



December 5, 2022

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Working Waterfronts Framework. The Visitor Product Cluster Working Group (VPCWG) is an industry-led effort that aims to strengthen Southeast Alaska's Tourism industry. The group organizes itself around initiatives that addresses opportunities and challenges and advocates on behalf of the industry. We appreciate the time and attention that you and your staff have given to the challenges and opportunities for Alaska's coastal communities. Alaska's tourism industry is an essential component of our working waterfronts. We are excited about the potential of our sector to grow while benefiting our communities and other waterfront sectors.

Overall, the VPCWG supports the framework your office has presented. We encourage you to include tourism as a core sector of our working waterfronts. Southeast Alaska's tourism economy is far more than just cruise ship tourism, with growth in independent travelers, expedition-style cruises, and fishing lodges highlighting the need to make sure that tourism can grow with other sectors along our waterfronts. Alaska is a world-class tourist destination. People come from around the world to experience our incredible natural lands and waters and unique ways of life. The themes in the Working Waterfronts framework are in line with the initiatives of the VPCWG.

Workforce Development

- Maritime workforce development could benefit tourism. Federal and state assistance in educating potential mariners would go a long way in encouraging young people to choose a maritime vocation. Our group is pursuing initiatives to enhance visitor products by developing our local workforce and retaining existing workforce to increase value for our businesses and communities.
- In addition to maritime trades, guide skills and certifications can help locals take advantage of employment opportunities. Programs that support workforce development in the communities can have positive economic outcomes.
- The Visitor Products Cluster Working Group has identified a lack of housing as a significant obstacle to workforce development. As we invest in skills and opportunities for Alaskans, we need to make sure that we have places for them to live.

Ocean and Coastal Acidification Research and Monitoring

- We support efforts to study and respond to ocean acidification. Alaska's tourism industry is founded on the opportunity to experience our rich natural marine environment, particularly fishing and viewing marine wildlife. Impacts to marine life from ocean acidification could potentially impact our businesses.

Coastal Energy

- We support proposed grant support for hydro, tidal, and transmission infrastructure that can be sited in a way that protects the natural resources that tourism relies on.

Fishing Vessel Electrification Pilot Program

- We support this proposal and support expanding this program to include tour vessels. The International Maritime Organization's proposed Green Corridor between Seattle and Southeast Alaska. This is a huge opportunity for Alaska to lead the development of the next generation of clean ship propulsion. In addition to the large cruise ships, this route is sailed by at least four US flag small cruise ship companies, and dozens of small US flag charter yachts.

Tourism

- Shoreside electrification of large and small ship moorage facilities should be a priority for Alaska. The addition of "shore power" to piers & floats should focus on vessels that are not reasonably able to hook up to shore power today. This should include large cruise ships, smaller passenger ships, larger fishing vessels, ferries, tugs, and military vessels. There is ancillary value in this for Alaska, as some of the vessels outlined above would choose to winter over in Alaska if reliable and reasonable shore power were available, bringing additional economic vitality to the communities they winter in. Aligns with the priorities of the Green Corridor proposed with Seattle.
- We would like to see the following added:
 - Increased access to natural and wild public land through support for responsive special use permitting and recreation infrastructure on the Tongass National Forest.
 - Support for USDA Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS) as rural communities take advantage of growing and diversifying tourism economy. Fund USDA to continue the direction of this strategy and these investments. Ensure that the Forest Service has metrics to measure the success of their recreation and tourism support.

Small Boat Harbors and Boat Ramps

- Small boat harbors and ramps are a critical resource for Southeast Alaska's tourism industry. We recognize that this infrastructure is also essential for other sectors. Ensuring that sectors can find mutually beneficial outcomes.
- Short-term use floats & barges (24 hour) with drive down ramps enhance our harbors in a positive manner. One facility that comes to mind is the drive down ramp and float/barge in Petersburg, Alaska. This float is used by small ships, fishing vessels, construction barges, and many others. Drive down ramps provide better safety when compared to overhead cranes and carrying equipment by hand. It also provides better fire safety as it allows local fire departments to drive down to the dock rather than fight a fire from afar. We strongly support this type of facility.
- Haul-out facilities and associated marine services would increase the ability of ships to home port in Alaska. The shipyards in Ketchikan and Seward are the only two haul-out facilities that can manage vessels over 160' in the state. The challenge is that many of the support services that a full-service shipyard needs are not located in Alaska. Propeller and shaft repair, life raft certification, fire alarm & system services, engine & reduction gear rebuilders, HVAC service, and even chemists to certify it is safe to enter an enclosed space. Most of these services need to come from the Seattle area which increases the cost and extends the time vessels are out of service. While a full-service shipyard is desired, any future expansion must include appropriate service to support the shipyard if it is to be successful.

Regards,

Jaimie Palmer
Vice President, Allen Marine Tours
Co-Chair, VPCWG

Liz Barlow
Director of Sales, Above and Beyond AK
Co-Chair, VPCWG