



Grace Merkes, representing the
Kenai Peninsula Borough

Update from the Board of Directors

Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council

The Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council held its regular meeting December 4th and 5th in Anchorage.

Our speakers included Rear Admiral Bob Little, Commander, Arctic District, United States Coast Guard. He laid out his priorities and expected mission outcomes for the Council. These include controlling and securing maritime borders; facilitating commerce in a way that promotes economic security with a focus on Alaska-specific areas such as fishing, tourism and oil and gas; and emergency response. Admiral Little shared his vision for his command in the context of the \$24 billion federal appropriation that will bolster funding for USCG priorities with investments in new ships, aircraft, and updates to Coast Guard infrastructure like housing, ports, and piers. He also reported that he has been updated by his staff on Alaska's exemptions to Western Alaska oil spill planning criteria. Admiral Little assumed command of the USCG District that oversees CIRCAC's area of operations in July of 2025.

Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner-designee Randy Bates also addressed the Council. He highlighted the philosophy he brings to his latest role in state government as being an advocate for responsible resource development. Commissioner Bates also noted the importance of affirming states' rights in terms of resource development and his goal to "get fish back to the rivers". Bates is currently awaiting legislative confirmation to his position, which is expected in the coming legislative session. He brings nearly a quarter century of experience working in regulatory agencies at the state level and CIRCAC supports his appointment as ADEC Commissioner.

Current CIRCAC Board member Sean MacKenzie, who represents the Municipality of Anchorage, was our other presenter. A USCG veteran and former Captain of the Port for the Arctic District, Capt. MacKenzie is the Emergency Programs Manager for Anchorage's Office of Emergency Management. He detailed the Municipality's ongoing role in providing resources and relief for the 646 evacuees from Western Alaska communities affected by flooding from the remnants of Typhoon Halong in October of 2025. Captain MacKenzie's presentation served as a good reminder of the importance of strong regional and statewide partnerships to successfully address such incidents.

We would like to thank Prince William Sound RCAC for inviting our board and staff to its annual Science Night and holiday party while we were in Anchorage. Those events are a great opportunity to engage with our colleagues and help maintain a productive relationship with their board and staff members.

Our next meeting regular Council meeting is the annual meeting scheduled for April 10th, 2026 in Kenai.