

International Maritime Organization Approves Routing Measures and Areas To Be Avoided In the Bering Sea and Bering Strait

As global shipping has increased through the Bering Strait, tribes of the region have expressed strong concern for the safety and welfare of the environment. Uniting together with the help of Kawerak's Marine Program, the tribes submitted comments to national decision makers such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) that could affect the area. Bering Strait voices seemed to be heard, as the IMO took action on May 25, 2018 to put in place ship routing measures for arctic waters off the west coast of Alaska. Three Areas To Be Avoided* (ATBA) were established, to include waters surrounding Nunivak Island, Saint Lawrence Island, and King Island. The routes and ATBA's will go into effect on December 1, 2018.

Years of work have contributed to the region's preparation for these critical moments of decision that have the ability to eternally impact the region. Tribal representatives in the Bering Strait region have participated in four workshops since 2014 hosted by Kawerak's Marine Program on the issue of shipping. Those workshops gathered representatives from around the region to discuss the uses of the waters in the Strait, the concern for the marine life and subsistence lifestyle, the safety and well-being of the people in the region, and solutions for the impending changes in the Arctic. These collaborative workshops have been vital to achieving advocacy success for the protection of the waters.

Recurring themes from participants at those workshops were as follows:

1. There should be no discharge into our ancestral waters
2. The potential impacts from an oil spill are of great concern
3. Shipping should not impact marine wildlife

While the official IMO action will not address or resolve discharge or oil spill preparedness, the routing measures and ATBA's have the potential to mitigate the shipping impacts upon marine wildlife. As impacts to wildlife would be devastating for the people of the region, these safeguards are steps forward to protect our ancestral lifeways. The routes, although voluntary, have the potential confine traffic to an established route and raise safety and environmental awareness while ships are near the ATBA's.

The Kawerak Marine Program was established in 2014 to address serious concerns resulting from the changing Arctic. We are grateful for the wisdom of the Bering Strait tribes who made the program a priority. The Kawerak Marine Program has been attending IMO meetings since 2015 in London and advocating for our region's needs. Workshop reports are available on Kawerak's website, <http://www.kawerak.org/marine>.

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AREAS TO BE AVOIDED

An area to be avoided or ATBA is a ships' routing measure that comprises an area within defined limits in which either navigation is particularly hazardous or it is exceptionally important to avoid casualties and should be avoided by all ships or certain classes of ships. General Provisions on Ships' Routing (GPSR) para 2.1.13. In general, these areas should be established only in places where inadequate survey or insufficient provision of aids to navigation may lead to danger of stranding, or where local knowledge is considered essential for safe passage, or where there is the possibility that unacceptable damage to the environment could result from a casualty, or where there might be hazard to a vital aid to navigation. GPSR para 5.5. The IMO instruments providing for the establishment of ATBAs are the Safety of Life at Sea Convention, Chapter V, regulation 10 and the General Provisions on Ships' Routing.

Workshop Reports Direct Links

<http://kawerak.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/BSVAS-report2016.pdf>

<http://kawerak.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/MP-Bering-Strait-Voices-on-Arctic-Shipping-final-report.pdf>

<http://kawerak.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Coast-Guard-RE-Docket-USCG-2014-0941-Port-Access-Route-Study-5-30-17.pdf>

NYT ARTICLE ON IMO Decision: <https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2018/05/25/us/ap-us-arctic-shipping-lanes.html>

Figure 1, PV Crystal Serenity August 21, 2016, Nome

