

Rear Admiral Megan Dean
Commander - 17th Coast Guard District
United States Coast Guard

Admiral Dean:

I am writing in full support of recertification of the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council (CIRCAC). Since its creation in 1990, CIRCAC has been Cook Inlet's most effective organization for promoting programs to prevent spills, enhance safety in both marine transportation and oil facilities operations, and protect Cook Inlet's waters, shorelines, cultural, natural and wildlife resources.

I have been involved with CIRCAC for over 30 years, first as a regulator with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation then as an active volunteer. During that time I have found the organization worked with regulators and the oil industry to address related issues in Cook Inlet. They brought the voice of the citizens for the region to regulators and the oil industry with positive attitudes. Many of CIRCAC's suggestions have been adopted by regulators and the oil industry. There have been times where they have agreed to disagree with regulators and the oil industry yet they continued to work positively with regulators and the oil industry. Below you will find more of the important work CIRCAC does. Without an NOG like CIRCAC the voice of citizens is likely to be lost or demised.

CIRCAC advocates for better regulatory oversight and safety measures, they contribute concrete solutions on how to achieve those goals. This includes conducting risk assessments, sharing data, developing applicable tools and strategies, evaluating best available technology, engaging the public, and thoroughly reviewing contingency plans and regulations that prioritize prevention while promoting safety. No other organization has focused as much attention for as many years to identifying, assessing and mitigating risks in this region.

CIRCAC has been proactive in working with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) on a suite of regulatory updates, approved in 2021. CIRCAC worked with the agency, industry partners and through various public outreach campaigns to educate and support updates that strengthened the state's spill response rules.

Working with industry and multiple local, state and federal agencies, CIRCAC has expanded its Ice Camera Network. The information provided by these cameras has significantly reduced the risk of an incident in Cook Inlet's dynamic winter conditions and highlights CIRCAC's ability to develop partnerships and share information.

CIRCAC's science program provides valuable data about coastal habitats, physical oceanography and oil behavior. They recently entered a three-year agreement with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) to compile historical contaminants data from Cook Inlet into an integrated database for online access.

CIRCAC continues to provide its stakeholders and the public an avenue through which they can work with industry and regulators to ensure safe operations in the region.

CIRCAC's accomplishments in the last three years include, but are certainly not limited to:

- Updated Alaska ShoreZone visual data with new surveys along the outer Kenai Peninsula coast

- Received study plan approval from BOEM for data needs for model validation in Cook Inlet

- Advocated for a strengthening of oil spill prevention and response regulations

- Increased public outreach efforts through new, local advertising, exhibits and expanding audiences for its newsletter, website, and social media
- Expanded Geographic Response Information Database (GRID) in scope and accessibility

- Participated on and provide expertise to the Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee

- Expanded the Cook Inlet Ice Monitoring Camera Network with modern video technology

Since its inception, CIRCAC has formed and strengthened partnerships and encouraged consensus decision-making. Through this process, CIRCAC brings a varied group of stakeholders together to create environmental monitoring and oil spill prevention programs to promote safe production and transportation of oil in Cook Inlet.

I strongly urge the U.S. Coast Guard to re-certify CIRCAC so that it can continue to build on its work and positively impact the future of Cook Inlet.

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