

Navigation Safety Advisory Council (NAVSAC)

Resolution 12-06

(Introduced as Task Statement #11-07)

(Update to Resolution #11-04)

Virtual Aids to Navigation (ATON)

**Task Title:** Virtual Aids to Navigation (ATON)

**Whereas** physical AtoNs (i.e., buoys, day markers, visual ranges, lights, etc.) are vital components of safe visual and radar navigation;

**Whereas** AtoNs are relied upon by all segments of the maritime community (commercial, recreational, sport, large/small vessels) to safely navigate;

**Whereas** smaller vessels, including recreational, sport and fishing vessels, may not have access to or have available electronic charting systems and/or AIS receivers and, therefore, may rely exclusively on physical AtoNs to safely navigate;

**Whereas** NAVSAC considers that virtual AtoN is not well explained to the user population (i.e., Is the virtual object created on ECDIS only?, Is the virtual object generated on all AIS units?, Is a virtual AtoN an “aid to navigation” by a traditional definition?, etc.);

**Whereas** NAVSAC has been made aware that the U.S. Coast Guard is actively considering eliminating some physical AtoNs and replacing them with “virtual AtoNs”;

**Whereas** NAVSAC understands that the U.S. Coast Guard’s policy regarding virtual AtoNs is that virtual aids should be used to enhance existing ATONs, not to replace physical AtoNs;

**Whereas** NAVSAC has been made aware that the U.S. Coast Guard has in the past removed physical AtoNs without sufficient outreach and notice to the local maritime community;

**Whereas** NAVSAC is of the view that using the “Notice of Proposed Rulemaking” and Federal Register “Notice and Comment” process for public comments does **not** constitute sufficient outreach and engagement.

**Therefore**, NAVSAC strongly recommends to the Secretary of Homeland Security, through the Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, the following actions:

1. Actively engage all local stakeholders, including local port, shipping, boating, environmental and government interests, to obtain up to date information regarding local needs **well in advance** of any decision to eliminate any physical AtoNs.

2. Before the USCG position on virtual aids changes from enhancing existing AtoNs to replacing AtoNs there should be much discussion with all local stakeholders.

3. That the USCG considers alternative means to meet their mission of maintaining and providing ATON's to the maritime community by considering private sector involvement.