

Mariners' Advisory Committee

for the Bay & River Delaware

Captain Stephen Roberts, Chairman

Captain H. Hickman Rowland Jr., Secretary

Organized 1964

Captain Rick Iuliucci, Treasurer

Captain Joseph F. Bradley, Honorary Chairman



The Honorable Christopher Coons
383 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

June 27, 2013

Dear Senator Coons:

As the chairman of the Mariners Advisory Committee for the Bay & River Delaware, I write to you today to express my grave concerns about the funding structure of one of the most critical components of the safety system on the Delaware River Basin and on the Nation's other rivers: the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System, PORTS®. The MAC respectfully requests that you support inclusion of funding for PORTS in the FY14 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations Bill.

The Marines Advisory Committee

The Mariners Advisory Committee for the Bay & River Delaware (MAC) is the Harbor Safety Committee for the ports on the Delaware River. Formed in 1964, it is comprised of master mariners, pilots and other maritime professionals and concerns itself with safety of navigation, with particular regard to large ocean going vessels. The MAC works closely with the U.S. Coast Guard, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, commercial vessel and terminal operators, and port industry personnel to recommend and promote safe navigation practices on the Delaware Bay and River, as well as the approaches to this very important waterway. We also participate on other local, regional and national committees related to safe navigation and port security such as the federally mandated Area Committee, a committee of local stakeholders responsible for environmental disaster recovery, the Coast Guard's Marine Transportation System Recovery Unit (MTSRU) responsible for getting the port up and running after such an event and the Coast Guard's Area Maritime Security Committee (AMSC) responsible for enhancing the security of our port system.

Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS®)

PORTS is a system of tide, current and weather sensors positioned in key places along the Delaware Bay and River providing mariners and other users with real-time data on the ever changing condition of the waterway. The Delaware system is one of 21 systems located throughout the United States. PORTS data is accessed by

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users via the internet and automated telephone. Local installation was funded through a grant from the Delaware River Port Authority and administered by the Maritime Exchange for the Delaware River and Bay. Local funds support the operation and maintenance (O&M) of the system with the funding mechanisms varying from port to port. These local funds have been provided by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania through the Philadelphia Regional Port Authority. It costs approximately \$300,000 annually for O&M with additional costs for enhancements. The Federal Government through NOAA monitors and maintains the data stream. Nationally the O&M cost is approximately \$5,000,000. Funding for this critical system is under pressure throughout the country and will disappear locally at the end of Fiscal Year 2014 if no permanent funding stream is established.

Maritime users of PORTS®

The maritime industry is the prime, but not only, user of PORTS data. Pilots, captains and other mariners can review the real-time weather and tidal data prior to beginning a transit of the waterway. This up to the minute information allows us to make informed decisions based on actual, not predicted conditions that can affect the safety of life and the environment. Tide and weather conditions can vary widely from what has been predicted and knowing in advance what can be encountered along the route provides a much safer and efficient passage. The PORTS system is a critical decision support tool for every port facility and business where those business' operations are influenced by the weather. Because the Delaware is a tidal river this is of critical importance. Large ships regularly transit the shipping channel with a rising tide allowing for the carriage of more cargo into our ports. Using the PORTS data stream enables ships to safely load more cargo and to transit more efficiently saving money for shippers and port operators and helps make the United States port system more economically competitive. Losing PORTS in any one port will make that port less competitive with others in the region causing a loss in local port related jobs and revenue.

Emergency Management and PORTS®

The MAC along with local, state and federal emergency response agencies use the PORTS data when preparing for and responding to environmental events and incidents. In anticipation of a heavy weather event affecting our region, the United States Coast Guard will often stand up the Marine Transportation System Recovery Unit (MTSRU). As a critical partner in the MTSRU, the MAC uses PORTS data help prevent and/or recover from damage to our port complex. 2011's Hurricane Irene was a prime example of how the Coast Guard and the MAC, using PORTS information, were able to manage shipping traffic in the river above Philadelphia during the post storm period when tides were running far above normal preventing the possibility of hitting bridges or causing damage to other critical infrastructure. Similarly, PORTS data was used during and after Super-storm Sandy to help protect vessels seeking shelter from the storm and to keep the Port open minimizing the storm's economic impact on the Delaware Valley Region.

During the recovery of the *Athos 1* oil spill in 2004, PORTS data was used to track the movement of the oil helping to mitigate the spill's impact on the environment. The Final Report of the Delaware River and Bay Oil Spill Advisory Committee, published in December 2010 highlighted the importance of the PORTS system to preventing maritime accidents and associated pollution releases. In fact, Recommendation 14 of that report was to "fund the upgrade, continued operation, and maintenance of, the PORTS system. That report indicates that PORTS has the potential to prevent shipping accidents and subsequent environmental damage and save millions of dollars in response, restoration, and damage claims.

The Delaware River Basin Commission's (DRBC) continuous real-time flow and transport model draws on data from the PORTS system to simulate movement of contaminants during spill events to protect drinking water intakes. Immediately after the recent vinyl chloride release near Paulsboro, NJ, the DRBC simulated the plume and coordinated with drinking water intakes in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

State and local emergency management authorities use PORTS during high tides events that may require evacuation of coastal and low lying areas. Natural resource authorities use the data when examining the impact of high tides on beach erosion and is a key component in the efforts of DRBC's Flood Advisory Committee to develop a coastal storm-surge inundation and forecast system for the Delaware Bay and tidal Delaware River, in cooperation with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the states of New Jersey, and Delaware, NOAA National Weather Service, and the US Geological Survey.

In Summary

NOAA's PORTS program is a critical part of the Delaware River Basin's navigation and safety infrastructure. Used by mariners, port operators and environmental and emergency management agencies, PORTS is a crucial part of our port's economic, safety and health infrastructure. The loss of this critical program would have a negative impact on millions of people living in the region and the environment. Given that many port and estuary programs are supported by the Federal Government, it is easy to see that the loss of PORTS in our region would have a negative effect on the Nation. If these concerns are valid here on the Delaware, one can only imagine that the other estuaries served by the PORTS program are of equal importance to the Nation. Surprisingly, despite the past support PORTS Operations & Maintenance funding has received from Congress, this item was again omitted by the Department of Commerce in its FY14 budget submission to President Obama. In 2002, the reauthorization of the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act (HSIA), Section 103, provided that NOAA "shall, subject to the availability of appropriations, design, install, maintain and operate real-time hydrographic monitoring systems to enhance navigation safety and efficiency." The cost of supporting O&M for all 21 operational PORTS sites throughout the U.S. is approximately \$5 million annually. Yet, 10 years after the authorization of HSIA, full funding for O&M remains unavailable. Therefore, the MAC encourages you to support Federal funding nationwide for PORTS. \$5,000,000 annually is a very small burden for the country to bear for a program that has such a high impact on the safety of our environment and the security of our economy.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. The MAC respectfully requests that you support inclusion of funding for PORTS in the FY14 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations Bill.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S.A. Roberts", written in a cursive style.

Captain Stephen A. Roberts, Chairman
Mariners Advisory Committee