Griffin was thanked for her help in organizing and documenting the meetings.

Captain White acknowledged that determining the appropriate language was initially frustrating, but the group reached consensus. The next challenge is dissemination—how best to share the guidance with vessel operators, potentially through weather routing services or other maritime communication channels. He explained that the introduction outlines the regional challenges: the remoteness, limited resources, and why such a document is necessary. The pre-voyage planning section was carefully edited to avoid redundancy, emphasizing that the Aleutians are not ideal for nearshore operations. Weather is a persistent challenge, and there are few places of refuge.

Pilots are not an on-call advisory service, but vessel masters should consult them when necessary. The guidance stresses that if deviation from the Aleutian Islands Alternative Planning Criteria (APC) is required (for vessels covered by an APC), it should be done responsibly and legally. Best practices include proper ballasting, voyage preparation, and constant weather awareness. Captain Custard highlighted the importance of simple language, since for many vessel masters English is a second language. The document was tailored to ensure clarity for this audience. David emphasized the need for the guidance to be concise and clear, as it is an advisory document created to support the estimated 7,000 vessels that transit the region annually. It will help

masters manage storm conditions and understand evolving operations in the region, especially as modern vessels differ significantly from older ones.

Shari Coleman suggested translating the document into another language, depending on what's commonly used among vessel crews. Captain White responded that while English is the international language for shipping, many crews already translate materials themselves. Mr. Hartsig congratulated the group for their collaboration and added that the guidance will be helpful not just for masters, but also for company home offices. He recommended removing references to the USCG Homeport site until its updated version is available. Braun confirmed that the Homeport site is currently removed.

Captain Culpepper referred to the Ice Guidelines in Cook Inlet, noting the benefit these documents have had with including all mariners in discussions on readiness and response. He emphasized that the Storm Avoidance document will be a valuable tool for navigating challenges in the region and should be distributed as vessels enter the Area of Responsibility. Captain White pointed out the MXAK website's "Distressed Communications" section (<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/942e9e9c8eef4e4aa6cbfd8f6f92c517>), which includes video footage of the Pan Viva track and the vessel's propeller breaching the water during storm conditions.

Ms. McLaughlin stated her intent to bring the Storm Avoidance Guidance to a vote for inclusion in the WSP, highlighting its alignment with the USCG Prevention mission and its usefulness in storm avoidance scenarios. Ms. Fletcher noted that adding the guidance document to the WSP or making any updates in general requires the Committee to follow formal procedure. Ms. McLaughlin concluded by saying that, at a minimum, the group should vote to approve the document as a standalone product and plan for a formal vote at the next meeting. Captain White asked that any comments be sent to him and Ms. Griffin.

### **Closing Comments**

Karen thanked the coordinators involved in the APIA SWIFR Grant on sustainable materials management and ABSI for their work with NOAA on community resilience planning and vulnerability assessments. She encouraged anyone with relevant resilience plans to reach out and welcomed new members.

Ms. McLaughlin thanked everyone for adjusting their schedules to attend the meeting, representing their stakeholder groups on the Committee, and their continuous efforts to protect the region.

### **Next Meeting Date**

The next meeting will take place in late August or early September. A doodle poll will be sent out to determine a date.

### **Review Action Items**

- Committee members will review the Storm Avoidance Guidance document and provide comments to Captain White and Ms. Griffin.
- Ms. Griffin will:
  - Redistribute the USCG NVIC on guidance for local Harbor Safety.
  - Email the WSP work group to schedule the next meeting.
  - Draft a meeting summary for the Committee's review.
  - Send a Doodle Poll to the Committee to determine availability for the next meeting.

<p><b>Motion Andrew Mew, Captain Steve White to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned by at 1:43pm AKDT.</b></p>
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**Meeting Materials:** 1) Meeting Protocols, 2) Committee Roster, 3) January 23, 2025, Meeting Summary, and 4) Draft Storm Avoidance Guidance Document