

PRESS RELEASE
May 28, 2013

For Immediate Release
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Passenger Vessel Association

PVA Says Voluntary Code of Conduct Can Protect Alaskan Harbor Seals

Alexandria, VA, PVA has submitted written comments to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) urging that the agency defer implementing broader restrictions on vessels operating in Alaska in the vicinity of tidewater glacial habitats for harbor seals in favor of current voluntary restrictions. PVA recommended that the agency re-emphasize adherence to the existing voluntary Code of Conduct to which PVA members, and others, are already committed and which historically has proven to be adequate.

NOAA's Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) proposed expanding vessel restrictions concerning distances from seals, speed limits, specified corridors, and area closures.

PVA's comments highlighted several key points to NOAA:

- Harbor seal populations in Alaska are neither "endangered" nor "depleted" and that the agency has never before put in place vessel restrictions unless a marine mammal has been listed pursuant to the Endangered Species Act.
- NOAA's studies cited in the ANPRM fail to demonstrate a causal link between seal populations and vessel activities.
- Independent researchers have concluded that an aggressive campaign of compliance with the current voluntary Code of Conduct in Aialik Bay has reduced disturbances of seals and coincided with stabilization and subsequent increase in the harbor seal population there.

PVA also urged that NOAA concentrate its limited resources on obtaining even greater levels of adherence to the Code, a strategy that PVA members are committed to and would yield positive results for all concerned.

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