

Briefing for PWSRCAC Board of Directors – September 2023

ACTION ITEM

Sponsor: Alan Sorum, OSPR Committee, and
POVTS Committee

Project number and name or topic: A Resolution Urging the Homeporting
of a Sentinel-Class Fast Response
Cutter in Port Valdez

1. **Description of agenda item:** The Board is being asked to approve a resolution of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council urging the United States Coast Guard (USCG) to homeport a Sentinel-Class Cutter, also known as the Fast Response Cutter, in Port Valdez.

2. **Why is this item important to PWSRCAC:** At the time of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the then Valdez Marine Safety Office had no viable assets available on the water in Port Valdez. Recognizing the threat, the Island-Class United States Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC), ANACAPA, was relocated to Port Valdez from Petersburg, Alaska, to help protect the Trans Alaska Pipeline System, including the Valdez Marine Terminal and its associated shipping infrastructure in Port Valdez and Prince William Sound.

Starting in 2003 with the USCGC LONG ISLAND, an Island-Class Cutter has been permanently homeported in Port Valdez. Island-Class Cutters are being decommissioned to be replaced by Sentinel-Class cutters. The USCGC LIBERTY, currently stationed in Port Valdez, will be the last cutter assigned to Port Valdez. The USCG currently has no plans to replace the USCGC LIBERTY at the end of its service life.

Senators Murkowski and Sullivan, and the City of Valdez are urging the USCG to homeport a Sentinel-Class cutter in Port Valdez. Currently there is proposed funding for construction of at least six more of these cutters that are not currently assigned to a homeport. Senator Sullivan asked for input from the Council to support homeporting a Sentinel-Class cutter in Valdez during its recent visit to Washington, D.C.

Having a cutter assigned to Port Valdez has many benefits. Looking at benefits related to the Council's mission, having a cutter contributes to both the prevention of and response to a crude oil spill; protection of the Valdez Marine Terminal from a terrorist incident that would likely involve an oil spill; and directing and deconflicting vessel traffic during a response.

There have been recent instances of oil tankers and other high interest vessels including cruise ships having difficulty with commercial fishing vessels while passing through the Valdez Narrows. A 154-foot USCG cutter would provide a clear presence that would significantly reduce the marine safety and security risks this situation creates every summer in Port Valdez.

Approval of Resolution in Support of Coast Guard Cutter Homeporting 4-2

The USCG acts as the Federal On Scene Coordinator (FOSC) for any oil spill in marine waters. Sentinel-Class cutters have fully interoperable command and control systems that can work with Coast Guard, Homeland Security and Defense Department assets providing for coordination and supervision of a spill response in the field.

3. **Previous actions taken by the Board on this item:** None.
4. **Summary of policy, issues, support, or opposition:** None known.
5. **Committee Recommendation:** The OSPR and POVTS Committees have been polled on their support of this resolution and feedback will be provided at the Board meeting.
6. **Relationship to LRP and Budget:** None.
7. **Action Requested of the Board of Directors:** The Board is asked to approve the proposed resolution urging the USCG to homeport a Sentinel-Class Cutter in Port Valdez and supporting the Alaska Congressional Delegation and City of Valdez's efforts to secure this request as well.
8. **Alternatives:** None.
9. **Attachments:** Draft resolution 23-01 titled "A Resolution of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council Urging the United States Coast Guard to Homeport a Sentinel-Class Cutter in Port Valdez."

Draft Resolution 24-01

Urging the United States Coast Guard to Homeport a Sentinel-Class Cutter, Also Known as the Fast Response Cutter, in Port Valdez

WHEREAS, the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council was established after the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill and is mandated by Congress in the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 to promote the environmentally safe transportation of crude oil from the Valdez Marine Terminal through Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the Trans Alaska Pipeline System is the lifeblood of the Alaska economy, with its terminal in Port Valdez seen as critical to both national security and energy infrastructure, and understood to be a target for terrorism; and

WHEREAS, the volume of oil, which accounts for roughly 3-4% of the nation's supply, is transported through the environmentally sensitive and pristine Prince William Sound, necessitating a high level of care to help protect Alaska, its residents, communities, economies, and environments; and

WHEREAS, Port Valdez is a designated United States Maritime Administration Alternate Strategic Port, as a means to ensure readiness in support of force deployment during contingencies and other national defense emergencies; and

WHEREAS, there were no on-water United States Coast Guard assets available in Port Valdez after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, requiring the United States Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC) ANACAPA to be relocated to Port Valdez from Petersburg, Alaska, in recognition of the need for a cutter to help protect the Trans Alaska Pipeline System, including the Valdez Marine Terminal and its associated shipping infrastructure in Port Valdez; and

WHEREAS, starting with the USCGC LONG ISLAND, an Island-Class cutter has been homeported in Port Valdez since 2003; and

WHEREAS, the United States Coast Guard currently has no plans to replace the USCGC LIBERTY currently stationed in Port Valdez that is at the end of its service life; and

WHEREAS, threats to national security and critical energy infrastructure, such as the Good Friday Earthquake of 1964 and the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, emphasize the need for a timely and effective response from the coast in Port Valdez; and

WHEREAS, after the departure of the USCGC LIBERTY, the nearest cutters will be in Cordova at more than two hours away, Seward at five hours away, and Kodiak at 12 hours away; and

WHEREAS, the presence of a USCGC stationed in Port Valdez is a recognized and valued asset in enhancing marine safety and the safe transportation of crude oil in Prince William Sound, both in preventing and responding to oil spills; and

WHEREAS, in addition to support in prevention of oil spills and directing the Federal response to a spill, a cutter can serve in multiple operational roles including law enforcement, search and rescue, and fisheries enforcement; and

WHEREAS, recent conflicts within the Prince William Sound Traffic Lanes of the Valdez Narrows, with fishing and recreational vessels encroaching on the security zones in place to protect crude oil tankers, create a navigational safety risk and highlight the need for a continued presence by the United States Coast Guard to enforce the security zones that were permanently established after September 11, 2001, under 33 CFR 165.1710.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council urges the United States Coast Guard to homeport a Sentinel-Class cutter, also known as the Fast Response cutter, in Port Valdez; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council supports efforts by the City of Valdez to secure the homeporting of a Sentinel-Class cutter in Port Valdez.

PASSED AND APPROVED by the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council on this **XXX** day of September, 2023.

Robert Archibald
President

Bob Shavelson
Secretary