

**Consent Agenda Briefing for PWSRCAC Board of Directors – May 2026**

**ACTION ITEM**

**Sponsor:** John Guthrie and the POVTS  
Committee

**Project number and name or topic:** 8520 – Miscommunication in Maritime Contexts  
Phase 4

1. **Description of agenda item:** The Board is being asked to authorize a sole source contract with Sky Island Language Learning Research in an amount not to exceed \$60,000 for phase 4 of project 8520 “Miscommunication in Maritime Contexts.” In phase 4 of this project, Dr. Nicole Ziegler of Sky Island Language Learning Research will synthesize the results of the first three phases of the project by creating targeted, task-based learning modules informed by Phase 3. These modules will be made freely available to the public and can be used by maritime institutions and industry to better educate trainees and personnel. The created materials will be available on the PWSRCAC website, with design input from Dr. Ziegler, based on the Task Bank, a global database for task-based language learning modules for educators.

This contract authorization is contingent upon Board approval of the FY2027 budget, which contains funding for this project, at the May 2026 Board meeting.

2. **Why is this item important to PWSRCAC:** Historically, the Trans Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) trade has been serviced almost exclusively by U.S. flagged tankers, largely due to an export ban included in the TAPS Authorization Act. When the export ban was lifted in the 1990s, there was still a requirement that U.S. flagged tankers be used to transport any exported oil from TAPS. Functionally, this limited exports due to increased costs from using U.S. flagged vessels. Since that requirement was removed in 2016, more than 20 foreign-flagged tankers have visited the Valdez Marine Terminal to load oil, and that number is likely to increase substantially in the future due to a variety of factors. Oil production on the North Slope is projected to increase by nearly 50% as projects like Willow and Pikka come online at the same time as refining capacity on the West Coast of the U.S. decreases due to refinery closures in California. Similarly, most of the U.S. flagged fleet, particularly the vessels operated by Polar Tankers and Alaska Tanker Company, are already over 20 years old.

While miscommunication is still a source of risk among crews consisting solely of U.S. citizens, it's possible that if more foreign crews start visiting the VMT in the coming years, the cultural, social, and linguistic communication issues highlighted by Dr. Ziegler in her work could pose a new and possibly significant risk to the safe transportation of oil through Prince William Sound. Funding Phase 4 of Dr. Ziegler's work to create freely available task-based learning modules dealing with miscommunication in the maritime industry and guided by her research into the needs of professional mariners in this area would allow

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PWSRCAC to be proactive in reducing future miscommunication issues in our region of interest.

Dr. Ziegler has already confirmed participation from Teekay Tankers, a likely foreign-flagged TAPS trade shipper, in her Phase 3 work, indicating they might be open to incorporating her materials into their training or providing feedback on the modules during development. Dr. Ziegler also recently gave a keynote address at the joint conference for the International Maritime Lecturer Association (IMLA), International Maritime English Conference, International Navigation Simulator Lecturers Conference, and International Conference on Engine Room Simulators in Croatia. Many maritime instructors attending the conference expressed interest in the potential teaching materials she plans to develop during Phase 4.

The goal of Phase 4 of this project is for Dr. Ziegler to draw upon the findings from the first three phases to create a suite of task-based learning modules focused on the linguistic, social, and cultural communication needs of international professional mariners, including those working in Prince William Sound. These could be incorporated into coursework at institutions, used individually, or as part of occupational training. During development and upon completion, outreach efforts will be made to current and potential future TAPS trade shippers, the SERVS escort tug operating company, and the Southwest Alaska Pilots Association (SWAPA) to inform them of the materials and encourage them to incorporate them into their training.

### 3. **Previous actions taken by the Board on this item:**

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Action</u>
Board	9/22/22	Authorized of a sole source contract with Dr. Ziegler through Sky Island Language Learning Research in an amount not to exceed \$55,000 for Project 8520 – Miscommunication in Maritime Contexts.
Board	3/27/24	Accepted the white paper titled “Miscommunication in Maritime Contexts” by Dr. Nicole Ziegler as meeting phase one of contract 8520.23.01 and allow Dr. Ziegler to seek professional publication of the paper.
XCOM	1/15/25	Accepted the report titled “Exploring Miscommunication at Sea: Causes and Contributing Factors” by Dr. Nicole Ziegler as meeting phase two of contract 8520.23.01, and allow Dr. Ziegler to seek professional publication of the paper.
XCOM	1/15/25	Accepted the report titled “Miscommunication in Maritime Contexts: Insights from Phase 1 and Phase 2” by Dr. Nicole Ziegler as meeting the final deliverable of contract 8520.23.01 and allow Dr. Ziegler to seek professional publication of the paper.
XCOM	1/15/25	Authorized a sole source contract with Dr. Ziegler of Sky Island Language Learning Research in an amount not to exceed \$50,000 for Phase 3 of Project 8520 – Miscommunication in Maritime Contexts.

4. **Summary of policy, issues, support, or opposition:** None known.

5. **Committee Recommendation:** The Port Operations and Vessel Traffic System Committee supports this project.

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6. **Relationship to LRP and Budget:** Project 8520 – Miscommunication in Maritime Contexts Phase 4 is in the proposed FY2027 budget in an amount of \$67,500. This project is also included in the Board-approved Long Range Plan and was the number one prioritized POVTS project for FY2027. This project also ranked high by both the Board and staff with an overall rank of 5 out of 23.

7. **Action Requested of the Board of Directors:** Authorize the Executive Director to enter into a sole source contract with Sky Island Language Learning Research to conduct project 8520 – Miscommunication in Maritime Contexts Phase 4 in an amount not to exceed \$60,000.

*Note: This action is contingent upon approval of full funding of this project in the FY2027 budget.*

8. **Alternatives:** None recommended.

9. **Attachments:** None.