

## **Standards of Care in the Arctic Waterways Safety Plan**

### **Promoting Safety, Education, and Communication for the Maritime Community in the Arctic**

#### **Justification for a Standard of Care:**

Over the past two decades, the Arctic region has seen a significant decrease in the amount of time that the region is ice-bound, and an overall decrease of ice coverage in the Arctic basin throughout the summer season, opening new shipping lanes that have not been historically available for reliable passage. These two factors have opened the way for passage through the Arctic for many Maritime groups as new routes open and shorten the distance between major ports around the world. It has also opened the door for more foreign research vessels to expand their areas of interest while also allowing the cruise ship industry access to explore Arctic communities and waters. This increase of transient traffic unfamiliar with the region has created uncertainty over how to handle their presence and has given rise to safety concerns among experienced vessel operators who ply the waters today.

The primary experienced operators currently utilizing Alaska's Arctic waterways are Alaska Native subsistence hunters who operate in open skiffs and the commercial vessels that resupply remote communities to get them through the winter months. Of concern to these operators are what prevention measures by federal, state, or local stakeholders are already in place to avoid or mitigate any conflicts or potentially catastrophic risks as a result of the newcomers; where gaps exist; and how to avoid conflict and negative impacts, as well as protect the safety of the mariners using the waterways now and in the future. This is the basis on which the Arctic Waterways Safety Committee was formed and the reason for a diverse group of Alaskans to come together to create Standards of Care for the Arctic Waterways. With these new user groups arriving or transiting the Arctic region of Alaska, maritime safety concerns have come to the forefront for the residents and commercial users of the area. The following highlights some of the concerns:

- The risk to Alaska Native subsistence hunters or travelers being run over or overcome by wakes of larger vessels while transiting offshore in open skiffs;
- The potential negative impacts to Alaska Native subsistence hunting, and ultimately the food security of Alaska Native communities, from vessel traffic diverting or otherwise disturbing marine mammals;
- The lack of navigational infrastructure supporting maritime traffic and the age of the charts and soundings of the area;
- The lack of infrastructure in place to respond to either small or large incidents;

- Risks of oil and chemical spills or discharges by vessels;
- Risks of gray and black water discharges by vessels;
- Negative impacts on wildlife as a result of increasing traffic

### **Maritime Best Practices- A way forward:**

Increasingly, people in Alaska are coming together to create Harbor Safety Committees, Waterways Safety Committees, and watchdog groups with the purpose of creating partnerships and agreements, not regulations, to govern sensitive marine areas or areas of interest. One example of this is the Open Water Season Conflict Avoidance Agreement established in 1985 between the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and the oil and gas industry. Within such partnerships, agreed upon “best practices” for operating in defined areas are established by the people who know the area best and have an interest in the safety of their people and environment. These “best practices” can and should be shared with new user groups working or transiting in the Alaskan Arctic and the Arctic Waterways Safety Committee is the new body that makes this possible. The goal of this group is to mitigate potential conflicts and promote safety for all users of Alaska’s Arctic waters. In drafting best practices for the Arctic, the Arctic Waterways Safety Committee is supporting waterway users by addressing their concerns and creating relationships with non-local and International companies and organizations.

### **Why We Care- The partnerships we create for safety at sea**

Best practices, intended for use and growth in a living document, are only as good as the relationships and partnerships created by working together. As the AWSC works with new waterways users there will be further opportunities to strengthen our collective knowledge base as new users contribute their knowledge and experience surrounding maritime activities in the Arctic. This environment promotes an open dialogue between current and new users of the waterways and allows each party to share the importance and meaning of maritime safety and vessel responsibility when operating in the Arctic. Together these groups will develop new and innovative plans on how to keep the waterways accessible to various users while minimizing conflict and promoting safety of life at sea, as well as protecting the local marine ecosystems on which food and economic security, as well as cultural ways of life, are dependent.