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STATE OF ALASKA LEGISLATURE
HEARING ON THE FORMATION OF THE ARCTIC WATERWAYS SAFETY
COMMITTEE

TESTIMONY OF WILLIE GOODWIN
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WATERWAYS SAFETY COMMITTEE

Juneau, Alaska
March 10, 2015

Good morning. My name is Willie Goodwin. I'm from Kotzebue and am serving as Chairman of the Steering Committee formed last fall by a number of stakeholder groups who have come together to create an Arctic Waterways Safety Committee. I am also the Chairman of the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee.

I want to thank each of you for allowing us to come here today to tell you about our work to form the Arctic Waterways Safety Committee and what our vision is for this Committee. We are excited to tell you about this work and to ask for your support.

As we all know, the changes we are seeing in the sea ice of the Western Arctic Ocean is opening the waters of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas to new uses. Those of us who live in the coastal areas of the Arctic see the changes in our ice and weather patterns on a daily basis.

And we see the signs of coming commercial uses in the form of increasing numbers of large, foreign-flagged vessels moving through our waters and passing through the Bering Strait.

In 2012, at the suggestion of the U.S. Coast Guard, the five tribally and federally recognized marine mammal co-management groups - the Eskimo Walrus Commission, the Ice Seal Committee, the Nanuuq Commission, the Alaska Eskimo Whaling

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Commission, and the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee - came together to see what we could learn about this new activity that we have been observing. We were joined in this effort by the North Slope Borough, the Northwest Arctic Borough, Kawerak, and the Inuit Circumpolar Council.

What we learned, as I am sure you know, is that our waters are being looked at as a new shipping route between Europe and Asia. The Arctic is also becoming a marine tourist destination. We also learned that there are other foreign interests coming into our waters, to conduct scientific research and to explore to find what resources are there.

Like any new activity, this increase in vessel traffic might bring essential economic opportunities to our State and to our communities. But the size of these ocean-going vessels, the speed with which they can travel, and the projected increase in their numbers can also be destructive to the activities that already exist in our waters. Because of this, we need to find ways to manage these new uses, so that economic development can happen in safe and healthy concert with the other existing uses of the Waterways.

Among our five marine mammal co-management organizations, we represent all of the coastal marine mammal subsistence hunters of arctic Alaska, from the Bering Straits Region, north to the Canadian border. Along with our hunter organizations, our two Boroughs and the communities of the Bering Straits Region represent all of Alaska's citizens from the St. Lawrence Island, north. The marine mammals our coastal communities take each year, and share through our substance sharing networks, form a critical part of the food and economic security of the north.

With the changes occurring in our sea ice, we are seeing more fall, open-water hunting. Having our hunters, in their small boats, on the water at the same time as the peak season for large ocean-going vessels creates a great risk to both human life and to

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disturbance of the subsistence food gathering, unless we have a well-designed system for traffic management.

At the same time, the offshore oil and gas operators working in Alaska have very significant assets on the water and are planning to add more assets in the Chukchi Sea. It is in their interest and the interests of our State that commercial and other foreign traffic moving through the lease sale areas be routed so that they do not interfere with development activities or endanger assets or human life.

In 2012, our marine mammal co-management groups, working together as the Arctic Marine Mammal Coalition, began meeting with the Coast Guard, NOAA, and the Alaska Marine Exchange to explore what steps can be taken to begin developing a traffic management regime for the Arctic. Initial successes include the inclusion of notifications on the Coast Pilot and Maritime Charts about marine mammal aggregations and presence of subsistence hunters. Such information exchange is a critical component of ensuring the health and safety of our hunters and resources.

We have provided input to the Coast Guard on its Port Access Route Study, which will be submitted to the International Maritime Organization.

We also have been working with the Coast Guard and NOAA to get bathymetric surveys started in the Bering Straits Region east of St. Lawrence Island. Sea floor mapping in this area will make it available to deep draft vessels. For vessels on a south-southeast course, this new route will be shorter than the route to the west of St. Lawrence. This also should help to reduce traffic in our marine mammal hunting areas to the west of the island. It is a win-win initiative for both industry, who can enjoy shorter transit routes, and subsistence hunters, who will experience less vessel traffic in their hunting areas.

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Working as a Coalition, we also have been interacting regularly with the Alaska Marine Exchange to learn how we might help to facilitate the expansion of the AIS network along the arctic coast.

Finally, in 2014, at the request of the Coast Guard, we met together with other marine stakeholders, including representatives of oil and gas, the Alaska Marine Pilots, the City of Nome, our two Boroughs, and Kawerak. We also invited the State, representatives of the tug and barge operators working in Alaska, and representatives of the tourism industry to join us.

Our purpose in coming together was to form a Harbor Safety Committee. We chose the name "Arctic Waterways Safety Committee" since there are no harbors in the Arctic, but our goals are the same: to establish best lawful practices to ensure a safe, predictable, and efficient operating environment for all users of the arctic waterways.

We incorporated the Arctic Waterways Safety Committee on October 30, 2014, under the laws of the State of Alaska, and have submitted an application for 501 c (3) status.

This afternoon we will hold the Committee's Initial Meeting, where we will adopt bylaws and elect officers.

I have attached to my testimony a schematic showing the makeup of the Committee:

- the five marine mammal co-management organizations, representing the hunters on the water in small vessels;
- the offshore oil and gas industry, representing those with exploration and development operations, and the vessels supporting them;
- the Alaska Marine Pilots Association, representing those who are responsible for piloting vessels through U.S. arctic waters;
- tug, barge, and cargo operators, responsible for destination traffic in the north;

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- mining interests, as the Red Dog Mine is an important waterway user;
- commercial fishing interests;
- the City of Nome;
- the Northwest Arctic Borough;
- the North Slope Borough;
- regional Tribal organizations;
- and the marine tourism industry.

We are inviting Ex-Officio Observers from the University of Alaska, the Alaska Marine Exchange, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Marine Salvage, the scientific research community, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

We would be honored if the State of Alaska were to join us as an Ex-Officio Member of the Arctic Waterways Safety Committee.

Not all of the Committee's seats are filled at this time, but we are working very hard on our outreach to make sure that all stakeholders with an existing interest in arctic marine waters are represented.

As Alaskans and residents of the Arctic, we have a long custom of sharing and of making decisions by consensus. This is how Alaskans have always survived.

When the world around us changes, we incorporate those changes into our lives and find ways to learn from them and to gain benefit so that our lives are made better.

When offshore oil and gas first came to our waters in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we found ways to work with the oil and gas operators. We taught them how we use the waters and what we need to have a safe and successful hunt for the animals. They learned how to work with us and we learned how to work with them.

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One example of our very successful efforts, where offshore oil and gas and subsistence hunters have learned how to work together to share the waters, is the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission's Open Water Season Conflict Avoidance Agreement. We have other examples like this.

Our goal in forming the Arctic Waterways Safety Committee is to take this history of sharing, of collaborating, and of working by consensus, and to apply it to this new activity that is coming into our waters. By bringing all of the existing stakeholders together, we can define what the existing interests are and identify consensus on how we can best share our waters with new users.

Starting with these existing uses and users, we will develop a system of Best Practices for the safe management of vessel traffic in our waterways. As we are able to identify commercial and other interests that are new to our waters, we will invite representatives to sit down with the Committee and to work with us to benefit from the existing experience of Arctic Waterways users, and implement these best practices in a manner that benefits everyone.

This is an exciting undertaking. And while we have our work cut out for us, it is work that will serve a great public purpose, by ensuring that Alaska's waters remain safe for all users. This will enable us to maintain the food security of our northern communities. And it will help to preserve opportunities for continuing the safe development of our great State's resources for the benefit of all of our citizens.

Thank you.