

**Testimony on HB 106 – Coastal Management
North Slope Borough Mayor Edward S. Itta
House Resources Committee
Friday, March 25, 2011 – 1 p.m.**

Thank you, Mister Chairman. I appreciate this chance to speak with the committee today. Let me get right to the point. I'm in favor of the work draft of the committee substitute for HB 106, because it makes substantive and logical changes to the existing program, which is really no program at all.

The federal law on coastal management allows a voice for Alaskans in the permitting process when federal lands or waters are considered for development. The State thinks the law is working just fine. But when it comes to the Arctic OCS, the State has been notably **absent** from the discussion of a whole **range** of primarily federal issues that are **important** State concerns—including endangered species rulemaking, development of a National Ocean Policy, and ocean discharge limits.

Instead of being **engaged**, the State simply submits generic written comments saying it supports development, and then it litigates. That **certainly** doesn't address issues of concern to the affected local communities. From the **local** perspective, coastal management as it is **now** practiced in Alaska is a hollow program. It's ineffective because it ignores community input.

Alaskans agree that people who are closest to the action have unique concerns and deserve a voice and a chance to contribute their local expertise, especially when it comes to projects in their own back

yard. Hasn't the State been aggressively making that same point with respect to recent federal actions in Alaska?

Alaskans also care about preserving our unique subsistence cultures. And for communities in the North Slope and Northwest Arctic regions, nothing is more critical. That being said, we also **recognize that** jobs and economic progress are essential to our quality of life and to the preservation of our subsistence culture. We depend on a strong oil and gas industry and state economy as much as anyone else. We are not in any way "anti-development".

Several coastal zone proposals have been placed on the table, and I've asked the Administration to sit with us and go through them point by point. The Borough's position has been that there is **nothing** in these proposals that cannot be modified.

But the State has thus far **declined** to discuss any significant changes in the program. We'll **meet** and they'll hear us out, but they have not **budged on anything**. Their energy goes into explaining how well the program works for the State. This opens the door for industry to argue that local involvement will kill development. If that's the case, then how come we've had so much development on the North Slope and at Red Dog? Until 2003, those developments were permitted through a coastal zone program that was **much stronger** than anything recently proposed.

Many who have commented on this bill say that six more years of deliberation are necessary to identify appropriate changes that would address district concerns. I can't tell you how frustrating it is to hear

that. We and other districts have already spent huge amounts of time and money on that effort over the past eight years. There have been endless workshops, stakeholder meetings, program re-evaluation meetings, a federal review of the program, a legislative audit, and plenty of hearings in Juneau. At this point, delaying action is no action. It's just kicking the issue down the road for **someone else** to deal with later. And when it comes to the Arctic OCS, **later** may be **too late**.

Without a meaningful program, our communities are left with only **one option**. If the State has no interest in addressing our concerns, then we'll have to turn to federal agencies for help. We'll have to see if the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, BOEMRE and the EPA will pay more attention. That's the corner we're being forced into.

The Borough has been really clear that on most federal issues—like NPR-A development or Endangered Species listings—we have a **lot more** in common with the State than we have with the feds or the NGOs. I don't see why the State would want to push us away in a direction that could have unintended consequences.

There will be a de facto alignment going forward—either the **State** can align with the local communities whose interests it ought to represent, or the federal **agencies** and local communities can align. I don't like that choice and that's a choice that should concern **all** Alaskans who want urban and rural interests to come together. Alaskans are **most** successful when we're united.

On coastal zone management, the North Slope Borough has tried to play by ever-changing rules since 2003. We have nothing to show for it.

Now it's up to the Administration and the Legislature. If you're going to leave the program as it is, and let coastal management work for everybody **except** those coastal communities who **clearly** have the most at stake, it probably makes more sense to go ahead and let the program sunset.

On the other hand, if the State believes that local communities really **should** have a say in coastal policy, if it values the partnerships that come from working together on important federal issues, and if it is willing to consider reasonable changes to a clearly flawed ACMP, then we're listening.

In closing, the Committee Substitute contains many good proposals. I encourage the Committee to take a positive step forward on this issue by adopting the CS.

Thank you again Chairman Fiege for giving me the opportunity to testify today. Good luck.

###