

# **ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**

## **House Community & Regional Affairs Committee**

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### **Sponsor Statement**

#### **House Concurrent Resolution 22**

#### **Establishing the Alaska Northern Waters Task Force**

House Concurrent Resolution 22 establishes the Alaska Northern Waters Task Force to facilitate regional coordination and State of Alaska leadership in the ongoing development of the United States' policies related to the opening of Arctic marine transportation routes, national security, and resource development. The task force will comprise Legislators from Northwestern Alaska, leaders from Arctic communities, and key federal agencies. Together, they will assess and facilitate the creation of a joint state and federal entity to coordinate United States and Alaska interests that result from the opening of Arctic waters.

Perennial ice in the circumpolar Arctic waters is reducing in size at a rate of nine percent per decade. Arctic nations such as Norway, Canada and Russia are proactively promoting and defending their interests in increasingly ice-free areas. As the only Arctic state in this nation, Alaska has a unique role and interest in the development and evolution of U.S. policy in its northernmost region.

The creation of the Alaska Northern Waters Task Force anticipates increased federal attention to navigation routes, resource development, military activity and commerce in the Arctic. HCR 22 foresees the future creation of a joint federal/state commission that guides interagency and inter-jurisdiction actions in

the Arctic. It provides an opportunity for Alaska's Legislature and Arctic communities to assume a proactive role in shaping such a body, and ensures that Alaska's unique interests are strongly represented.

In the execution of its responsibilities, the Alaska Northern Waters Task Force will hold hearings in the northern communities of Barrow, Nome and Kotzebue, as well as Anchorage. By meeting in these regions, the task force will be able to seek guidance and feedback from the residents of the regions most likely to experience impacts from increased activity in the Arctic.

The Alaska Northern Waters Task Force will deliver its findings to the Alaska Legislature in January 2012, including legislative proposals for consideration.