



Alaska Marine Policy Forum

Summary from Wednesday, April 20, 2021

Host: Ginny Eckert

Notes by Darcy Dugan

The Alaska Marine Policy Forum is a bimonthly teleconference for Alaskans to network and share information about marine policy, budgets, and legislation at state, national, and international levels, sponsored by Alaska Sea Grant and the Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS). Contact dawn.montano@alaska.edu to receive email reminders and agendas for upcoming calls, and summary notes following each call.

Alaska Congressional Delegation Update

Sarah Pease, Senator Murkowski's Office

- Thanks to everyone who submitted programmatic requests; the portal is now closed.
- The [Ocean Regional Opportunity and Innovation Act of 2022](#) - is co-sponsored by Senator Cantwell, Whitehouse, Murray, Murkley, Collins and Sullivan
 - The goal is to create national support and a national funding mechanism to support ocean clusters. An ocean cluster is a group of private/partnership/academic organizations that work together to collaborate on Blue Economy type issues. This has been successful in other countries.
 - The bill will allow the designation of at least one ocean cluster in each of the 5 domestic NOAA Fisheries regions, plus the Great Lakes and Gulf of Mexico. It authorizes funding for seed programs—either a one time capital investment in infrastructure for innovation centers, or operation and administration support for the clusters.
 - This is a bipartisan bill with support from Senators from both coasts.

Mary-Eileen Manning, Senator Sullivan's Office

- Save Our Seas 2.0 passed in Dec 2020. Part of that established the [Marine Debris Foundation](#) which is a non-profit private foundation. The 13 member Board of Directors were just announced (includes two Alaskans—Ginny Eckert, Alaska Sea Grant and Juliann Curry from Icicle Seafoods)
- President Biden made an executive order banning Russian seafood imports. Senator Sullivan's office is working with the White House on legislation that would also ban Russian seafood that is processed in another country like China. Stay tuned.
- Senator Sullivan's office is accepting [appropriations requests](#) until April 22.
- H2V visas have closed for the fiscal year (these visas are commonly used for fish processing).

- [“Our Ocean”](#) Conference in Palau just finished. The US made a number of commitments including the Ocean Conservation Pledge (30x30-ish voluntary commitment).
- There will be amendments on the Coast Guard Bill (usually every other year). Stay tuned.

Legislative Updates

Liz Harpold, Representative Ortiz’s office

HB41, which creates a regulatory framework for shellfish enhancement projects and restoration projects, was taken up the Senate floor on April 20. This is a big step as some iteration of the bill has been around for several years. It picked up some Senate cross sponsors. The Senate Finance CS (‘committee substitute’ version) was adopted which removed language related to the Seafood Marketing Institute being able to market aquatic foreign products. The CS will be discussed on the Senate floor next week.

Thatcher Brouwer, Rep Tarr’s office

The House Fisheries Committee sponsored three pieces of legislation this session:

- HB26 addresses conflicts of interest with Board of Fish and Board of Game - in House rules committee, probably not moving forward
- HB28 - addresses a duplication of registration requirement that was created by the derelict vessel bill - in Senate Finance, waiting for hearing
- HB54 - invasive species management - being heard for the second time on April 20, and then on to Senate Finance and Senate Floor
- The House Fisheries Committee has heard a series of presentations this session on the following topics: Chum salmon disaster, other fisheries disaster declarations, salmon stock status update, ASMI market update, RFM certification process, Skipper Science program; changing ocean conditions and species affects
- Upcoming presentations: Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission and Alaska Ocean Acidification Network
- Confirmation hearing for new Commercial Fisheries Commissioner and Board of Fisheries coming up next week.

Invited Speakers

Kelly Kasper, Michigan State University

Topic: Vessel traffic in a rapidly changing maritime bottleneck

- For her PhD dissertation, Kelly looked at identifying spatial patterns of vessel tracking using AIS (Automatic Identification System) in the North Pacific.
- Her project analyzed 1 billion points from 2015–2020. In this presentation she is focusing on the Bering Strait region during the June–Oct. season between 2015–2020.
- Note: in 2018, voluntary routing measures were put in place by USCG on the US side.
- US vessel traffic declined slightly and then plateaued (probably mostly Red Dog Mine traffic); Russia continued to increase in this study period.
- Highest increases on the Russian side were in fishing and tanker traffic along LNG routes.
- Not a lot of changes in local vessel traffic. No regional traffic. Transient vessel traffic increased on the Russian side.

- Changes in vessel traffic are not evenly distributed. Increases in vessel traffic were concentrated in Russian waters in the Gulf of Anadyr and along the Northern Sea Route.
- Trends in transient vessel traffic in the Bering Strait Region are influenced by distant, telecoupled policy decisions.
 - Russian investment in LNG development on Yamal Peninsula
 - Shell's decision to stop exploratory drilling in the Chukchi Sea
- Don't extrapolate on these trends without caution!

After the presentation there was discussion that Nome residents have seen an increase in US Pacific Cod Freezer Longliners vessels but communities haven't been able to access the AIS data. The vessels are over 65 ft. It was noted that there are different reasons and authorization for why VMS exists in the fisheries management context, and it shouldn't be considered nefarious when vessels don't show up in data sets like this because there is a legal basis for the agency's authority. AIS has a similar structure for safety from an anti-collision perspective. There's a complicated structure of rules associated with different regions, different types of vessel tracking technology and different vessels. Vessels are allowed to be able to turn it off in certain circumstances based on legal basis. Kelly clarified that Marine Exchange AIS data was not used in this analysis because some of the regions, especially on the Russian side, have less coverage. (Marine Exchange AIS is terrestrial based; Kelly went with satellite AIS to include more data). Gay Sheffield noted that community members in Nome aren't used to seeing lights from vessels in the dark and are concerned about potential incidents because they may think a vessel went down and start the SAR process.

Ginny Eckert, Alaska Sea Grant

Update on mariculture

- Former Governor Walker appointed a Mariculture Task Force that sunsetted in June 2021. The [final report](#) is available. The task force was successful in many of the tasks.
- The successor is the Alaska Mariculture Alliance which is a 501c3. Membership of the group includes a wide variety of stakeholders with over 100 people involved. Several standing committees have been established and a [position announcement for](#) an Executive Director has been released.
- A companion organization recently set up is the Alaska Mariculture Research and Training Center. This is an avenue to bring people together to coordinate (not a brick and mortar center). It's currently housed within Alaska Sea Grant, staffed by Melissa Good. Ginny is the interim director waiting for funding to get a permanent director.
- Melissa has been teaching a seaweed processing and handling workshop (not just in Alaska). Seaweed sector is growing and more knowledge is needed in the state on how to process it.
- The University of Alaska sponsored the [Alaska Mariculture Conference](#) in Juneau in mid-April. There were local, national and international participants. The conference was recorded and will be made available.
- A Board of Fish proposal was passed in March to allow researchers to hold oysters in research facilities even though they are non-native to Alaska.

Keith Criddle, University of Alaska

Update on new Master of Marine Policy

- A joint UAF-UAS proposal to create a 1-year, 30-credit, course-only Master of Marine Policy program has been approved by the faculty senates at both institutions and the UA system-wide Academic Council.
- It is now being considered by President Pitney and will then go by the Board of Regents.
- If approved, it will start this fall and will be available statewide through distance education.

The next Alaska Marine Policy Forum call will be June 15, 2022 at 1 pm Alaska time.