

**Testimony by Vera Metcalf on Coastal Communities and Subsistence Use
Commissioner, US Arctic Research Commission
Director, Eskimo Walrus Commission
Ocean Policy Task Force Public Meeting, August 21, 2009**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in the meeting of the Ocean Policy Task Force.

As a Commissioner of the US Arctic Research Commission, as the Director of the Eskimo Walrus Commission, and as an Alaskan Native who resides in the Bering Strait region, I offer these comments:

- Appreciate the review of Ocean Policy. USARC has worked the Ocean Commissions in the past and is a member of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership where we have urged its Commissioners to pay attention to the Arctic Ocean and Bering Sea. These waters provide strategic amounts of energy and protein to the United States even as they undergo changes and become more accessible. There are real research needs in both physical and biological oceanography, including the important work under the Law of the Sea.
- As a representative of the Eskimo Walrus Commission and in support of coastal marine mammal hunting communities, I'd add that what's important to us is securing and preserving these and other natural and cultural resources for our future generations as we continue to rely on a variety of resources found in marine waters. This dependence is a significant cultural foundation to us because without them, we are even more vulnerable to the many changes to come, like climate and ecological change, oil and gas development, and increased shipping which amplify the pressure of recent economic sustainability questions for our communities. I truly believe this dependent relationship holds valuable insights for evaluating the quality of our stewardship of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas.
- Among the five goals set by USARC, I emphasized the need to incorporate these in ocean policy: 1) Climate Change and the Bering Sea, 2) Arctic Human Health, 3) Arctic Infrastructure, and 4) Indigenous Languages, Cultures and Identities. Each of these research priorities aims to understand the health and well-being of the Arctic, from its natural resources and processes to its human components with the understanding that these are interconnected. The Arctic Observing Network and AOOS (Alaska Ocean Observing System) need long term funding. Bering Sea Integrated Research Program (funded primarily by NSF and North Pacific Research Board) need s continued funding and should be replicated for the Arctic Ocean's Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas. This data-gathering is critical, especially for a "Changing Arctic." **[How does the human component fit?]**
- The Arctic is home to cultures, knowledge, languages, people who have survived many changes already through the millennia and who will continue to be "at home" in the Arctic for many more years to come. If there are any who are interested in the health and well-being of the Arctic, it is us. I believe maintaining this strong, fundamental link that we have with the natural world will be the measure for how well we are taking care of the Arctic and its seas.
- The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) including its Section 119 amendments to provide for cooperative management of species with Alaska Native Organizations (ANOs) like EWC is necessary and valuable for including the Arctic residents in the stewardship of Arctic seas. **Recognition of, consultation with, and funding to ANOs** for 1) collecting and analyzing data on marine mammal populations, 2) monitoring the harvest of marine mammals for subsistence use; 3) participating in marine mammal research; and 4) developing marine mammal co-management structures with Federal and State agencies, will provide valuable help in conserving and protecting the environment. We can contribute as the on-site, first responders who experience first-hand the changes in the marine environment, and who do so with specialized, culture-based knowledge.
- Also important to the well-being of our Arctic seas is the capability of the US Coast Guard to patrol and protect our resources as accessibility increases from the fish, shipping, tourism and development demands. The infrastructure to support their mission is necessary and critical. Of special interest to coastal hunting communities is the Coast Guard's vital search and rescue role, so very important to us through the years. Additionally, USARC has advocated for replacing the aging icebreakers with ones that can represent the US's interests properly.

Finally, my recommendation for ocean policy is, that along with specific research policies and plans, that it includes the Arctic people; support our unique, cultural, traditional bond with our world; support our languages, traditions of subsistence hunting, observations, support our efforts to be involved in scientific research, in monitoring conditions, and knowing that all things are all interconnected.