



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

July 2, 2014

Rear Admiral Daniel B. Abel
Commander, 17th Coast Guard District
United States Coast Guard
c/o Docket Management Facility (M-30)
U.S. Department of Transportation
West Building Ground Floor
Room W12-140
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20590-0001

Re: Comments on USCG-2014-0414; Cook Inlet RCAC Recertification

Dear Admiral Abel:

I would like to express our support for the recertification of the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council (Cook Inlet RCAC).

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are the two federal resource agencies with trust responsibilities for living resources in and around Cook Inlet. For NMFS, these trust resources include marine and anadromous fish, marine mammals, and certain threatened and endangered species. Over the years, we have worked with Cook Inlet RCAC on spill planning and response, and have found their collaboration, support, and assistance invaluable to our purpose and interests in conserving living marine resources. Cook Inlet RCAC has been particularly helpful in adding to the knowledge of the ecological role of the Cook Inlet beluga whale, an endangered population endemic to Cook Inlet that may be disproportionately impacted by hazardous substance spills.

Since its inception under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, Cook Inlet RCAC has represented an important voice on behalf of Cook Inlet's diverse stakeholder groups and citizens. With heightened interest in Cook Inlet exploration and development, it is more important than ever that an effective and respected mechanism be in place to represent Cook Inlet's citizens in monitoring and promoting environmentally safe marine transportation and oil facility operations.

The organization has worked conscientiously to objectively represent the many stakeholder interests in the region, and develop meaningful partnerships with industry, local, state and federal governments and Cook Inlet's citizens. Through Cook Inlet RCAC's efforts and leadership, we



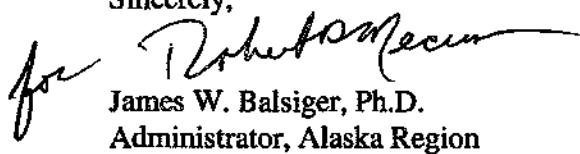
have made significant progress in the areas of environmental monitoring, and oil spill prevention, response, and preparedness.

Among their many accomplishments, Cook Inlet RCAC effectively lobbied for a dedicated docking assist and rescue tug for Cook Inlet and safer means to transport oil across Cook Inlet. The Council was instrumental in securing funding for and launching the first comprehensive Cook Inlet Navigational Risk Assessment, a project that has been supported region-wide by industry and Cook Inlet citizens alike. As part of this assessment, which is now nearing completion, the Council is spearheading an area-wide harbor safety committee. Moreover, such pioneering projects as the Ice Forecasting Network of Cameras and the Alaska Coastal Mapping Program have improved our ability to prevent, plan for and respond to oil spills.

As a named reviewer in state regulations of Oil Discharge Prevention and Contingency Plans for crude oil exploration, production and transportation facilities, Cook Inlet RCAC proves its tremendous value on an ongoing basis. Additionally, the Council's robust environmental and biological monitoring program has led to opportunities to partner with experts in the field, is expanding our scientific knowledge of the region, increasing our appreciation for what is at stake and giving us ideas for how best to protect our valuable wildlife and natural resources.

We look forward to supporting them in this effort and in future projects, and respectfully request the Coast Guard approve Cook Inlet RCAC's application for recertification.

Sincerely,


for 
James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.
Administrator, Alaska Region