



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 met for its regular and annual meeting, April 5th in Kenai.

The Council heard reports from several of our industry and regulatory partners. United States Coast Guard Captain Christopher Culpepper, Commander, Sector Anchorage, gave us an update of ongoing USCG operations and took questions about the December 2023 fire aboard the M/V Genius Start XI at Dutch Harbor.

We were pleased to meet with Emma Pokon, Commissioner-designee for the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. Ms. Pokon brings an impressive resume centered on environmental law to the Department and reported that staffing levels in the Spill Prevention and Response (SPAR) program are currently full in our region. Proper funding, training, and retention of staff in the SPAR program is essential to maintaining safe operations in Cook Inlet and has been a concern in recent years.

Captain Marc Bayer, Vice President of Marine Operations for Marathon Petroleum, gave a presentation on that company's global operations, while Captain Paul Mehler, Port Captain for Marathon in Alaska, gave a debrief on winter operations in Cook Inlet, highlighting safe operations during the recently concluded winter ice season.

The Council also heard an annual operations update from Hilcorp. Operations Manager for Offshore Assets Dan Marlowe and Maniksaq Baumgartner, Hilcorp's Alaska Government and Public Affairs Advisor outlined the company's progress with decommissioning, plugging and abandonment of wells in Cook Inlet and its offshore drilling plans for 2024 and brought the council up to speed on various grants the company is working on to continue studying the viability of its Cook Inlet assets for future use in renewable energy projects.

The Council also recognized several volunteers for their continued commitment to the CIRCAC mission; Walt Sonen, who represents the City of Seldovia, was named our Volunteer of the Year. Service Awards were given to Dr. Richard Prentki (30 years -Environmental Monitoring Committee); Molly McCammon (20 years – Municipality of Anchorage and Environmental Monitoring Committee); John Williams (15 years – City of Kenai); James McHale (10 years – Prevention, Response, Operations, and Safety Committee). These Council and Committee members embody the dedication that has been necessary to remain vigilant in carrying our organization's mission for almost 35 years and we thank them for their service.

The Council will meet next in Kodiak in September.