

SOUTHEAST TEXAS WATERWAY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes for July 24, 2025, Full-Committee Meeting

A meeting of the Southeast Texas Waterway Advisory Council (SETWAC) was held on July 24th, 2025, at MSU Port Arthur in Port Arthur, TX. The current SETWAC Charter is dated January 29th, 2019. Meeting information and power point presentations are available electronically through the SETWAC website www.setwac.org.

1. Call to Order:

- SETWAC Chair, Daniel Plumley, called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M. Mr. Plumley welcomed those in attendance. 80 members and guests attended in person at MSU Port Arthur.
- Everyone then went around the room introducing themselves.
- The floor was then handed over to Captain Jennifer Andrew to begin the main discussion.

2. Remarks by the Captain of the Port:

- Captain Jennifer Andrews, recently returning from her third tour, including time spent in Lake Charles. She reflected on the continued progress and increased operational energy. She announced that there will be a new Chief of Inspections, and she is already in the area. Captain Andrews expressed enthusiasm about the direction of the Coast Guard, highlighting the rollout of new policy, which aims to address ongoing staffing challenges by improving manpower, tools, and resources. She also noted that funding has been allocated for infrastructure and asset upgrades to support mission effectiveness, particularly in keeping waterway operations running smoothly. Additionally, she reminded the team of the new cybersecurity regulations that took effect on July 16, requiring incident reporting, with the next major compliance milestone set for January 12. She encouraged personnel to reach out to LCDR Gates and her team with any questions.
- LCDR Kim Gates of USCG Marine Safety Unit Port Arthur presented a Certificate of Merit to Mrs. Tran for her outstanding contributions to commercial fishing safety from June 2024 through May 2025. Mrs. Tran supported the safety of commercial fishermen along the Sabine-Neches Waterway, the third busiest in the nation by cargo volume. Through free outreach and Vietnamese translation services, she assisted Marine Safety Unit Port Arthur, helping crews stay informed about navigational hazards such as the 77-mile Interconnector Louisiana Connector Pipeline. She also acted as a mediator between crews and fishing operators, promoting safe coordination with ongoing dredging activities. Additionally, Mrs. Tran played a key role in connecting fishing families with vital services, including eight mobile dockside clinics that offered medical care, safety gear, and essential supplies. Her efforts strengthened both safety and resilience within the maritime community. Her dedication and collaboration with local, state, and maritime partners reflect the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard. The award was presented on July 24, 2025, at Marine Safety Unit Port Arthur.

3. Approval of the April 24th, 2025, Minutes:

- A motion was made and seconded to vote to approve the April 24th, 2025, meeting minutes without edit. A vote was conducted; the minutes were approved. Mrs. Lorrie Taylor made the motion to accept, and Mr. Robert Hawn seconded the motion.

4. Committee Reports:

Navigation Sub-Committee Report:

- Captain Andrew Guidry, Sabine Pilots, opened with an update on ongoing efforts involving NOAA and port infrastructure. The team is continuing work to secure air gap and visibility sensors, with nearly all locations verified and data collected. A formal presentation will be made to the Sabine-Neches Navigation District on August 12.
- To update on the new helicopters in June, there were 284 hoist cycles, with 280 completed successfully, which was noted as a strong performance.
- Mr. Plumley then chimed in regarding the air gap and visibility sensors. That what began as a localized project in Sabine Pass has expanded in scope, now proposing five fog monitoring stations to provide full coverage from Sabine to the Port of Beaumont. This expanded plan includes both visibility and air gap sensors. However, further progress is dependent on securing financial commitment from the Navigation District, as land agreements and installation phases cannot proceed without funding. An update on progress is expected at the next meeting.

Tug Utilization Sub-Committee (Ad Hoc)

- Mr. Plumley shared Sean Marchant's update in his absence. Mr. Plumley stated that the tug utilization subcommittee meeting was scheduled for next Thursday at 10:00 AM at the pilot's office. The committee is deciding whether to petition the Plant Managers Forum to fund a traffic study by Lamar University. The budget has decreased from \$100,000 to about \$75,000, and the group is planning to engage plant managers to collectively fund this portion of the study. Interested parties were encouraged to attend and participate in guiding the effort.

Education, Research & Workforce Development Sub-Committee Report:

- Sade Chick provided updates on education, research, and workforce development. Regarding the bridge feasibility study, the goal is to eventually secure federal funding which requires having formal project plans. After meeting with TXDOT, to move forward, an unfunded project list will be established which TXDOT has never done before with this bridge project as the first entry.
- On the workforce development side, the committee is focused on addressing awareness and consistency of maritime educational resources. The goal is to ensure programs and materials such as a maritime storybook contain comprehensive region-wide information rather than port-specific content. The group is collaborating with organizations like the Yacht Club and Scouting America to introduce maritime education to youth from Pre-K through college. Dr. Jones,

director of the Port Arthur International Sea-Fair Center, is helping build these educational networks.

- Additionally, a job posting platform has been launched on the SETWAC website to connect students and job seekers with maritime industry opportunities including internships and scholarships. Stakeholders are encouraged to share job openings to help guide students and workforce entrants along clear career pathways.
- An individual from the crowd then mentioned that there was a job opening at Beaumont ISD and encouraged anyone who knew a suitable candidate to refer them for the position.

Port Welfare Public Ad-Hoc:

- Fr. Sinclair Oubre, spoke to several points. Starting with emphasizing the importance of recognizing our region's significance as a maritime community, particularly given our proximity to Houston. While it is easy to overlook our impact, he noted that our area is the third largest maritime center by tonnage in the United States. Several recent events further underscored this importance.
- Since the last SETWAC meeting, the community hosted the Texas National Maritime Gala in Port Arthur, a joint fundraiser benefiting both the Port Arthur Seafarers' Center and Camp Seaport. The event raised \$60,000, reinforcing support for the local maritime network.
- National Maritime Day was observed on May 22 with a commemorative event held at the Seamen's Memorial Sundial in Port Arthur. On June 12, the community celebrated the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Merchant Marine, a significant milestone that unfortunately received limited national attention. Fr. Oubre highlighted the long-standing tradition of this service, which predates even the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard.
- Day of the Seafarer, sponsored by the International Maritime Organization, was recognized on June 25. Camp Seaport was a huge success, with local support ensuring a memorable experience for the participating youth. Special thanks were extended to Station Sabine and Valero, who collaborated with Lamar State College Orange to host hands-on activities.
- The region also participated in Sea Sunday on July 13, a global observance held annually on the second Sunday of July, recognizing the vital role of seafarers in the maritime industry.
- Beyond events, several broader industry developments were noted. Fr. Oubre highlighted the region's historical shipbuilding legacy, including contributions from shipyards in Port Arthur, Orange, and Beaumont. A recent acquisition of Gulf Copper by Davie Shipbuilding may lead to the construction of icebreakers for the U.S. Coast Guard, potentially creating up to 2,000 jobs.
- Attendees were encouraged to monitor the SHIPs Act, which could provide additional funding to grow the U.S. Merchant Marine fleet from its current approximate count of 87 ships (excluding Jones Act vessels) toward a national goal of 200. An upcoming executive order aimed at restoring U.S. maritime dominance was also mentioned. This order could reverse previous reductions in programs like PL-480, potentially restoring U.S. flag vessel participation from 50

percent back to 100 percent. Such changes could reclaim lost maritime jobs and strengthen the U.S. presence in international shipping.

- Fr. Oubre concluded by urging attendees to take pride in the region's maritime role and to move beyond the perception that we are simply in the shadow of larger cities. The volume of recent activity and ongoing developments makes clear that our community remains a vital part of the national and global maritime landscape.
- Larry Kelly, Port of Port Arthur then took the floor and invited Nikki Fitzgerald and LCDR Kim Gates to join him in recognition of the team behind Camp Seaport. As Fr. Oubre had noted earlier, the image shown represented just a few of the many individuals who make this event possible. This year marked the 17th year of hosting Camp Seaport, a program that continues to thrive thanks to the commitment of numerous partners and volunteers from the community.
- Camp Seaport is a collaborative effort, and many in the room played an essential role in its success. Fr. Oubre named several contributors, and additional acknowledgements were given to organizations such as the Texas General Land Office (GLO), MARAD, the U.S. Coast Guard, Texas A&M AgriLife, and others. Special recognition was given to Nikki, a professional educator who stepped out of the classroom to help lead the camp, and Mrs. Edwards, an employee of the Port of Port Arthur. These two outstanding women were instrumental in organizing and running the camp. While Port staff were involved throughout, the broader community's support is what truly makes the program possible each year.
- Key partners included the Sabine Pilots, Valero, Motiva, and other local entities. The U.S. Coast Guard continued to be a central part of the experience, particularly on "Coast Guard Wednesday," which has become a recurring highlight of the camp. A heartfelt thank you was extended to MSU Port Arthur and to Lieutenant Commander Kim Gates, who served as the keynote speaker at the camp's graduation ceremony

Commercial Fisheries Report:

- Nikki Fitzgerald, Commercial Fisheries, began by updating everyone on the Port Arthur Shrimpers Association summer meeting held on July 2. This group, which meets twice a year in January and July, has shown substantial growth and increasing influence in recent years, particularly in legislative advocacy and hurricane preparedness efforts.
- A highlight of the meeting was a legislative update delivered by Terry Wilson, which focused on key wins for the shrimp industry. One major legislative success was the passage of SB 823, spearheaded by Senators Mays Middleton, Terry Wilson, Christian Manuel, and others. This law requires that any shrimp sold by food service suppliers or wholesale distributors in Texas must be clearly labeled to indicate whether it is imported. Additionally, restaurants are now prohibited from labeling imported shrimp as "Texas shrimp," "American shrimp," "domestic shrimp," or "Gulf shrimp." The legislation was signed into law by Governor Greg Abbott.

- Another win was HCR 76, which urges the federal government to curb the mass importation of foreign shrimp into the United States. The resolution aims to protect both consumers from substandard imports and the Gulf Coast shrimping industry from unfair competition. This resolution was also signed by Governor Abbott and forwarded to President Trump for federal consideration.
- In addition to legislative progress, ongoing efforts with NOAA continue, particularly in the areas of TED (Turtle Excluder Device) and FUR checks. Special thanks were given to Nate, who has taken on a critical role in compliance and dockside support, helping to alleviate some of the responsibilities previously handled by others. His work has been instrumental in keeping operations running smoothly.
- The shrimping season officially opened on July 15, and community members were encouraged to look for increased activity on the water in the coming weeks.
- Looking ahead, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has requested the hosting of a CPR and First Aid training session, which will take place on August 28 at the Seafarers' Center. Two sessions will be offered, morning and afternoon, to accommodate as many participants as possible. Flyers and additional information will be distributed shortly.
- Finally, Nikki reflected on the success of Camp Seaport over the past six years and expressed deep gratitude to all who have contributed. Thanks were extended to Sean, Kimberly, Valero, the Port of Port Arthur, and MARAD for providing access to ships and experiences that inspire local youth. Special recognition was given to Fr. Oubre for leading boat trips during the program. The long-term impact of these efforts was underscored by the success stories of past participants: last year's class saw one graduate enter the U.S. Coast Guard, and over the years, several others have joined both the Coast Guard and Navy. One former participant who joined the Navy has even since retired, highlighting just how long Camp Seaport has been making a difference in young lives.
- Dan chimed in to express appreciation for the ongoing hard work and advocacy efforts of the group, particularly highlighting the value of letter-writing campaigns and the collective ability to leverage the group's influence on support initiatives that make a meaningful impact. He noted how rewarding it is to see these efforts result in tangible benefits for the commercial maritime community.

Waterway Maintenance and Improvement Sub-committee:

- Kyle Reed, SNND, provided an update on the Deepening Project, slides on SETWAC website provide a visual update (as of July 24th) of the current dredging projects. The slides also provide a visual representation of the schedule for the pipeline removals.

- Kyle began by discussing updates on the pipeline removal project. Targa is collaborating with Kinetica and the removal company Morrison to finalize a plan that would allow pipeline extraction without shutting down the waterway, addressing concerns from stakeholders who cannot afford prolonged closures. A proposal is expected soon, after which discussions with the Coast Guard and pilots will be scheduled. The pipeline removal is targeted for Q4 of this year, with Morrison potentially starting earlier on simpler sections.
- Shifting focus to dredging, it was announced that Crosby is nearing completion of Contract 3. Contract 4, extending from Taylor Bay to the Port of Beaumont, is a major two-year project set for advertisement by year's end. The objective is to achieve a 4-foot channel cut to the Port of Beaumont by the end of 2027, involving multiple dredges. A second cut, planned for advertisement in late 2026, is contingent on the completion of the US Army Corps of Engineers Contract 6. Additionally, two anchorage basins are scheduled for award by year's end, potentially rolled into Contract 4 to prioritize early development of anchorage areas for immediate vessel use

Dredge Operations Report:

- Ancelmo Galindo, USACE acting Sabine-Neches Waterway Operations Manager, then spoke to future dredge projects, including deepening and widening plans, SNWW Maintenance, the offshore channel extension, Coastal Storm Risk Management Projects, and the Taylor's Bayou Channel improvement (Slides on SETWAC website).

Area Maritime Security Report:

- Michael Hiatt, USCG Port Security, provided an update on the Port Security Grant Program. It was explained that if the grant money is not announced by October 1st, it could be returned to the Treasury Department. The Coast Guard is in daily talks with FEMA to determine how to proceed, but stakeholders are encouraged to contact their local representatives to advocate for the grants. Several upcoming events were highlighted, including the Area Maritime Security Committee meeting on August 27 in Orange County, where the Captain of the Port will speak.
- Another key event is the Area Maritime Security Training Exercise on September 17, which will simulate a coordinated cyber and physical attack on the Ports of Beaumont and Port Arthur. The exercise aims to test the unified command's emergency response capabilities. A final planning meeting for the exercise is scheduled for the following day. The Facility Security Officer and Vessel Security Officer subcommittee will meet on September 25 in Orange to discuss security topics, including reassessing all regional facilities as part of the Coast Guard's Risk Assessment Methodology program. Recent assessments indicated an increased risk for four critical bridges, which will be addressed in detail during the meeting.
- Attendees were reminded about the importance of reporting suspicious activity, such as unauthorized drone usage or security breaches. These reports help inform Congress when allocating funds for port security. A new drone reporting tool has been introduced and is already being used by the Port of Port Arthur. Mr. Hiatt concluded with an invitation for anyone interested in discussing port security grants further to stay after the meeting and talk to him.

ATON Status/Projects Report:

- BMC Sistrunk, ANT Sabine, gave an ATON Report. Stating that last week, significant work was completed on discrepancy response and servicing for the offshore channel in the Sabine Neches Canal. The November rearranged light was rebuilt and raised by 10 feet, which has already taken effect. The Port Arthur Echo range day-night conversion was also completed, and a Port Delivery message was sent out to inform stakeholders. Additionally, the Neches River Sierra range is currently open for public comment regarding its own day-night conversion. Attendees were encouraged to support this change as it enhances weather and storm resiliency while improving pilot signal clarity. The next range slated for conversion is the Sabine Neches Lima range, with a similar public comment process forthcoming.
- In positive news, engagement with Coast Guard headquarters continues regarding funding secured from recent legislation. The Sabine Neches Waterway is expected to receive between \$8 million and \$9 million to support the range relocation project, which will align with the channel deepening efforts. Updates on this project will be communicated through SETWAC and GovDelivery messages.

5. 2025 Hurricane Season Tools:

- LT Sean Yanez, MSU Port Arthur, presented the 2025 hurricane season tools and the forms that need to be filled out before and after a storm. (Slides on SETWAC website).
- LT Sean Yanez continued with an overview of a new tool being introduced at MSU Port Arthur to enhance communication and recovery coordination following major disruptions. This tool is designed to support the Captain of the Port in making timely decisions to reconstitute the board after events such as severe weather or changes to port condition. When the Coast Guard activates its Incident Management Team, it transitions into the Marine Transportation System Recovery Unit. The primary goal of this unit is to restore the functionality of the marine transportation system, resume trade as quickly as possible, and ensure preparedness and coordination throughout the recovery process.
- In the past, the Coast Guard relied on a paper-based form that facilities were asked to complete and return following a storm. However, connectivity issues often delayed response times, as internet access and computer systems were frequently impacted. Recognizing that mobile devices are often still operational during these times, MSU Port Arthur has adopted a new process using Microsoft Forms. This approach has already been implemented at other units under Sector Houston-Galveston, including MSU Texas City, MSU Houston, and MSU Lake Charles.
- The new system includes three forms. The first is a restore form that requests updated contact information. The second is a remain in port form for ocean-going vessels over 500 gross tons that intend to remain in port during a disruption. While it is the vessel's responsibility to complete this form, facilities are encouraged to verify and support these requests. The third form is the post-storm facility assessment form, which asks facilities to report whether they are

fully operational, partially operational, or not operational, and to provide an explanation if they are not fully available.

- These forms are accessible through links and QR codes that will be shared in Marine Safety Information Bulletins. Once submitted, users will receive a confirmation email with a link allowing them to update their responses in real time. This enables the Coast Guard to quickly collect and process accurate data, improving situational awareness and decision-making during recovery efforts.
- The presentation concluded with contact information for MSU Port Arthur's Command Duty Officer, Vessel Traffic Services, and Waterways Management team. A dedicated email for the Marine Transportation System Recovery Unit was also provided. Attendees were encouraged to provide feedback on the new tool so it can continue to be improved to better serve the region.

6. New Business:

- Mr. Plumley announced the upcoming National Harbor Safety Committee Conference, scheduled for March 24 and 25 in Seattle. This event brings together harbor safety committees from across the country, including the Captain of the Port's Harbor Safety Committee, to discuss challenges, share best practices, and collaborate on solutions.
- As part of the preparation for the conference, a few discussion topics were proposed for potential panel sessions. The first topic is how harbor safety committees without funding can operate effectively, including any best practices or strategies for sustaining activity and engagement. The second topic focuses on encouraging active membership and leadership participation within all-volunteer committees, a challenge that was discussed in depth at last year's conference in Chicago. The third proposed topic centers around specific safety challenges related to energy-dominant regions, including increased cargo exports and the unique considerations for ports along the Gulf Coast. These topics aim to provide valuable insight and practical solutions for other harbor safety committees and captains of the port facing similar circumstances.
- Attendees were encouraged to participate in the conference if interested. A link for registration and more information is available on the committee's website. Special recognition was given to Giuseppe, who has been instrumental in maintaining and updating the website despite it not being his full-time role. Presentation materials, including the slides and meeting minutes, will be uploaded to the website shortly for public access.
- Additionally, a brief reminder was given that anyone interested in becoming more involved with the committee should reach out to current members. Participation is open, and while membership is not required to attend meetings, an application must be on file for those wishing to participate actively.
- Lastly, Doug Hendrix then discussed a brief operational update on sea plans recent conversations with the BTS Waterways Management team. It was noted that aircraft operations involving landings near the waterway will now be coordinated in advance. Operators are asked

to notify BTS prior to landing so the team can verify any potential conflicts or proximity to takeoff zones. Although these aircraft do not require a large amount of space, early communication allows for better situational awareness and safety coordination. In previous instances, landings occurred without prior notice, but with the current communication channels now established via phone and radio, the team can monitor activity and notify the appropriate contacts as needed. Based on current observations, no major issues are anticipated.

- Before closing, attendees were reminded of the upcoming Southeast Texas/Southwest Louisiana Area Committee meeting, scheduled for September 18 at 10:00 AM. All were encouraged to attend, and committee members were urged to designate a representative if possible. The meeting will be a valuable opportunity to voice concerns, ask questions, and engage with regional stakeholders.

7. Next Meetings:

- The next working group meeting will be held at the Sabine-Neches Navigation District offices on Thursday, October 9th, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.
- The next full committee meeting will be held at MSU Port Arthur on Thursday, October 23rd, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

8. Adjourn:

- Mr. Plumley adjourned the meeting at 11:02 A.M.