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**Alaska Marine Policy Forum**

Thursday, January 26, 2012

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***Alaska Marine Policy Forum:******A bi-monthly 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.***

**Peter Murphy, NOAA Regional Marine Debris Program Coordinator**

The March 2011 Japanese earthquake triggered a tsunami measuring 130’ in height, and affecting 250 square miles coastline. 125,000 buildings were destroyed and 25 million tons of debris was left. NOAA is modeling the debris path to figure out where the debris will end up. The current-driven trajectory shows debris dispersing toward the Hawaiian Islands this winter, the west coast of the US in 2013, and via the Alaskan current to the Gulf of Alaska, and then back out toward Hawaii in later years. Some debris is wind driven, and will move more quickly.

This debris adds to existing marine debris, and it is difficult in some instances to figure out what is coming from Japan. NOAA is trying to conduct more sampling and monitoring, and ongoing actions include detections with satellites to find and follow debris. Models inform satellites images, and satellites ground truth models. NOAA is also working with the Marine Conservation Alliance and partners in local communities for on-the-ground observations. They will continue to coordinate more with local groups on contingency planning and figure out how to handle the debris when it arrives onshore. Local knowledge will be important.

Experts say it is highly unlikely that the debris is radioactive for three reasons: the time lag between the tsunami and the reactor explosion, the small point source of the reactor compared to the extent of the tsunami, and the fact that high levels of radiation have not been detected in the debris to date. With regard to airborne radioactivity, the EPA has erected stations for testing air quality in Anchorage, Juneau, and Dutch Harbor. Some elevated levels of radiation were picked up immediately after the event, but nothing since then.

For ongoing information, go to [www.marinedebris.noaa.gov](http://www.marinedebris.noaa.gov). The Alaska Ocean Observing System will also be launching a marine debris page later this spring with Alaska-specific information.

**Bob King, staff to Senator Begich**

Bob attended the Alaska Marine Science Symposium in late January and enjoyed seeing many people. He also noted the Regional Fisheries Council Coordinating Committee met in DC on Jan 24th. Chris Oliver and Dave Benson from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council attended.

Current funding issues – NOAA has not received its spending plan for 2012. (Doug DeMaster noted that NOAA spending plan is at OMB and that NOAA is waiting). The FY13 budget is due in mid February, and Sen. Begich will have hearings in mid March. With the current political climate, everyone anticipates a tough year: “Flat is the new growth.” Sen. Begich remains strongly supportive of research on the Arctic.

Idea of merging Commerce and Interior: Bob and colleagues didn’t know what this would mean for NOAA. The new Administrator for NOAA Fisheries noted that regardless, the mission will continue wherever it ends up. Bob is interested in peoples’ comments on this topic.

The draft implementation plan for the National Oceans Policy will include the Regional Councils in the process. Also at the Regional Council meeting, NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco congratulated the Council members for meeting all of the deadlines of the catch limits.

Recent press on Alaska – The USCG Nome fuel delivery was nationwide news. Sen. Begich expressed widespread thanks for the collaborative efforts, and noted the need for icebreakers on the Senate floor. This incident also noted the difficult weather in AK and the need for weather satellites etc. “The Big Miracle” movie had a premier in DC and the whole Alaskan delegation attended. They were pleased with how AK was portrayed. Lastly, Alaska seafood was served at a House reception, and Alaska’s record of seafood was highlighted. Lt. Gov Treadwell was there. It was a good event, positive publicity on science based management.

A Port States agreement was introduced by Sen. Inouye focusing on port safety and pirate fishing. Sen. Begich is strong on this and there may be bipartisan consensus. Various port state nations agree on seafood imports, requiring advance notice when seafood is being shipped into a country, cracking down on illegal imports if on the IUU list, and verifying that the fish is what is claimed.

**Kathy Farrow – Arctic Research Commission**

The Arctic Research Commission report on Arctic Goals and Objectives for 2011-2012 was published in January. The report includes material from Arctic researchers locally, nationally and internationally. The report covers five broad USARC themes, and gives specific examples of research that is underway ([www.arctic.gov](http://www.arctic.gov)).

**Alaska Marine Mammal Stranding Network -** Aleria Jensen, NOAA Stranding Network Coordinator, provided an update. After reviewing data on the recent pinniped strandings in Alaska, the Working Group on Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events recommended in December that the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declare a multi-species Unusual Mortality Event (UME). The agencies have jointly appointed Dr. Raphaela Stimmelmayr from the North Slope Borough to be the UME On-site Coordinator and lead the investigation.

A workshop was held last week at the Alaska Marine Science Symposium to discuss strategies for moving forward with the UME investigation. The meeting was extremely productive as a forum for information exchange, as well as developing next steps for field protocols, diagnostics, and communications.  One of the outcomes from the workshop was a commitment to provide consistent and frequent updates to affected communities.  The Stranding Network will continue to use the outlets available to us for this purpose as we have done to date, including the NMFS and FWS websites, a list serve of interested parties, and regular communications with Tribal Marine Mammal Commissions and co-management partners. Other entities play an important role in disseminating information to affected communities as well, such as the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and the State of Alaska Division of Public Health.

Since this is the first UME involving subsistence species consumed as staple resources in coastal Alaskan communities, both NMFS and FWS will continue to prioritize concerns about the food safety dimensions of this outbreak. NOAA is making every effort to expedite the investigation so unnecessary fears can be put to rest.  Since these marine mammal cases were first brought to their attention in the fall of 2011, they have been working closely with the Division of Public Health to assess potential risks and distribute general precautionary guidelines around handling and consumption in the absence of a known pathogen.  At present, there is no evidence that consuming animals involved in this disease event has caused any human illness. No new cases have been reported in Alaska since the end of November.

**Amy Holman, Alaska Region NOAA Coordinator**

The implementation plan for the National Ocean Policy was released and is out for review until Feb 27th, including the section on the Arctic. Find it here: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/oceans>

Sea ice update – this is a very heavy sea ice year, impacting fisheries in the Bering Sea, particularly crab. The Renda and Healy are still in the ice. This is the first time in over a decade that sea ice has come down this far this early in the year, and cold weather has formed shorefast ice stretching all the way to Unimak Pass – impacting shipping. Cold northern winds have moved ice south, and experts are anticipating a cold February.

**Other Announcements**

The USCG will be sponsoring two sessions at the Alaska Forum on Environment (AFE) -- talking about the Nome fueling story, and Shell offshore drilling.

The Alaska Center for Climate Assessment & Policy (ACCAP) has sessions at AFE on The National Climate Assessment Report, and on the crysophere and a new sea ice atlas.

The Northern Waters Task Force report is out – available [here](http://housemajority.org/coms/index.php?c=104), produced by the Alaska State Legislature.

**Meetings ongoing/coming up**

NPFMC – first meeting of 2012, Feb 1-7 in Seattle.

International Circumpolar Health conference – will be in Fairbanks this summer

Marine Mammal Commission is meeting in Anchorage the week of Jan 25, discussing Arctic issues, disease issues, marine mammals in the US

IPHC is currently meeting at the Hilton in Anchorage.

Our next meeting will be **Wednesday, March 21.**