



## 2021 FALL MEETING – **MINUTES**

*Virtual meeting via Zoom*

September 10, 2021 (10 am – 1 pm)

- 1. Call to Order**.....Billy Adams

Billy Adams – Called the meeting to order at 10:03 am on September 10, 2021.

- 2. Invocation**

Percy Ballot – Gave the invocation.

- 3. Roll Call** (Quorum = majority of membership = 6 ISC Members)

Ice Seal Committee		PRESENT	ABSENT
Bristol Bay Native Association	Sam Gosuk	X	
	Heidi Kritz	X	
Association of Village Council Presidents	Jennifer Hooper	X	
	Albert Simon		X
Kawerak, Inc.	Brandon Ahmasuk	X	
	Benjamin Payenna		X
Maniilaq Association	Cyrus Harris	X	
	Percy Ballot	X	
North Slope Borough	Billy Adams	X	
	Joe Mello Leavitt		X
<b>Total</b>		<b>7</b>	

- 4. Brief Intro / Meeting Logistics**.....Andy Von Duyke

Andy Von Duyke – Provided a brief intro and info on meeting logistics.

- 5. Introductions**

Taqulik Hepa.....North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management  
 Nicole Kanayurak.....North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management  
 John Citta.....North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management  
 Andy Von Duyke.....North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management  
 and Ice Seal Committee  
 Kayla Scheimreif.....North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management  
 Lori Quakenbush.....ADFG/AMMP

Justin Olnes	ADFG/AMMP
Anna Bryan	ADFG/AMMP
Alexandra Sletten	ADFG/AMMP
Justin Crawford	ADFG/AMMP
Jon Kurland	NOAA/NMFS
Sean Carey	NOAA
Barbara Mahoney	NOAA
Kristin Cieciel	NOAA
Peter Boveng	NOAA/NMFS/MML
Michael Cameron	NOAA/NMFS/MML
Karyn Rode	USGS
Vicki Cornish	Marine Mammal Commission
Rick Raymond	BOEM
Donna Hauser	University Alaska - Fairbanks
Rowenna Gryba	University of British Columbia
Carrie Goertz	Alaska SeaLife Center
Colleen Reichmuth	UCSC Long Marine Lab
Gayla Hoseth	BBNA

**5.1 Congratulate Shawn Carey on his imminent retirement**

This agenda item was moved forward to accommodate Shawn Carey’s schedule.

Shawn Carey – Provided a brief statement. Introduced Kristin Cieciel. Billy and a number of other meeting participants thanked Shawn for his service to co-management of ice seals and other species and to the communities in Alaska that rely upon them for subsistence.

**6. Vote in Percy Ballot**.....ISC Board

Chairman Billy Adams – Asked ISC board for unanimous consent to vote in Percy Ballot. No objections. Percy is voted into the ISC.

Percy Ballot – Provided a brief introductory statement of introduction.

**7. Adopt Agenda**.....ISC Board

Andy Von Duyke – Requested an agenda change that moved Karyn Rode’s presentation forward in the agenda (immediately following the 8.3 ISC Board updates) so that she has time to present given her tight schedule.

Billy Adams – Agreed that Karyn Rode’s agenda change made sense.

Jennifer Hooper – Moved to adopt agenda as revised.

Cyrus Harris – Seconded the motion from Jennifer. Agenda as revised was adopted.

**8. Agenda**.....ISC Board

8.1. ISC Chairman’s update.....Billy Adams

Billy Adams – Provided an informal update. Meeting with IPCOMM. Comments were sent on critical habitat. Seal hunting was good due to good ice close by. This hasn’t been seen near Utqiagvik for a long time. It was reminiscent of the 1980s. Lots of healthy fat bearded seals harvested. Looking forward to ringed seal hunting in the fall/winter. Whale hunting has commenced, with a whale harvested already in Kaktovik. Looking forward to in-person meetings because they are better and more efficient.

Percy Ballot – Asked about the weather patterns in Utqiagvik and whether they were “normal”.

Billy Adams – Replied that August was cold and snowy. Wind and wet sleet and snow. There were hardly any mosquitos. September was warm. Caribou are fat and have been since July.

8.2. ISC Executive Manager’s update.....Andy Von Duyke

Andy Von Duyke – Stated that the minutes from the previous ISC meeting have been posted on the ISC website. Links have been sent out. Zoom meetings are recorded and Andy will attempt to archive recordings on the website (depending upon storage). No-cost extension from last year plus current budget may allow for opportunities to pay for capacity building (e.g., Alaska SeaLife Center). Another option may be to attend the Alaska Marine Science Symposium. Costs may also be covered for the Next Generation of Ice Seal (co-management) leaders. Currently, there is not a secretary/treasurer – tabled until next face-to-face meeting.

Billy Adams – Suspects that the next meeting will be face-to-face. For example, AEWG did this in Fairbanks successfully. If protocols are met, then this will likely happen.

Percy Ballot – Asked if any partners are studying food chain? This was in reference to young seals that have been observed dying.

Andy Von Duyke – Indicated that yes, these studies are occurring and will continue to occur. Deferred to Lori Quakenbush and Peter Boveng.

Lori Quakenbush – Described the ADFG diet database recording the stomach content analysis.

Peter Boveng – Added that a new study has been initiated to merge diet, movement, energetics to address questions like this.

8.3. ISC Board updates.....ISC Regional Representatives

**BBNA**.....Heidi Kritz & Sam Gosuk

Heidi Kritz – Mentioned the voluntary subsistence harvest surveys. Not much occurring this year. Most hunters traveled out of the region to hunt. Working with Barbara Mahoney on research ideas (e.g., habitat and diet). Noted that not many seals caught in Bristol Bay.

Billy Adams – Reminded the ISC that Sam Gosuk had requested an acoustic mooring to monitor for the presence and timing of seals.

Sam Gosuk – In his [report](#), Sam agreed with Heidi that there were not many seals present. He was fortunate to get a seal and it was very fat. Not much herring spawn in the region. There is a pattern with commercial harvest preventing herring from getting to the coast to spawn. Herring roe is important forage for seals and for subsistence. Sam also found a stranded seal. In the fall he sees seals at river mouths. Expecting to see young bearded seals and spotted seals up river.

Andy Von Duyke – Noted that Sam Gosuk and Peter Boveng provided written reports and these will be made available on the ISC website. They are also linked in this document.

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**AVCP**.....Jennifer Hooper

Jennifer Hooper – Reported a normal spring and breakup period on the Kuskokwim River. Terrible cold and wet summer. Lowest salmon returns on record. Fishing was closed from breakup till the fall. Good sockeye salmon run was only good fishing of the year. Up to the fifth fish donation to the Yukon communities. AVCP’s focus has been on the fisheries situation. Berry season was pretty decent. Not many direct reports from the tribes. No recollection of concerns of issues relating to seal hunting. AVCP Natural Resources now has a facebook page. Hoping that this will be a good source of direct observational type information. Department is very small. Two staff currently, and are recruiting for two more staff.

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**Kawerak**.....Brandon Ahmasuk

During the summer the regional seal harvest was normal. Occasional reports of bearded seals with 2011 UME symptoms (e.g., hair loss primarily). Once in a while reports of skinny seals per the other UME symptoms. The past summer had a very poor salmon run for all five species. Same concerns about disappearance of fish and its impact on seals. Regional seabird die-off is still occurring. In the Nome region in

July had an enormous increase in rain. Also wondering about dietary studies of seals. Are the fish disappearing? Other predators having an effect. Big increases in pollack and Pacific cod in the region. Beyond this, there are also harmful algal blooms. Seems to be a ecosystem crash. Hopeful in the fall that things will be decent.

Percy Ballot – Expressed concern about food chain. Elders noticing that sardine fish are not abundant and that seabirds are not accessing them.

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**Maniilaq**.....Cyrus Harris & Percy Ballot

Cyrus Harris – Provided comments in which the effects of climate change seem to be at work. Very uncommon weather patterns, but consistent with other reports this year. Rainiest summer ever. East, SW, West and SW winds, all create high water. He never saw low tides in the summer. This was the second year in a row that the salmon runs were bad. Cyrus is concerned about the food chain. What’s going on out in the ocean? Ecological approach to understanding is important. Last winter was good for freeze up. First time in 15-20 years in which the sea froze up in Kotzebue Sound entirely and beyond the sight of land. Good spring hunt for adult bearded seals. So much to learn about what is going on in the Arctic waters.

Percy Ballot – Indicated that netting has been going OK. Also concerned about the food chain. Need to share info. Keep culture camps going.

Cyrus Harris – Was reminded to discuss regular seal hunting. He likes to wait until there is sikuliaq. Young bearded seals, ringed, and spotted seals. Seals will float in November. Climate change is affecting the timing.

Billy Adams – Reiterated about concerns on the food chain.

Brandon Ahmasuk – Wanted to mention that there has been a region-wide marine debris event over the past couple years. Lots of Russian labels on the trash. Also drums of oil (Russian labeled) present. Reported to the Coast Guard. Coast Guard will fly up the coast to recover at least one drum. Some seals in the past have been covered in oil.

Percy Ballot – Wondered about regulation of ship waste off-shore. Need to keep this in mind. Many, many more ships now than before. He wants ISC to consider this.

Billy Adams – Mentioned that the Arctic Waterway Safety Commission can update the ISC on this. ISC should communicate with federal partners. Billy’s report was already given during his chairman’s report.

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Karyn Rode – Requested that her presentation (agenda item #8.7) be moved forward to accommodate her tight schedule. ISC board approved. She provided an update on how some of the seal data was being used in a polar bear study. A summary of her presentation is posted on the ISC website.

- [Seal body condition and atmospheric circulation patterns influence polar bear body condition, recruitment, and feeding ecology in the Chukchi Sea](#)
- [SUMMARY](#)

Conclusions were that adult female polar bear body condition was related to the condition of ringed seals. Adult male body condition was related to bearded seal condition. Sea ice was not related to body condition. Therefore, seal harvest data is extremely important for understanding polar bear body condition.

Cyrus Harris – Mentioned a polar bear sighting in Kotzebue was the first one seen in years. Lots of sea ice likely to be involved. The bear looked healthy.

Billy Adams – Spoke on a variety of topics regarding the need to be careful about conclusions drawn from studies because of its potential impact on subsistence hunters.

Andy Von Duyke – Mentioned that a “more robust update” can be provided at the next meeting if desirable, however it was requested that presenters keep their materials very short for this call.

Karyn Rode – Made clarifications on two points: (1) females ate more ringed seals than males, and males ate more bearded seals than females; and (2) study did not show decline in body condition or in the population, and ultimately does not influence the quota.

Billy Adams – Suggested that Karyn’s work is important. Requested that this be an agenda item for the next meeting.

8.4. NMFS update ..... Jon Kurland

Jon Kurland

Provided older PowerPoints for background.

**Topic #1 - Consultation**

Jon Kurland – Mentioned a situation between NMFS and the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee (BWC). When NMFS finalized the 2020 annual stock assessment reports (SARs) it was discovered that NMFS did not consult with the ABWC regarding a change in the status of the Eastern Bering Sea stock from non-strategic to strategic stock; meaning that human caused removal (i.e., harvest) was above Potential

Biological Removal (PBR). ABWC was not properly consulted and highlighted a problem in NMFS' procedural process that provides for coordination with the applicable Alaska Native co-management organization. This is being changed to ensure that this is corrected. The 2020 SAR is being withdrawn so that consultation can be correctly be done with ABWC soon.

Andy Von Duyke – Asked about the production of SARs. Who is involved in producing these? Can Alaska Native co-managers be involved in the process prior to a final report being generated?

Jon Kurland – Responded that SARs are developed by MML. Reviewed by scientific review group (SRG), which is an outside the agency peer-review group. Public comments are also requested. Somewhere before the public comment period is when the Alaska Native co-management organization should have been consulted.

Andy Von Duyke – Highlighted that co-managers are not the public and so need to be consulted directly. Jon Kurland also confirmed and agreed with this comment.

John Citta – Indicated that the SRG simply missed this change (implying that they would have flagged it if it had been noticed). Though embarrassing, this will ultimately improve the process of implementing change and in consultation.

## **Topic #2 – Critical Habitat**

Jon Kurland – Brought up the ISC Comment letter from April 8<sup>th</sup>. Specifically, he found it difficult to reconcile ISC comments with regional agency comments, in which there was a lot of diversity of opinions. For example, NSB was critical of the designation, while Kawerak was in favor of it and asked for an expansion. Maniilaq also noted disappearance of ice and similar threats, so it's important for NOAA to protect that habitat. Jon brings up the diversity of views as understandable, but wanted to point out that ISC member orgs have different views that need to be considered moving forward.

Jon Kurland – Also mentioned his “confusion” about the ISC statement that it was not consulted in a more meaningful manner—specifically, that the ISC felt that consultation was late in the process. Jon disagreed with this and provided a detailed timeline beginning in 2013 that referenced the old PowerPoint presentations that had been presented to the ISC with NMFS' request for feedback. Jon then went on to ask how NMFS could have been better at engaging with the ISC.

Andy Von Duyke – Provided some comments (note that the summary provided below expands on and clarifies what he attempted to say during the virtual meeting):

- The ISC has limited capacity.
  - Annual funding only covers the time and expenses to plan and host one annual in-person meeting.
  - ISC has one paid staff member (ISC Executive Manager<sup>1</sup>) whose salary is covered for 5 weeks. Historically, the entire annual budgets for the ISC have fallen below the cost of a single administrative employee in the federal government.
  - Though per diem is covered, no other activities outside of a meeting are funded, including honoraria.<sup>2</sup>
  - Many ISC participants are volunteers, others are paid from grants or from very limited budgets.
  - All ISC participants sit on multiple boards and are spread very thin.
  - Actions and statements by NMFS that suggest an equal partnership between ISC and NMFS are not accurate given that NMFS draws upon the time of numerous paid biologists, statisticians, policy-makers, managers, administrators, and legal representation.
- Notification by NMFS that consultation has occurred does not mean that consultation has in fact occurred.
  - Swamping a tiny organization with no capacity to meaningfully deal with vast amounts of highly technical information is not consultation.
  - Receiving large technical documents in a near final form at the end of the process, rather than being invited to take part at the start of the process is not a good way to receive meaningful feedback, nor is it consultation.<sup>3</sup>
- Given that the ISC board is not compensated, the expectation of full and meaningful feedback on a nearly final and highly technical critical habitat proposal is unrealistic. Nobody at NMFS would volunteer their efforts to do this (and should not be expected to).
- The ISC will be able to participate in a more equitable and meaningful manner under the following conditions:
  - Capacity is built up to point at which the ISC can do more than plan and host an annual meeting.
  - The manner in which NMFS policy proposals are developed should also be modified to...
    - include the ISC at the beginning of the process, not the end.
    - utilize methods that facilitate ISC participation (e.g. workshop).

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<sup>1</sup> It is not the job of the ISC Executive Manager to generate a response to NMFS' request for feedback. This job is for the ISC itself. The ISC Executive Manager is not the ISC and cannot speak unilaterally on its behalf.

<sup>2</sup> Reviewing technical documents and developing recommendations requires time by the ISC members, which is currently not covered under the ISC grant. Modest financial requests in Section 119 grant proposals that would address this have been routinely denied.

<sup>3</sup> A great example for how this might look was at the polar bear recovery planning process, during which time a workshop format with facilitators was used.



- allow sufficient time for preparation and full consideration by ISC members and their communities.
- Co-Management that does not meet these conditions will almost certainly fail to produce “meaningful” consultation.

Percy Ballot – Communication is critical to everything. Confusion about what is being said. Percy reads his emails. Need to clear the air on disagreements on consultation. Need to find a way to communicate more clearly.

Brandon Ahmasuk – Future input would benefit if NMFS would come to the communities (even if just the ‘hub’ communities). Difficult now with COVID, but in the future this would be good.

Jon Kurland – Reminded ISC that public hearings were held in 2014 (Nome, Kotzebue, Utqiagvik). More recently these were done by phone, but there was less participation than hoped for.

Andy Von Duyke – Workshop based approach to consultation process. Difficult to anticipate this and other actions. With a lag-time in the proposal and funding process, workshops, involved conversations that add time to the meeting, etc. would not be funded. Request that an agenda item for meetings would be a detailed schedule that is developed to allow the ISC to request funds when it is clear there will be the need for more time by ISC reps to participate in these processes.

Sam Gosuk – Phone based feedback in rural communities is not a good approach.

Billy Adams – Would like more time in advance to prepare for these consultations. Anger and frustration can result when ISC reps go back to update their communities with information that policy has been finalized and/or implemented when communities have not had time for feedback and/or to fully understand what is going on. Every community will have different comments. Alaska is huge. Every region is different. Timing varies by region. Variation in responses is a good thing to hear because of the differences among the regions. ISC needs time to more fully consider, work with the communities, etc.

Jon Kurland – Brought up this topic in the spirit of improving the co-management process.

### **Critical Habitat**

Jon Kurland – Provided an update on timing and status of the proposal for critical habitat.

*Ringed seals* – Revising primary prey essential feature by adding rainbow smelt. Also revising text to be more general prey.

*Bearded seals* – Omitting acoustic conditions from the description. This is very data deficient. Will still consider anthropogenic noise effects during consultations. Also, shoreward of 20m depth contour will be defined solely by primary prey and not for sea ice features.

March 2022 is deadline for final critical habitat proposal.

8.5. MML update.....Peter Boveng

- [SUMMARY: NOAA Fisheries Marine Mammal Laboratory – Monitoring and Research, 2021](#)

Peter Boveng – Noted that the aerial survey-based seal population abundance monitoring field work has been completed in the Beaufort Sea. Data are under review. Currently, human checking of computer “automated” detections ( $n = 14K$  images). Project is moving much faster than previous efforts.

Publication updates:

- Haulout timing (important for estimating abundance).
- Den emergence timing of ringed seals (important for estimating ringed seal abundance).
- Plans for 2022 vessel-based seal survey (spotted and ribbon seals); includes recruiting an AK Native team-member from the Bering Straits region (Kawerak).

Sam Gosuk – What time of year surveying Bristol Bay area?

Peter Boveng – April-May

Sam Gosuk – Info on survey results?

Peter Boveng – Methods papers and paper by Jessie Lindsey. Main results on abundance are not yet published.

Brandon Ahmasuk – Kawerak region interested in having a community member participate on research cruises. Is this at level of ISC or Regional level?

Billy Adams – Regional level.

Brandon Ahmasuk – FYI, Kawerak approved this research. Tom Gray might be an option for a participant on the research cruise.

Peter Boveng – Not in update, but in the near future he will be stepping aside from program leadership and devoting more of his time for research products and publications. Will remain involved in ice seal research during a 1-2-year transition as he works toward retirement.

Billy Adams – Expressed his thoughts about how it is good that the ISC has developed positive relationships with long-term federal partners, but also unfortunate to lose a partner who has learned much about working with the ISC.

8.6. ADF&G update.....Lori Quakenbush & Justin Olnes

- [SUMMARY: Variability and trends in subsistence harvests of ice seals in the Yukon-Koskokwim Delta region, Alaska, 1962-2018](#)

Lori Quakenbush – Introduced the manuscript that analyzed the household survey data for harvest in the YK Delta (AVCP region) region to look at trends over the last 50 years. She mentioned that Albert Simon has reviewed and supports the manuscript. ADFG would like the Ice Seal Committee to be a co-author (as was done in the Nelson et al. paper previously).

Justin Olnes – Provided more details from the manuscript. In general, harvest trends have been declining in the overall number of ice seals harvested and per capita harvest. This was evident at two temporal scales. There have also been declines in the numbers of active hunters and the number of households that utilize seals. Causes: economic, climate conditions.

Andy Von Duyke – Asked if draft manuscript should be circulated to board. What is the timeframe?

Lori Quakenbush – Wanted this to happen as fast as ISC board can get it done because of the due date for the NMFS grant.

Percy Ballot – Requested a copy to send out to the community. Also, would like information provided prior to meetings whenever possible.

Lori Quakenbush – Noted that this was an ISC priority. ADFG found funds to do this work and would like to continue to look at other data (e.g., North Slope Borough).

Billy Adams – Important to continue harvest monitoring.

Percy Ballot – In favor of finding ways to fund future harvest monitoring projects.

Sam Gosuk – Likes the idea of local people conducting the surveys.

- 8.7. USGS update.....Karyn Rode

See above for Karyn's update (see the end of agenda item #8.3).

- 8.8. UAF / AAOKH Update.....Donna Hauser

- [Ikaagvik Sikukun](#), [infographic](#), and [recent publication](#)

[Donna Hauser](#) – Provided a brief update. Research based in Kotzebue Sound to look at changes in the sea ice. In the final stages of the project. Final products include topics such as changes to the timing of ugruk hunting.

[Alex Whiting](#) – Provided a summary of his journal data along with sea ice data.

[Cyrus Harris](#) – Indicated that IK and Western Science is the best way to do this type of research.

- 8.9. Shawn Carey retirement

[Shawn Carey](#) – Said his goodbyes earlier in the meeting (see agenda item #5.1).

- 8.10. Other topics / Closing comments

[Billy Adams](#) – Expressed a bit of frustration about the limitations of Zoom. Stated that we all need to learn how to work with this tool. Zoom makes things more difficult to understand.

[Percy Ballot](#) – Thankful for Kotzebue study. If Buckland can help, then let him now. Reiterated his desire to get information provided early if possible.

[Cyrus Harris](#) – Spoke of the benefits of using Indigenous Knowledge.

[Jennifer Hooper](#) – Be safe. Looking forward to in-person meeting.

[Brandon Ahmasuk](#) – Thanks and looking forward to the next meeting in person

[Heidi Kritz](#) – Thank you for sharing information

[Sam Gosuk](#) – Thanks for the information. Also requested the seal hunting workbooks from ADFG. Lori Q will send them to Sam, Percy, Cyrus, and Brandon.

[Brandon Ahmasuk](#) – Also mentioned Inuit Heritage program.

[Andy Von Duyke](#) – Will propose dates for in-person meeting

[Vicki Cornish](#) – All be safe. Encouraged by what she saw in the content of the meeting.

Peter Boven – Congratulated the group on developing skills in virtual meetings.

Carrie Goertz – Thanks.

Colleen Reichmuth – Congratulations on important publications.

Barbara Mahoney – Will touch base with Andy on upcoming topics for ISC.

## **9. Adjourn**

Meeting adjourned.