From: Chris Meier
To: City Clerk
Cc: Alexandra Pierce; Borough Assembly
Subject: Public Comment on VITF Recommendations
Date: Thursday, November 5, 2026 2:40:40 PM

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Members of the Visitor Industry Task Force,

I am writing as a Juneau resident, a recreational boater, and President of Alaska Travel Adventures to comment on Recommendations 20 and 21. I also serve as Vice Chair of the Southeast Alaska Whale Watch Association (SEAWWA). The views in this letter are my own and my company's, not a new position of the association.

My family and I live here. We enjoy these waters with our friends and neighbors, and I care deeply about the community we call home. The concerns about wakes, congestion and responsible behavior around whales matter to me personally as well as professionally. I also recognize the difficult balance the City is working to achieve between the benefits tourism brings and its effects on daily life in Juneau.

I support the cooperative approach outlined in SEAWWA's October letter. Working with other operators to turn community concerns into specific changes in how we operate has reinforced my belief that we can accomplish a great deal by bringing the City, operators and other harbor users together around clearly identified problems.

The extended no wake practice approaching Statter Harbor is a meaningful example. Expanding that area has been discussed for some time, with jurisdictional and administrative challenges complicating the effort. SEAWWA members agreed to try extending no wake practices 500 yards beyond the existing buoy and subsequently adopted that commitment for member company whale watching vessels. I favor this targeted approach over extending the same restriction to all harbor users, including smaller recreational boats whose wakes may have substantially less impact.

I support Recommendation 21’s emphasis on incorporating SEAWWA’s operating commitments into TBMP, including loading and pump out practices, wildlife viewing standards and captain training, together with improved coordination and enforcement around Statter Harbor. The next step is consistent implementation, with clear expectations, follow through on concerns through TBMP, and a way to evaluate results. I

am prepared to help do that work.

I appreciate that Recommendation 20 now includes operational approaches and consultation with local operators. I remain opposed to pursuing a new City licensing program, an operator moratorium, permit caps or future reductions in the fleet. Those options would create considerable uncertainty without necessarily resolving the specific problems before the task force.

The City's existing five ship limit already constrains the primary source of demand for whale watching. Some vessels in member company fleets did not operate during the 2026 season. These conditions deserve consideration before pursuing further restrictions. Decisions should reflect actual operating activity and current demand, alongside the operational changes already adopted.

Wake impacts, harbor congestion and vessel behavior around whales depend heavily on how, where and when boats operate. Limiting the fleet does not, by itself, establish responsible practices. I ask the task force to give the operating commitments now adopted a meaningful opportunity to demonstrate results during the 2027 season, with agreed measures and a scheduled review.

Fair treatment also matters. Restrictions that reach businesses using public facilities while leaving comparable operations at private docks outside the same limits could shift business opportunities without resolving the underlying concerns. Questions also remain about the City's legal authority to establish and enforce the proposed licensing and fleet restrictions, including how those requirements would apply to operators using public and private facilities.

For me, the uncertainty is personal. Our business represents years of work and investment in vessels, facilities and people. Decisions about replacing equipment, retaining employees and planning for the future depend on confidence that responsible businesses can continue operating. Discussion of limited entry, future fleet reductions and conditions on permit ownership affects those decisions well before any new program takes effect. The wages we pay, purchases we make from local businesses, and taxes and harbor fees we contribute help support families, jobs and public services in Juneau. Behind the discussion about vessel numbers are people, families and livelihoods rooted in this community.

Please revise Recommendation 20 to prioritize implementation and evaluation of the cooperative operating approach, rather than pursuing limited entry, caps or reductions in the fleet. The operating commitments and coordination measures described above provide a foundation for that work. Clear standards, meaningful accountability and regular review can give the City and the public a way to judge whether the changes are working and

identify where further improvement is needed.

Recommendation 20 calls for coordination with local operators. While the task force included a member from the flightseeing industry, it did not include anyone who owns or operates a local whale watching business, even though these recommendations contemplate licensing, limited entry and fleet restrictions for whale watching businesses. Public testimony and written comments are valuable, but they are not the same as participation at the table. If the Assembly pursues further work on measures affecting whale watching businesses, I ask that local operators be included directly from the outset. These decisions affect family businesses, employees and livelihoods in our community, and operators bring practical knowledge of what will work on the water.

I am committed to continuing this work with City officials, other operators and our fellow citizens. We share an interest in healthy whales, safe waterways and a Juneau where families and responsible local businesses can thrive. I believe we can accomplish more by working together toward those goals.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Chris Meier
President
Alaska Travel Adventures