

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES**

March 8, 2022

10:08 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Geran Tarr, Chair  
Representative Louise Stutes, Vice Chair  
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins (via teleconference)  
Representative Andi Story  
Representative Dan Ortiz  
Representative Sarah Vance  
Representative Kevin McCabe

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: COAST GUARD FISHERIES MISSION

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JASON BRENNELL, Captain  
United States Coast Guard  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented on the U.S. Coast Guard fisheries mission.

BEN HINCHMAN, Lieutenant  
United States Coast Guard  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the presentation on the U.S. Coast Guard fisheries mission.

CONNER SULLIVAN, Commander  
United States Coast Guard  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the presentation on the U.S. Coast Guard fisheries mission.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[10:08:56 AM](#)

**CHAIR GERAN TARR** called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 10:08 a.m. Representatives Stutes, Story, Vance, McCabe, Tarr, and Kreiss-Tompkins (via teleconference) were present at the call to order. Representative Ortiz arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**PRESENTATION: Coast Guard Fisheries Mission**

[10:09:41 AM](#)

CHAIR TARR announced that the only order of business would be a presentation on the Coast Guard fisheries mission.

[10:10:59 AM](#)

JASON BRENNELL, Captain, United States Coast Guard (USCG), introduced himself and other subject-matter experts from the USCG external affairs staff in Juneau: Lieutenant Ben Hinchman, Commander Jesse Houck, Commander Lyle Kessler, and Commander Conner Sullivan. He pointed out that the USCG portfolio includes domestic fishery enforcement in association with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). He stated that NOAA covers federal fishery regulations and the Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel Safety Act requirements. He stated that counter Illegal Unreported Unregulated (IUU) fishing is another portfolio item intended to combat foreign fishing activity on the high seas of the North Pacific. He stated that the USCG operation is called the North Pacific Guard. He listed other missions, including the Ports, Waterways, Coastal Security (PWCS) program. He also addressed national security and national sovereignty issues. In order to maintain maritime safety and security in shared spaces on the Bering Sea, he pointed out that Alaska is the "touchpoint" for the USCG's relationship with the Russian Border Guard in Kamchatka. He discussed changes to the maritime boundary lines, and the importance of developing a presence in the Chukchi Sea. He pointed out USCG has responded concerning Russia's naval exercises.

CAPTAIN BRENNELL discussed enforcement practices, explaining that USCG is ordained to board vessels on the high seas for the purpose of finding and reporting violations. He described a 2021 incident in which USCG was denied boarding opportunities by the People's Republic of China. This was based on disputes over appropriate protective gear associated with COVID-19. He expressed the opinion that the boarding denial was suspected to be a concealment of illegal behavior. He concluded that the incident will be addressed by the U.S. delegation. In reference to fast response cutters (FRCs), he stated that six FRCs will be operating around Southeast Alaska and the Gulf of Alaska to close some of the gaps associated with decommissions. He added that there are three more FRCs on the way.

[10:27:22 AM](#)

CAPTAIN BRENNELL, in response to the committee's questions, stated that in general, the USCG's responsibilities and duties, in relation to fisheries management, have remained stable in scope. He gave further context to the incident with the Republic of China, explaining that registered signatories to flag states should be authorized to conduct boardings. The USCG is operating the Chukchi Sea more routinely to monitor maritime boundary lines and fishing activity in the region. He explained that the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) and Automatic Identification System (AIS) capabilities across the world allow the USCG to easily identify vessels and communicate with international communities electronically.

[10:40:44 AM](#)

BEN HINCHMAN, Lieutenant, United States Coast Guard, in response to committee questions regarding violations, reported that over the past two years, the number of fisheries reporting had decreased due to COVID-19; however, the rate of violations detected on boardings had increased. Violations were processed by the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement.

[10:46:38 AM](#)

CAPTAIN BRENNELL, in response to additional committee questions, explained that the maritime boundary line delineates the Russian exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and the U.S. EEZ. He explained that search and rescue is the most important USCG mission and the foundation of the organization's work in Alaska. He estimated that annually, there are 600 cases throughout the state. He maintained that the prevention aspect of search and

rescue is of the utmost importance. Regarding the Republic of China boarding incident, opinions among the U.S., China, Japan, and Russia differ on the extent of enforcement. Currently, enforcement measures are administrative, while enforcement on long-term sustainability is more difficult. He observed that communication using the Alaskan Command (ALCOM) has improved over the past 10 years.

[11:14:48 AM](#)

CONNER SULLIVAN, Commander, United States Coast Guard, named the following acronyms: Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO), Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC), and North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC). He noted that both WCPFC and NPFC were RMFOs. He stated that USCG had a seat at both domestic and international council meetings.

CAPTAIN BRENNELL, in closing, discussed USCG's role in the Alaska Marine Highway System and described a mass rescue incident involving the Empress of the North, a vessel which ran aground in Icy Strait. He maintained that education about prevention and preparation in the case of a search and rescue effort is critical and new infrastructure, including new FRCs and facilities on state land, are in the works.

[11:24:51 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 11:25 a.m.