I. TASK TITLE:

Recommendations for Designation of Narrow Channels. (Short Title Narrow Channels)

II. BACKGROUND:

Representatives of the Towing Vessel Industry have communicated to the Coast Guard concerns related to the safe navigation of towing vessels with regard to adherence to Rule 9 (Narrow Channels) of the Inland Navigation Rules, enacted on 24 December, 1980. Specifically the Towing Vessel Industry requests of the Coast Guard, greater specificity as to what constitutes a Narrow Channel. Further, industry has also suggested that the Coast Guard specifically identify a navigable channel as a narrow channel where necessary.

III. DISCUSSION:

Towing vessels have increased in both length and breadth substantially since their earliest inception. Modern towing vessels often have large horsepower and bollard pull capabilities that have permitted the sizes of tows to grow to exceed those of deep-draft, seagoing vessels. Accordingly, the Army Corps of Engineers and Port Authorities have responded by dredging channels to accommodate the growth in size of these towing vessels. However, due to cost, existing shore side facilities and property rights, it is not practical to widen a navigable channel.

A factor mitigating the risks of navigating larger tows has been the substantial investment in time and resources to elevate the skill-sets of the navigating officers aboard towing vessels. Training standards and licensing competency standards have improved dramatically. Today, navigating officers aboard towing vessels are better educated, better trained and have greater navigation tools available to them than at any other time in history.

Another factor mitigating risk is the growth in communication capabilities available to the navigating officer. Marine radio communication, Automated Identification Systems (AIS) and Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) have assisted in informing the mariner of hazards, marine traffic congestion and the potential to clarify the navigational condition.

However, the real risks of dynamic and increasing towing vessel dimensions coupled with static waterway dimensions poses a real risk to navigational safety. This risk is exacerbated in areas where towing vessels, deep draft vessels and recreational craft share the waterway. Industry has pointed to the requirements of the Inland Navigation Rules, in particular Rule 9, as a potential solution to reduce maritime collisions or groundings.

Defining Narrow Channels would indicate inherent hazards to those navigating the area and would promote enhanced operational precautions. However, the term “narrow channel” is not easily defined. Usually, it is decided by the courts that a particular waterway is a narrow channel after an accident. In the Coast Guard, certain Sector Commanders (COTPs) and their respective Districts are considering developing regulations, in which they will declare certain waterways to be narrow channels. This may require the Coast Guard to consider officially designating certain waters/waterways as narrow channels.
In response from this request of the towing industry to explore the potential for Rule 9 as a mitigating factor to prevent a marine casualty, the Coast Guard refers the following to the Towing Safety Advisory Committee for action.

IV. **TASKS:**

1. Provide recommendations to the Coast Guard on specific criteria to be used in determining what channels should considered as Narrow Channels for the purposes of Rule 9.
2. Provide recommendations to the Coast Guard on how best to communicate to the public that a channel has been designated as Narrow.

V. **DUE DATE:**

Provide an Interim Report to the Coast Guard no later than January 2014. Provide all recommendations to the Coast Guard no later than August 2014.

VI. **TSAC REPRESENTATIVE:**

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