

STATEMENT OF
CAPTAIN JOHN E. DECARTERET
CHIEF, MARINE SAFETY DIVISION
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD DISTRICT THIRTEEN
BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON MERCHANT MARINE AND FISHERIES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND NAVIGATION
AND THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
AND THE ENVIRONMENT
JULY 27, 1985

GOOD MORNING MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEES. I AM CAPTAIN JOHN E. DECARTERET, CHIEF, MARINE SAFETY DIVISION, THIRTEENTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT. WITH ME IS CAPTAIN GORDON G. PICHE, CHIEF, MARINE TECHNICAL AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS DIVISION OF THE OFFICE OF MERCHANT MARINE SAFETY, U.S. COAST GUARD HEADQUARTERS, WHO HEADS THE COAST GUARD'S FISHING VESSEL SAFETY TASK FORCE. I AM MOST PLEASED TO APPEAR BEFORE YOU TO ADDRESS THIS SUBJECT OF MUTUAL INTEREST. FOR YEARS THE COAST GUARD HAS HAD A DESIRE TO DO SOMETHING TO IMPROVE THE FISHING INDUSTRY'S SAFETY RECORD. I AM GRATEFUL CONGRESS IS TAKING AN ACTIVE INTEREST IN THIS AREA TOO.

IT IS GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT COMMERCIAL FISHERMEN ARE ENGAGED IN ONE OF THE MOST HAZARDOUS OCCUPATIONS. IT HAS THE WORST SAFETY RECORD OF ALL U.S. INDUSTRIES. OUR CASUALTY DATA, OBTAINED FROM OUR COMPUTERIZED CASUALTY FILE AT COAST GUARD HEADQUARTERS, IS COMPILED FROM REPORTS OF CASUALTIES AND PERSONNEL ACCIDENTS SUBMITTED TO THE COAST GUARD BY VESSEL OWNERS, AGENTS, MASTERS OR PERSONS IN CHARGE OF A VESSEL AS REQUIRED BY TITLE 46 CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS PART 4. FISHING VESSEL POPULATION DATA IS OBTAINED FROM COAST GUARD VESSEL DOCUMENTATION FILES. WE ESTIMATE THERE ARE SOME 32,000 DOCUMENTED COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSELS. RECENT CASUALTY STATISTICS SHOW:

NATIONALLY

- VESSEL LOSSES FOR DOCUMENTED FISHING VESSELS OVER 5 NET TONS AVERAGED NEARLY 250 PER YEAR BETWEEN 1981 AND 1984. THIS IS A JUMP FROM THE 10 YEARS PREVIOUS WHERE LOSSES RANGED BETWEEN 150 AND 200 EACH YEAR.

- LOSS RATES OF LARGE (OVER 100 GROSS TONS) FISHING VESSELS ARE 5 TO 7 TIMES GREATER THAN LOSS RATES FOR U.S. OCEANGOING CARGO SHIPS.

- THE DEATH RATE FOR FISHERMEN IS 7 TIMES THE NATIONAL AVERAGE FOR ALL INDUSTRY GROUPS. BETWEEN 1981 AND 1984 AN AVERAGE OF 75 LIVES PER YEAR WERE LOST. 1984 DATA IS INCOMPLETE AND INDICATES ONLY 49 DEATHS AS COMPARED TO 111 IN 1983.

IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

- AN AVERAGE OF 72 DOCUMENTED FISHING VESSELS HAVE BEEN LOST EACH YEAR SINCE 1981. OF THESE, AN AVERAGE OF 8 HAVE BEEN THE LARGER, OVER 85 FOOT LONG VESSELS.

- 108 FISHERMEN HAVE DIED DURING THAT TIME SPAN IN THESE ICY AND OFTEN TREACHEROUS WATERS.

- DEATHS, VESSEL LOSSES AND CASUALTIES ARE NOT OUT OF PROPORTION WITH THOSE IN OTHER AREAS OF THE COUNTRY.

VESSEL SINKINGS AND LOSS OF LIFE INCIDENTS ARE READILY KNOWN TO THE COAST GUARD BECAUSE OF OUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE RELATED SEARCH AND RESCUE MISSIONS AND INVESTIGATIVE PROCEDURES; THEREFORE, WE FEEL THESE STATISTICS ARE MORE RELIABLE THAN PERSONNEL INJURIES AND VESSEL CASUALTIES NOT INVOLVING DEATHS OR TOTAL VESSEL LOSSES. CASUALTIES INVOLVING STATE-NUMBERED BOATS USED IN COMMERCIAL FISHING ARE NOT CONSIDERED IN THE ANALYSIS, AS THE POPULATION IS UNKNOWN.

HUMAN ERROR PLAYS A MAJOR ROLE IN FISHING VESSEL ACCIDENTS. CALCULATED TO BE A DIRECT OR INDIRECT CAUSE IN 80 PERCENT OF THE CASUALTIES, IT GENERALLY RESULTS FROM A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE IN VESSEL OPERATIONS THAT DO NOT RELATE TO THE BUSINESS OF CATCHING FISH. THESE INCLUDE POOR WATCHKEEPING PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES, LACK OF PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE, NAVIGATIONAL ERRORS, RULES OF THE ROAD VIOLATIONS, AND A GENERAL LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE VARIOUS FORCES ACTING UPON THE VESSEL, ESPECIALLY REGARDING VESSEL STABILITY.

FOUNDERING, FLOODING AND CAPSIZING ARE THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTOR TO LOSSES. CASUALTY DATA SHOW THAT THEY CONTRIBUTED TO APPROXIMATELY 43 PERCENT OF ALL LOSSES. SOME LOSSES DUE TO CAPSIZING CAN BE TRACED DIRECTLY TO THE MANNER IN WHICH THE VESSEL WAS OPERATED. A NUMBER OF CASUALTY REPORTS HAVE BEEN REVIEWED IN WHICH THE VESSEL AT THE TIME IT WAS PUT IN SERVICE MET THE INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION (IMO) RECOMMENDED STABILITY CRITERIA AND HAD STABILITY LOADING INFORMATION; HOWEVER, THE OPERATOR NEGLECTED TO LOAD OR OPERATE THE VESSEL ACCORDING TO THESE RESTRICTIONS.

FIRES AND EXPLOSIONS ARE THE SECOND MAJOR PROBLEM AREA. APPROXIMATELY 25 PERCENT OF THE LOSSES FALL INTO THIS CATEGORY. OVER TWO THIRDS OF THESE CASUALTIES OCCURRED IN THE ENGINE ROOM SPACES DUE TO MACHINERY OR ELECTRICAL FAILURE. A GENERAL LACK OF VESSEL "HOUSEKEEPING" ALSO CONTRIBUTED.

ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF CASUALTIES SUGGESTS THAT MANY COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED OR THE SEVERITY DIMINISHED IF MORE PRECAUTIONS HAD BEEN TAKEN OR IF THE VESSEL HAD BEEN OPERATED MORE PRUDENTLY. THE INSTALLATION OF FIRE AND SMOKE ALARMS IN THE ENGINE SPACES WOULD HAVE, IN MANY CASES, ALERTED THE CREW TO A FIRE IN ITS EARLY STAGES. SIMILARLY, A BILGE ALARM WOULD HAVE ALERTED THE CREW TO EARLY FLOODING OF WATER INTO THE VESSEL.

FACED WITH INCREASED COMPETITION FOR LIMITED RESOURCES, OPERATORS ARE ALSO EMBARKING ON VOYAGES UNDER CONDITIONS WHICH WOULD OTHERWISE DICTATE STAYING IN PORT. VESSELS ROUTINELY ENCOUNTER CONDITIONS WHICH SEVERELY TAX THEIR CAPABILITIES. LOSSES ARE INEVITABLE.

SOME HAVE SUGGESTED A MANDATORY LICENSING AND INSPECTION PROGRAM. IF SUCH A PROGRAM WERE MANDATED BY CONGRESS, WE WOULD NEED A SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN RESOURCES. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE AREA OF LICENSING IT WOULD TAKE AT LEAST 4 YEARS TO IMPLEMENT AND ISSUE APPROXIMATELY 67,000 LICENSES. OUR LICENSING ACTIVITY WOULD INCREASE BY 67 PERCENT PER YEAR. INSPECTION AND CERTIFICATION OF FISHING VESSELS WOULD INCREASE OUR WORKLOAD BY 200 PERCENT. THE IMPOSITION OF USER FEES FOR INSPECTION AND LICENSING WOULD NECESSARILY BE A CONSIDERATION IN ANY NEW REGULATORY PROGRAM. WHILE A LICENSING/CERTIFICATION PROGRAM IS ATTRACTIVE TO SOME SINCE IT PROVIDES AN AVENUE OF ENFORCEMENT, THE COAST GUARD IS CONVINCED THAT FOR THIS PARTICULAR CLASS OF VESSEL AND PERSONNEL A VOLUNTARY PROGRAM CAN PROVIDE AN EQUIVALENT DEGREE OF SAFETY IN A MUCH SHORTER TIME FRAME. TO THIS END, THE COAST GUARD WANTS TO CREATE A FRAMEWORK FOR THE INDUSTRY TO DEMONSTRATE THAT IT CAN IMPROVE ITS SAFETY RECORD WITHOUT GOVERNMENT REGULATION.

ADMIRAL GRACEY, COMMANDANT OF THE COAST GUARD, RECOMMENDED A FISHING VESSEL SAFETY INITIATIVE TO THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF CASUALTIES IN THE UNINSPECTED COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL FLEET. THE SECRETARY ENDORSED THE INITIATIVE AND FORMULATION OF A SAFETY PROGRAM BEGAN IN THE SPRING OF 1984. THE FISHING VESSEL SAFETY PROGRAM HAS EVOLVED INTO ONE WHICH IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY. THE OVERALL SITUATION HAS CREATED AN ATMOSPHERE WHERE OUR PROPOSED ALL VOLUNTARY PROGRAM CAN BE EFFECTIVE IN REDUCING CASUALTIES AND LOSSES. A TWO PRONGED APPROACH IS BEING PURSUED: VOLUNTARY VESSEL STANDARDS AND A SAFETY AWARENESS/EDUCATION PROGRAM.

THE VOLUNTARY STANDARDS CONSIST OF A SERIES OF 5 NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULARS (NVICS), PUBLISHED BY THE COAST GUARD. THEY ARE TECHNICAL IN NATURE AND AIMED MORE AT THE FISHING VESSEL DESIGNER, BUILDER, AND OUTFITTER; AND FOCUS ON SUCH SUBJECTS AS STABILITY; RADIO AND SHIPBOARD NAVIGATION EQUIPMENT; CONSTRUCTION, MACHINERY AND ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT; FIRE PROTECTION; AND LIFESAVING AND PERSONNEL PROTECTION. THE NVICS ON STABILITY AND RADIO AND SHIPBOARD NAVIGATION EQUIPMENT WERE SIGNED IN EARLY JUNE. THE ONE ON STABILITY IS AVAILABLE AS OF THIS WEEK AND THE OTHER WILL BE VERY SOON. THE REMAINING 3 ARE NEARLY COMPLETE AND WILL BE GOING TO THE PRINTERS IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF WEEKS.

SINCE INPUT FROM THE FISHING INDUSTRY AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES IS ESSENTIAL, WE ARE PUBLISHING THE SERIES OF NVICS AS PROPOSED STANDARDS WITH THE INTENTION OF REVISING THEM TO ADDRESS COMMENTS AND COMPILING THEM INTO ONE PUBLICATION IN THE SPRING OF 1986.

THE SAFETY AWARENESS/EDUCATION PROGRAM CONSISTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FISHING VESSEL SAFETY GUIDE AND ASSOCIATED COURSES AIMED DIRECTLY AT FISHERMEN. THE GUIDE WILL BE A BOOKLET WITH CHAPTERS WHICH PARALLEL THE VESSEL STANDARDS BUT PRESENTED IN PICTURES, DIAGRAMS AND LANGUAGE TAILORED FOR FISHERMEN. THE GUIDE IS BEING DEVELOPED IN A JOINT EFFORT BETWEEN THE NORTH PACIFIC FISHING VESSEL OWNERS' ASSOCIATION AND THE COAST GUARD TASK FORCE. THE FUNDING FOR THE INITIAL VERSION OF THE GUIDE IS \$45,500 FROM A NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE SALTONSALL-KENNEDY GRANT, \$21,375 BY THE FISHING VESSEL OWNERS ASSOCIATION AND \$40,000 FROM THE COAST GUARD. THE FINAL PRODUCT WILL NEED SOME TAILORING FOR EACH PART OF THE COUNTRY; THEREFORE, OTHER FISHING VESSEL ASSOCIATIONS AND INTERESTED GROUPS WILL NEED TO GET INVOLVED. THE GUIDE WILL BE DISTRIBUTED PRIMARILY BY THE VESSEL OWNER ASSOCIATIONS AND THE NOAA SEA GRANT AND MARINE ADVISORY SERVICES' NATIONAL NETWORK.

THE TASK FORCE IS INVOLVING FISHING VESSEL INTERESTS TO THE EXTENT THAT IT CAN REACH THEM. THEY HAVE COMMUNICATED WITH FISHING VESSEL OWNER ASSOCIATIONS, INSURANCE UNDERWRITERS AND BROKERS, MARINE SURVEYORS, OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES SUCH AS THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION (NOAA) AND THE NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS), CONGRESSIONAL STAFFERS, COAST GUARD DISTRICTS AND FIELD UNITS AND THE NOAA/SEA GRANT UNIVERSITY FISHING VESSEL SAFETY CENTERS. THE MOST POSITIVE RESPONSE HAS COME FROM THE NORTH PACIFIC FISHING VESSELS OWNERS' ASSOCIATION, WHOSE MEMBERS ARE TAKING DECISIVE STEPS TO REGAIN THE CONFIDENCE OF INSURANCE INTERESTS BY DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE VESSEL SAFETY PROGRAM. TASK FORCE PERSONNEL HAVE DISCUSSED THE

VOLUNTARY STANDARDS WITH THE ASSOCIATION MEMBERS AND INSURANCE INTERESTS, JOINED FORCES WITH THEM IN DEVELOPING THE CREW SAFETY GUIDE, AND TOTALLY SUPPORT THEIR EFFORTS TO CREATE TRAINING COURSES TO LOCALLY EDUCATE THE FISHERMEN IN SAFETY BASED ON THE GUIDE. THE COAST GUARD BELIEVES THIS EFFORT WILL BE THE MODEL THAT OTHER AREAS OF THE COUNTRY WILL BE ABLE TO FOLLOW AND TAILOR FOR THEIR PARTICULAR FISHERY.

IN SUMMARY, WE FEEL OUR VOLUNTARY PROGRAM WILL MEET THE NEEDS OF INDUSTRY; THAT IS, BE THE FRAMEWORK THAT LOCAL FISHING AND INSURANCE GROUPS CAN USE TO ASSURE A REASONABLE LEVEL OF SAFETY AND REDUCE THE CASUALTY FIGURES. THE PROGRAM CAN BE IMPLEMENTED IN A RELATIVELY SHORT TIME AND HAVE AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT. THERE IS A WILLINGNESS ON THE PART OF THE INDUSTRY TO DO SOMETHING NOW. THE COAST GUARD IS MAKING ITS KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE WITH VESSEL SAFETY AVAILABLE IN A COOPERATIVE EFFORT WITH THE INDUSTRY. WE BELIEVE THE VOLUNTARY SAFETY PROGRAM WILL WORK.

THANK YOU, I WILL BE PLEASED TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU WISH TO ASK.