SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 12

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY SENATOR DUNBAR

Introduced: 2/26/25
Referred: Transportation

A RESOLUTION

Urging the United States Congress and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to address outages of National Data Buoy Center stations.

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

WHEREAS the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration operates and controls National Data Buoy Center stations; and

WHEREAS the National Data Buoy Center operates 27 automated meteorological/ocean stations in the state, including both terrestrial- and marine-based stations; and

WHEREAS the primary function of National Data Buoy Center meteorological/ocean stations is to collect and disseminate in situ, real-time, quality-controlled observations in the marine environment to ensure the nation's maritime safety and to understand and predict the atmosphere, ocean, waves, ice, and climate; and

WHEREAS, because of the state's extensive coastline, vital fishing and tourism industries, dependence on marine commerce, and reliance on oil exported by sea, the performance of National Data Buoy Center meteorological/ocean stations is critical to the citizens and economy of the state; and

WHEREAS the extreme weather and remote nature of the state necessitate a robust maritime infrastructure that incorporates redundancies to reduce the frequency and functional effects of outages; and

WHEREAS information from National Data Buoy Center meteorological/ocean stations is used by mariners and authorities to determine when conditions for navigation are safe; and

WHEREAS the Hinchinbrook Entrance in Prince William Sound is closed to outbound oil tanker traffic from the Port of Valdez if winds exceed 45 knots sustained or seas exceed 15 feet; and

WHEREAS weather-related closures are determined by the United States Coast Guard Vessel Traffic Service Prince William Sound; and

WHEREAS the Vessel Traffic Service uses the National Data Buoy Center Seal Rocks Buoy as the primary source of information to make weather-related closure decisions; and

WHEREAS the Seal Rocks Buoy was established in 1995; and

WHEREAS, since 1995, there have been six major outages, with the two longest outages occurring recently; and

WHEREAS the Seal Rocks Buoy broke free in October of 2023 and, when the buoy was reestablished in the spring of 2024, the wave sensor was faulty; and

WHEREAS the United States Coast Guard supported the replacement of the Seal Rocks Buoy wave sensor by National Data Buoy Center personnel on September 12, 2024; and

WHEREAS the Seal Rocks Buoy again stopped reporting wave information on October 17, 2024; and

WHEREAS the National Data Buoy Center has not provided an estimated time for the repair or replacement of the Seal Rocks Buoy; and

WHEREAS almost all weather-related closures of Hinchinbrook Entrance are caused by wave heights, rather than windspeed; and

WHEREAS the Vessel Traffic Service relies on other nearby National Data Buoy Center meteorological/ocean stations at Cape Suckling and Cape Cleare as imperfect backups to the Seal Rocks Buoy, and those stations have also been recently plagued by extended

periods of inoperability; and

WHEREAS, in the absence of National Data Buoy Center meteorological/ocean station data, the Vessel Traffic Service must sometimes rely on subjective wave height reports made by crew members of commercial ships, putting the ship and crew members at risk; and

WHEREAS laden tankers exiting Hinchinbrook Entrance during conditions near the closure threshold is a safety concern, and a functional Seal Rocks Buoy is critical to the safe transportation of oil through Prince William Sound; and

WHEREAS, if a tanker were to lose power or steering in conditions near the closure threshold while the Seal Rocks, Cape Cleare, and Cape Suckling Buoys are inoperable, the risk increases to escort tugs and crews called on to assist the stricken tanker in time given the challenges of attaching a tether, crew members trying to work on deck, the additional strain on deck equipment, and other difficulties associated with operating in heavy weather; and

WHEREAS a major oil spill resulting from a tanker incident would have disastrous consequences on the regional environment, local ecosystems, subsistence lifestyles, Alaska Native villages, and economies of communities, particularly communities that rely on fishing or tourism;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature calls on the United States Congress to include language in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2025, to address National Data Buoy Center meteorological/ocean station outages occurring in the state and specifically to require the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to ensure the reliability of National Data Buoy Center meteorological/ocean stations and take actions necessary to restore the full functionality of National Data Buoy Center meteorological/ocean station equipment; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature calls on the United States Congress to maintain and enhance the critical public service the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration provides to mariners, authorities, and other users in the state through the observation and forecasting functions of the National Weather Service, including National Data Buoy Center meteorological/ocean stations; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature urges the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to work with Senators Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan and Representative Nicholas Begich to address, in the Commerce, Justice, Science,

and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2025, the National Data Buoy Center meteorological/ocean station outages occurring in the state; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature urges the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to adopt regulations that address National Data Buoy Center meteorological/ocean station outages occurring in the state in a manner that accounts for the weather and remote nature of the state, the importance of safe navigation to the state, and other unique challenges associated with maritime safety in the state.

COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to Dr. William Burnett, Director of the National Data Buoy Center; Commander Sarah Rousseau, United States Coast Guard, Marine Safety Unit Valdez; David Seris, United States Coast Guard, District 17 Waterways Management; the Honorable Lisa Murkowski and the Honorable Dan Sullivan, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Nicholas Begich, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.