

**Testimony of Denise Michels, Mayor of Nome, Alaska**

**Before the State of Alaska's Legislative Arctic Committee on the City of Nome's  
perspective of the Arctic Waterway Safety Committee**

**Juneau, Alaska March 10, 2015**

Senator Giessel and McGuire-thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. Participants, thank you for your participation.

Respected senators, my name is Denise Michels. I was born and raised in Nome and a long descendent of Inupiaq people who have relied on the sea and land to sustain us in one of the harshest climate in the world. I'm a tribal member of Nome Eskimo. I currently serve as the Mayor for the City of Nome and Director of Transportation for Kawerak, Inc., our regional non-profit.

I'm honored to be here to share my thoughts and recommendations today. Many of us in the room were members of the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission and are proud of the work for the Implementation plan recommendations which the City of Nome supports. The AAPC 's Implementation plan ties in with the foundation of the Arctic Waterways Safety Committee, which is the process of identifying projects for our work plan for the next two years. I'll paraphrase the D17 Admiral Abel's description that the AWSC is one leg of the three legged stool. The other two legs are the Bering Strait Port Access Route and the International Maritime Organization's Polar Code. Pull one of those legs of that stool and it becomes unbalanced. The AWSC allows open participation to address conflicts to be resolved with all users of the waterway without any attorneys or 10 year court battles that cost thousands of dollars. We thank the US Coast Guard District 17 for their technical assistance with the Arctic Waters Safety Committee.

Globally, nationally and statewide there are many forums, conferences, studies and workshops happening with regards to the Arctic and many international, federal and state agencies are working towards policies for governance of the Arctic which may impact our way of life and provide opportunities for economic development. It is an overwhelming process to keep on top of all the activities to ensure that we, who live in the Arctic, are at the table and we are part of the process in formulation of any rules and regulations that govern our way of life. The AWSC will be the forum for all information to be disseminated to all users of the waterway to identify, assess, plan, communicate and implement those operational and environmental best practices that promote the safe and efficient use of arctic waters from St. Lawrence Island through the Alaskan and Beaufort Seas.

The Bering Strait and the Port of Nome has seen an increase 10 fold with the number of docking at 446 in the 2014 shipping season. Many of these vessels have successful

transverse the Northwest Passage from sail boats, cruise ships and foreign flagged Ice Breakers, add that in with destination traffic from companies that have been operating in our waters successfully for years the Bering Strait will require a traffic vessel scheme within that 51 miles to avoid any accidents. Adventure tourism has increased with kite-boarders, jet skiers, swimmers, kayakers and winter ice driving expeditions attempting to cross the international borders. There is a lot of water activity traversing through the Bering Strait in a short window of time during the open ice season.

There has been a few near misses, a fuel barge broke loose from its tug, the company was able to launch another tug to get it controlled in rough waters. A tug traveling south sank off St. Michael.

The Port of Nome has vested interest in the AWSC activities, as were the only medium draft port north of Nunivak and has just recently been identified as the Arctic Deep Draft Port in the US Army Corps of Engineers and Alaska Department of Transportation's Tentative Selected Plan. The need is immediate for a deep draft port and a place of refuge.

Climate change impacts ocean temperatures, chemistry and impacts the biodiversity with unknown plant and animal life in locations where they have never been seen before. Nome's Port Commissioners have provided concerns which the City has submitted to the AWSC in regards to early spring season ice breaking and what the effects on the biodiversity will it have on the fish. The Bering Strait's region fishing fleet is one of the economic drivers that home port at the Port of Nome. Members of the AWSC have one thing in common, the sea ice coverage. The Port of Nome has had to address user conflict in the port with subsistence, dredging and commercial users with waterway management so we felt it was important to participate in the Arctic Waters Safety Committee due to our strategic location with the Port of Nome.

The AAPC's Arctic Policy #2 collaborate with all levels of government, tribes, industry and NGO' to achieve transparent and inclusive Arctic decision making resulting in more informed, sustainable and beneficial outcomes including efforts to (c) pursue opportunities to participate meaningfully as a partner in the development of federal and international Arctic policies, thereby incorporating state and local knowledge and expertise. This body's make up does exactly that, tribal and municipalities are at the table and part of the solution process.

The AAPC's Arctic Policy #3 to enhance security of the state though a safe and secure Arctic for individuals and communities include (b) provide safe, secure and reliable maritime transportation in the areas of the State adjacent to the Arctic are issues that the AWSC will address including.

Most importantly the AAPC's Arctic Policy #4 value and strengthen the resilience of communities and respect and integrate the culture and knowledge of Arctic peoples, including efforts to (a) recognize Arctic indigenous peoples culture and unique relationship to the environment including traditional reliance on a subsistence way of life for food security, which provides a spiritual connection to the land and seas. The AWSC had the marine industry and subsistence users at the table to address subsistence security.

The AAPC's strategic line of effort #2 the State of Alaska will address the response capacity gap in Alaska's Arctic support efforts to 2C expand development of appropriately integrated systems to monitor and communicate Arctic maritime information. Strategic line of effort #3 the state of Alaska will support healthy communities 3C support long-term strategic planning efforts that utilize past achievements, leverage existing methods and strengthen local planning that assess and directs economic, community and infrastructure development, as well as environmental protection and human safety. The AWSC foundation will address those two recommendations. We request support to fund the administration of the Arctic Waters Safety Committee through the cruise ship head taxes.

Again I thank you for allowing the City of Nome to participate.