

Matthew T. Bell, Jr.
Rear Admiral
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Commander 17th Coast Guard District

Admiral Bell:

I am writing in full support of recertification of the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council (CIRCAC). For 30 years, 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. Over most of those 30 years I have worked with CIRCAC first as a regulator then a volunteer.

CIRCAC advocates for better regulatory oversight and safety measures, they contribute concrete solutions on how to achieve those goals by working with the regulated community and the citizens. This includes advocating 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 identifying risks and developing recommendations to address them; an example is the recently completed Cook Inlet Pipeline Integrity Assessment. Through this project, a full catalog of Cook Inlet's undersea pipeline system was documented allowing a panel of experts, operators and the public to recommend risk reduction measures before problems arise.

Working with industry, CIRCAC has also been able to achieve the long-term goal of closing the Drift River Oil Terminal on the West side of Cook Inlet. Situated at the base of Mt. Redoubt, Drift River posed a significant safety hazard in the event of a natural disaster. Now, that oil is transported via pipeline, greatly reducing unnecessary risk.

CIRCAC's science program provides valuable data about coastal habitats, physical oceanography and oil behavior. Current research will generate new information about how biological debris interacts with oil as it moves through the water column.

CIRCAC continues to strengthen oil spill contingency plans and recommend substantive changes to ensure facilities are adequately staffed and that the plans are executable.

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

- Completing multi-year near-shore habitat assessment
- Launching groundbreaking study of marine snow as an oil transporter
- Advocating for a strengthening of oil spill prevention and response regulations
- Increasing public outreach efforts through new, local advertising, exhibits and expanding audiences for its newsletter, website, and social media
- Expanding Geographic Response Information Database (GRID) in scope and accessibility
- Working with regulators to maintain a robust Vessels of Opportunity program
- Upgrading the Cook Inlet Ice Monitoring Camera Network with modern video technology

Since its inception, CIRCAC has maintained a balance approach to meeting its mandate under OPA90. The CIRCAC Council fairly represents the diverse Cook Inlet community in directing the organization. CIRCAC forms 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.

Sincerely

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