

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

*

GROUNDING/STRANDING OF THE FISH *

TENDER BARGE *SM-3* IN NUSHAGAK BAY * Accident No.: DCA20FM027

NEAR EKUK, ALASKA, ON AUGUST 30, 2020 *

*

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Interview of: BENJAMIN BLAKEY, President
Northline Seafoods

Via telephone

Tuesday,
September 29, 2020

TABLE OF CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW FOR

Mr. Benjamin G. Blakey, President, Northline Seafoods

TAKEN ON

September 29, 2020

PAGE NUMBER	LINE NUMBER	CURRENT WORDING	CORRECTED WORDING

If, to the best of your knowledge, no corrections are needed kindly circle the statement “no corrections needed” and initial in the space provided.

NO CORRECTIONS NEED. _____
Initials

Printed Name of Person providing the above information

Signature of Person providing the above information

Date

From: [Furukawa Robert](#)
To: [Benjamin Blakey](#)
Subject: Mr. Benjamin G. Blakey, President, Northline Seafoods: Interview Transcript, Transcript Errata, and Non-Disclosure Agreement
Date: Wednesday, October 21, 2020 4:13:00 PM
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[Transcript Errata-SecondPage-SM-3-grounding-stranding-DCA20FM027.docx](#)
Importance: High

NTSB INVESTIGATIVE INFORMATION / [REDACTED]

National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Marine Safety

October 21, 2020

Dear **Mr. Benjamin G. Blakey**,

The enclosed transcript of your interview on **September 29, 2020** is provided for your review and comment to ensure its accuracy. It is not for public release. Please destroy the transcript after providing your comments.

The transcript is investigative information of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) created as part of the NTSB's investigation into the **Grounding/Stranding of the Fish Tender Barge SM-3 in Nushagak Bay near Ekuk, Alaska, on August 30, 2020 (DCA20FM027)**.

NTSB regulations prohibit the public release of investigative information prior to release by the NTSB without the permission of the NTSB Investigator in Charge (IIC). See 49 C.F.R. § 831.13(b). The IIC has not approved public release of this information at this time. Therefore, we request that you refrain from any further dissemination of this transcript.

Please provide your comments or corrections to the transcript by email:

[REDACTED] If you have any questions, you may contact me by email or phone:
(202) [REDACTED]

Comments must be returned no later than **November 2, 2020**. Requests for an extension of this deadline must be in writing and received prior to the due date. If comments are not received by the due date, we will consider the transcript to be final without comment.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

R. Jon Furukawa
Senior Marine Accident Investigator
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APPEARANCES:

██████████ Investigating Officer
U.S. Coast Guard

R. JON FURUKAWA, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:01 p.m.)

1
2
3 MR. FURUKAWA: The time is 1509 Eastern Daylight Time on --
4 what's today? Tuesday the 29th of September 2020, and we're here
5 to interview Mr. Benjamin Gregory Blakey, the president of
6 Northline Seafoods out of Sitka, Alaska. This is Jon Furukawa
7 from the NTSB.

8 Mr. Blakey, do you acknowledge that you're being recorded?

9 MR. BLAKEY: Yes, I do acknowledge.

10 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. And can we have your -- state your name
11 and your position and company.

12 MR. BLAKEY: My name is Benjamin Gregory Blakey. I'm the
13 president of Northline Seafoods.

14 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay.

15 And, [REDACTED]

16 CWO [REDACTED] Good morning. This is the investigator with
17 Sector Anchorage, Anchorage, Alaska.

18 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. And, like we said, this is a Coast
19 Guard led interview. So, [REDACTED] why don't you take over?

20 CWO [REDACTED] Okay. Once again, Ben, thanks for taking the
21 time to talk to us. As I explained before, it's a joint
22 investigation with the Coast Guard and NTSB on the grounding of
23 SM-3.

24 INTERVIEW OF BENJAMIN BLAKEY

25 BY CWO [REDACTED]

1 Q. So let's back up to your history, and how did you become
2 involved with Northline Seafoods?

3 A. I'm one of the co-founders, so my business partner, Pat Glaab
4 -- Gene Glaab and myself started Northline in 2015.

5 Q. Okay. As primarily a fish buying or processing company
6 originally just in the Sitka area?

7 A. That's correct, yeah. When we started, we started in Sitka
8 processing in Silver Bay, which is the far end of the town of
9 Sitka. And we moved our processing vessel to Bristol Bay in 2019
10 where it stayed. We processed salmon in Bristol Bay in 2019 and
11 then this past summer as well.

12 Q. Okay. So in 2019 was your first year processing in the
13 Bering Sea -- or in the Bristol Bay area?

14 A. Yes, that's correct. And we were processing in the Nushagak
15 Bay, which it's fair to say the Bering Sea, but we weren't
16 necessarily in the open ocean or anything like that.

17 Q. Right. Okay. Understood. All right. On your processing
18 barge, did -- in 2019, was it just the processing barge that was
19 SM-3, or did it also have a holding barge on -- that you used in
20 2020?

21 A. Yeah, we used the holding barge -- the same holding barge we
22 used in 2020, we also used in 2019.

23 Q. Okay. And the mooring arrangement in 2020, was it exactly
24 the same? Same buoy, same chains, same anchors as what you used
25 in 2020 [sic]?

1 A. I believe it changed slightly. I think that we added a shot
2 of chain, and Drew can speak to this change better than I can.
3 From what I recall, basically our 2020 assembly was more beefy.
4 We added a couple shots of, I think it was 1½-inch chain. But
5 fundamentally it was the same mooring buoy, the same general
6 (indiscernible) assembly. But yeah, Drew can speak to the exact
7 changes that went in place.

8 Q. Sure. Okay. Knowing that part of Bristol Bay, how weather
9 is out there, I'm sure you had some significant storms in 2019.
10 Was there any problems with either the barge connections to each
11 other or to the mooring itself in 2019?

12 A. There was not, not that I recall. We never dragged anchor,
13 never had any connection issues that I can recall. But 2019
14 actually was a fairly calm year. I would say probably abnormally
15 calm weather-wise.

16 Q. Okay. Probably saving it for 2020.

17 A. For 2020, I was not on the vessel, so I never -- I actually
18 have not stepped foot on the *SM-3* since 2019 just because of
19 COVID, because I work from shore. But I understand that the
20 weather they've experienced in 2020 was worse than 2019, and I
21 think there was some barge connection -- you know, they did have
22 some times where they had to raise the ramp because it was banging
23 around a little bit.

24 But as far as I'm aware, we've actually -- I'm almost certain
25 we've never dragged anchor; none of the anchors ever moved. There

1 was no issues with the mooring buoy until the large storm at the
2 end of August when the top of the mooring buoy came off.

3 Q. Okay. I don't know if it came from you or it came from Pat,
4 but I got the purchase order where looks like primarily all of the
5 mooring equipment came from one company.

6 A. Blue Seas, yes, sir. That's right.

7 Q. Was -- were you the one for logistics, or does that have
8 something to do with anything that Drew might've worked for
9 Northline?

10 A. Yeah. So Drew, working with another consultant engineer,
11 helped source that. So we had Pat's brother -- or Gene's brother;
12 I'm not sure if he used -- my business partner, Pat, his brother's
13 got a lot of nautical experience, and I think he helped us source
14 the mooring buoy and the components that we used to build the
15 mooring assembly.

16 But if I recall, I think Drew mapped it out. Basically,
17 before we go and put our barge on anchor, we have to submit it to
18 our insurance underwriters to say, hey, this is how we plan to
19 secure it. So I know that Drew put together the -- I guess it
20 would be the PowerPoint slideshow of how we were going to do it.
21 I can't say that he designed it. I think he certainly played a
22 role, but he could probably tell you, back in 2019.

23 Q. Okay. Do you have any idea who the manufacturer of the buoy
24 was, or did you just get it from that supplier and that was pretty
25 much all the involvement that Northline had?

1 A. So we got it from that supplier. I went back to Pat's
2 brother -- well, actually it was the past couple of weeks. We've
3 called Blue Seas a couple times to try and get more information,
4 and I don't know if they're out of business, but apparently Dan's
5 had a hard time getting ahold of him. It was an older gentleman
6 who -- I think it's based in Florida.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. So we -- I don't know if you guys have tried them. We've
9 tried them, we've -- I think Dan's gotten a voicemail, but no
10 response. So, to be honest, I think we require or we requested a
11 mooring buoy, the purpose -- I don't think we actually got like a
12 brand name or anything other than here's a new mooring buoy; we'll
13 ship it out along with everything else. You know?

14 Q. Right. Okay. Yeah, we haven't looked into the manufacturer
15 yet, but it's definitely on our list of people to talk to or
16 companies to engage with on manufacturing.

17 A. We did save the pieces, by the way. They're up in
18 Dillingham. We did a cutout around the top of the mooring buoy
19 that pulled off, and we have the original piece. So if -- I think
20 Jack McFarland, we're going to send it to him in Kodiak. So just
21 so you guys are aware, if you need to inspect the pieces, they
22 should be in Jack McFarland's control here in a week or so
23 whenever they get airfreighted out.

24 Q. That's the top of the buoy and then the padeye that ripped
25 out, those two pieces?

1 A. The padeye -- yeah, it's -- the padeye itself is still
2 connected to the steel. So what happened was, the entire top of
3 the buoy came off. It wasn't --

4 Q. Right. Yeah, I saw that.

5 A. Yeah. So what they did is they cut out a circle all around
6 the top of the buoy that tore off, so you could basically see
7 where the steel separated and maybe inspect to kind of see how it
8 happened and, you know.

9 Q. Right. Do you know what the plan for the bottom half of the
10 buoy is?

11 A. Yeah, we're keeping it in Dillingham, so it's -- we're going
12 to put it in our storage in case somebody's interested in looking
13 at it. It's not salvageable for any purpose other than, you know,
14 if somebody was interested in looking at it.

15 Q. Right. No, I think once your -- once this claim is closed,
16 I'm sure that somebody will tell you to go ahead and get rid of
17 it.

18 A. Yeah, no. We're holding onto everything until we're told
19 otherwise, so --

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And then also, just so you're aware, the chains, the chain
22 assembly and the anchors, those are being stored in Dillingham as
23 well, in case somebody wants to look at them. It's a series of
24 two 5,000-pound anchors and then, you know, some shots of chain.
25 But that's also being kept obviously.

1 Q. Okay. If you put another barge out there next summer, are
2 you going to use the same equipment that survived the accident, or
3 are you going to buy all new equipment?

4 A. I would imagine we'd probably not use the same equipment.
5 You know, the anchors and the general layout worked fine. I think
6 we may just -- we're going to be using a different vessel, and
7 whatever anchoring assembly we put together is going to be
8 engineered as well, so I can't say that Boston (ph.) or some other
9 engineering, you know, naval architect is going to say that that's
10 exactly how they would do it. But, for insurance purposes, we're
11 going to have to use the best recommendation of a naval architect.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. So the short answer is no. I would doubt that, that would
14 end up being what works for a new barge of different size and
15 different requirements.

16 Q. That makes sense. Okay. Let's back up a little bit to when
17 the barge was being modified. So I think what I understood from
18 Pat was that, when the barge was purchased, it was from a logging
19 company in the Sitka or southeast area?

20 A. That's correct, yes. (Indiscernible) Logging, I believe.

21 Q. Okay. And then, when you bought it, it already had that
22 house structure on top?

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. And when you -- when Northline modified the barge, they put a
25 new bottom on, they added the machinery and the freezer

1 components. Was there any work done to the structure of the
2 house?

3 A. No. No, we did not do work to the structure of the house.

4 Q. Okay. The three cranes that are on there -- I think there's
5 two on one end and one on the other end -- were those all added by
6 you, or were they part of the original purchase?

7 A. They were added by us.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And the cranes all -- and this may be apparent from the
10 photos, but the cranes all exist separate from the superstructure.

11 Q. Right, right. Yeah, I noticed that they were actually on the
12 main deck. That's fine.

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. Okay. So the storm leading up to the casualty, I think you
15 told me originally on your 2692, you said 11 p.m. on August 30th.
16 So how was it that you came about with that time?

17 A. I think that was looking at my text messages. I think I went
18 back and I looked at my text messages from Jeremiah Klejka, who I
19 believe you've already spoken with.

20 Q. Um-hum.

21 A. So yeah, if I recall, that's how I came up with it.

22 Q. So that 2300 time, that -- would that be the time that he
23 told you that they'd broken the mooring or the time that they were
24 on the beach or headed toward the beach?

25 A. So I think it was an estimate, because -- so in Bristol Bay,

1 text messages are not -- they're not super reliable. So I have a
2 text here, Sunday, August 30th at 11:42 p.m., and Jeremiah said
3 that the main system anchor broke; we deployed the backups, and we
4 are dragging to shore.

5 Q. Okay. That's good.

6 A. So, basically, my 11 -- so that was probably my estimate,
7 assuming that this had taken place roughly 40 minutes before he
8 sent me this text. So that's the point of reference that I have.
9 And I actually did not -- like I didn't call Jeremiah or Pat or
10 say, hey, exactly what time did the mooring buoy broke (verbatim)?
11 I just based it off the information that I had.

12 Q. That's fine. And that's all we're trying to do is recreate
13 the timeline as best we can from what we have and what we
14 remember. So some of the crew said that it happened really super
15 fast; other ones said it took pretty much all night. And that's
16 all we're trying to do is narrow down which one it was.

17 Did it break and drift fairly quickly with the wind and the
18 waves onto the beach, and then when the tide dropped -- I think
19 Pat told us it was around 2 in the morning the 31st was the tide
20 started to recede that, that's when it was aground? Or if
21 something happened in between? That's all we're trying to do is
22 nail that down.

23 A. Okay. Yeah --

24 (Simultaneous speaking.)

25 Q. So we're -- go ahead.

1 A. I do have a text message that I can read you. Sunday, August
2 30th at 11:42 -- I don't know if Jeremiah shared this, but --
3 "Everything is happening very fast. Most likely will not be able
4 to get ahold of me after you get this. The main anchor system
5 broke. We deployed the backup but still ended up dragging to
6 shore. We are now getting pounded into shore by the waves. We
7 are worried about the superstructure falling and are staying down
8 in the lower bays. Nothing to do but wait it out. Nothing the
9 other boat could do to help. (Indiscernible) is doing damage
10 control and will touch base in the morning. There isn't really
11 anything we need you to help with right now. We're just going to
12 wait it out. Just wanted to let you know where we're at. We lost
13 some stuff from the upper deck and two roller bags, but otherwise,
14 everything is okay."

15 So that was at 11:42, and I can't say with any certainty
16 that, that was sent at 11:42. Sometimes texts take a little bit
17 of time.

18 Q. No, no, I understand. Bristol Bay, I know it well.

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. Okay. So when did you get the next one from him? Is there a
21 follow-up on the following day?

22 A. Let's see. Actually, I did have one more text a couple
23 minutes later. He said, "We're staying below. Zack has an
24 inReach we'll probably use to communicate. We're still safe."
25 11:50. And then I didn't hear from him until 11:20 a.m. the next

1 day.

2 Q. Which said essentially what?

3 A. "Just got off the barge into the village."

4 Q. Okay. So at any time after he sent that one at 11:50 saying
5 Zack has an inReach, did you get anything from Zack on inReach?

6 A. I did not. Actually, so this is what it said -- he did say,
7 "The house is starting to come apart, so we're staying below.
8 Zack has an inReach we'll probably use to communicate." In
9 another separate text, "We are still safe now." And then nothing
10 from Zack, nothing from those guys until 11:20 a.m., "Just got off
11 the barge into the village."

12 We had been in communication with them. I don't have my call
13 logs, but we sent somebody down to the barge first thing in the
14 morning, so I was in communication with other people before that
15 point in time. I didn't -- it's not like I didn't hear from
16 anybody until 11:20.

17 Q. Right. Okay. How about, to back up a little bit before the
18 storm, did you or anybody you know of, were they tracking the
19 weather? Was there a weather system they were tracking?

20 A. As I recall, we were aware there was a weather system coming
21 in. We -- I remember looking at the waves, making sure that the
22 wave heights weren't significant, and they weren't supposed to be.
23 We used Windy.com to look and say, hey, what's coming down the
24 pipe? We did know that there was some weather on its way.

25 I think when we discussed like, hey, do we move the barge or

1 do we leave it, we didn't have a good option for tow, as I recall.
2 I didn't know if there was anybody close by. And I'm sure Pat
3 spoke to this, but he was concerned about unattaching from the
4 solid mooring system and just --

5 Q. Yeah, he did.

6 A. And he was like, well, we could unattach from the mooring
7 system that's solid and have them drug, and we could just go run
8 it up on the beach somewhere. That was kind of going to have some
9 of the same potential issues as, you know, just getting pushed up
10 on the beach anyways.

11 Q. Right. Yep, that makes sense. Okay. As far as you know,
12 has anybody, even until now, had to go to the hospital for any
13 kind of latent injury that they weren't initially aware of?

14 A. Not that I'm aware of. I would've -- I would think that I
15 would've heard if somebody went to the hospital for any reason,
16 and I have not heard of anybody experiencing an injury that
17 required even a doctor visit, let alone a hospital.

18 Q. Okay. That's good. We'll go with no news is good news.

19 A. Yeah, that's kind of the way I'm looking at it.

20 Q. Okay. I can't think of anything else that --

21 (Dog barking.)

22 (Background conversation.)

23 MR. BLAKEY: Sorry about that.

24 CWO [REDACTED] No worries. It's part of the joy of the
25 telework.

1 MR. BLAKEY: Yeah, yeah. Well, actually, I'm at my office,
2 it's just, we don't get a lot of strangers walking in the door
3 because of COVID, but this guy just walked in, so it's a little
4 bit like -- anyways, I'll let you guys carry on.

5 CWO [REDACTED] Okay.

6 BY CWO [REDACTED]

7 Q. So, just for my general education, what exactly -- as
8 president of Northline, what's like your primary duty? Is it
9 administrative, is it logistics, is it overseeing operations? I
10 mean, what exactly do you do?

11 A. It's a little bit of everything kind of. My official role is
12 I work with fleet vendors, suppliers, do contracts, all the sales.
13 This summer, I worked the land-based operations, so when they
14 needed something on the barge, I helped facilitate, provide them
15 what they need, help get parts and pieces to the right place at
16 the right time.

17 So it's kind of -- you know, we're a small company, so we --
18 as you can imagine, basically we all do a little bit of
19 everything. We all wear --

20 Q. Sounds like it.

21 A. We all wear a bunch of hats. But yeah, this year in
22 particular, because of COVID, because I wasn't out on the barge, I
23 obviously played a much lower, smaller role than I normally would
24 in like barge management or even production management, quality
25 control, things that somebody who's working in sales would

1 normally -- you know, I'd normally spend more time working with
2 the graders or working with like quality control folks. But
3 because of COVID, I couldn't go out there. I played a little bit
4 less of a role in that this season.

5 Q. Right. So like, if COVID was not present, you would've spent
6 more time on the barge?

7 A. Yeah, yeah. I think, in 2019, I probably spent about half my
8 time out there and half my time on land.

9 Q. Okay. But you still wore the same hats 2019 and 2020?

10 A. Yeah, that's correct.

11 CWO [REDACTED] Yeah. Okay. I was kind of wondering, as a
12 president of a small company, what it was you did, and it sounds
13 like you do plenty, so I appreciate that explanation. But I think
14 that's all I have. I'm sure Jon's been taking notes, and he's
15 probably got some follow-up questions, so I'm going to go ahead
16 and turn it over to him.

17 MR. FURUKAWA: Yep. Hey --

18 MR. BLAKEY: And the last thing I'll just say real quick
19 before you go, Jon, is on the Blue Seas option, I'm still going to
20 try and keep tracking those guys down. You have the invoice. If
21 you guys want to try calling them and you have some luck, let me
22 know. I don't know if that's even necessary, but I would like to
23 -- the insurance underwriters are trying to get ahold of them as
24 well.

25 CWO [REDACTED] Understood. Okay.

1 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay.

2 BY MR. FURUKAWA:

3 Q. Hey, Ben.

4 A. Okay. Hey, Jon.

5 Q. How old are you?

6 A. I am 38.

7 Q. Thirty-eight. And what's your experience in the
8 fishing/maritime industry? How many years?

9 A. I've grown up working in the Bering Sea/Bristol Bay. I've
10 run -- I've owned and operated gill-netters in Bristol Bay before
11 I started Northline for about 11 years, crewed for years before
12 that. I've done bear (ph.) trawling off the east coast, you know,
13 midwater trawling. My family owned a processing company that did
14 crab in the Bering Sea, salmon, herring. So I worked in fleet
15 management -- I never worked in sales when I was with my family's
16 company, but worked in operations, fleet management, processing,
17 production management, basically just across the board.

18 Q. So basically all your life?

19 A. I've spent all my life working on the water, basically, and
20 mostly in Bristol Bay, actually, because when I was younger, I was
21 in school, so the summer salmon season is when I would be out
22 there.

23 Q. Okay. So you started in the industry about -- what, 16 years
24 of age?

25 A. My first -- yeah, I mean, I would be up out on my dad's

1 processor when I was 10, 11, 12, you know, sweeping and whatnot.
2 But my first crew job -- official crew job was probably 16, I
3 guess you'd say.

4 Q. Okay. More than half your life.

5 A. Yeah, yeah. I started working -- started sweeping floors
6 when I was 7 in a supply shop in Naknek, so I've basically been
7 working every summer since I was a kid up there.

8 Q. Yeah. Okay. And Northline Seafoods, you guys have been
9 around for 5 years?

10 A. Yeah. So we -- I think we incorporated 2015, November of
11 2015, and operated in Bristol Bay for 2 of those years.

12 Q. Okay. Let's see. You said Jack McFarland. Is he -- who's
13 Jack McFarland? Is he the insurance guy?

14 A. He's the rep for the insurance underwriters.

15 Q. Okay. I guess he's a surveyor or something.

16 A. Yeah. He's a surveyor, but he also -- he's got a ton of
17 experience, and I guess he does this work a lot, which is working
18 in salvage and representing underwriters in these sorts of
19 scenarios.

20 Q. Okay. And hopefully he'll give you guys a report, and we can
21 get a copy of that report.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. The holding barge, do you guys own that holding barge?

24 A. We lease it. So the holding barge is hauled out on land
25 right now in Dillingham.

1 Q. Okay. And what was the name of the holding barge?

2 A. It's the *Riverways-11*, I believe.

3 Q. Okay.

4 MR. FURUKAWA: Hey, [REDACTED]

5 CWO [REDACTED] Yes?

6 MR. FURUKAWA: Do you want a copy of the text messages
7 that -- you know, from Jeremiah to Ben?

8 CWO [REDACTED] I think in the transcript, it'll pretty much
9 cover what the text message said.

10 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay, okay.

11 BY MR. FURUKAWA:

12 Q. Okay. You guys were talking about inReach; what's that?

13 A. So there's a GPS -- it's a Garmin product where, if you don't
14 have cell reception, you can send texts via satellite. And so
15 what that means is you can text it on your phone, and then it
16 links through a satellite and then sends the text.

17 I think Zack -- I actually haven't talked to Zack about why
18 he never sent one out. I assumed it was just it wasn't worth the
19 risk of going up top, because they -- as I understand it, they
20 were down in the bays where it was safer, and to get satellite
21 reception, he would've had to go up top, which doesn't sound like
22 it was the safest of all options, so --

23 Q. Right. So inReach is the Garmin product for text messaging?

24 A. Yes, yes. And it's also like a SOS device, so you can click,
25 hey, I need help, and it'll send out a note to first responders or

1 local officials, Coast Guard -- I don't actually know who all it
2 notifies, but you can get help that way.

3 Q. Okay. I think that's pretty much it. And the buoy's in --
4 where did you say it is now? It's in Sitka or Dillingham?

5 A. It's in Dillingham. So the part of the buoy that failed --
6 and I think I've sent photos to [REDACTED] but essentially, imagine
7 like the top of the buoy itself just tore off. So there's a
8 padeye that attaches to the top of the buoy; the padeye itself
9 didn't break. It actually just pulled the lid off, if you will --

10 Q. Um-hum, or ripped it off.

11 A. -- so we've cut it into pieces -- well, not into pieces, but
12 we basically took the broken-off piece, which tore off and was
13 still attached to the barge, and then we also took a welder and
14 torched out a circle around the top of the buoy where the piece
15 tore out. So we have essentially three pieces: the two pieces
16 that fit together show where it structurally was damaged, and then
17 the buoy itself, which is now kind of just open, cut up, is in
18 Dillingham.

19 Actually, all pieces are in Dillingham. Jack McFarland
20 requested that I airfreight the two torn pieces to Kodiak so that
21 he can inspect them and he can keep them in his own warehouse for
22 the underwriters. If you guys want to just make a note that
23 that's kind of what -- I've been instructed to send them to
24 Kodiak, so if you guys are okay with that, then I'll proceed. Or
25 if you wanted to maybe see it for yourself first, you might just

1 let Jack know, or I can let Jack know.

2 CWO ██████████ No, actually, sending it to Kodiak is a good
3 idea, because we have an investigator in Kodiak that, if we need
4 to go see it, I can send him down there.

5 MR. FURUKAWA: Yeah, and --

6 MR. BLAKEY: Okay.

7 CWO ██████████ Yeah, we have nobody in Dillingham. We're out
8 there in the summertime; we're not out there at this time of year.
9 So yeah, Kodiak is fine. And then as long as we stay in the loop
10 of where the piece goes -- if it's going to go get forensic
11 testing, we can always make arrangements for an investigator from
12 another unit to go wherever that test is done. But yeah, as long
13 as we stay -- as long as we're kept informed of where the pieces
14 are, then that's fine.

15 MR. BLAKEY: Okay. Yeah, no, I'll certainly let you guys
16 know when it leaves. I think, yeah, the plan was to airfreight it
17 this week, so --

18 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. And Jack will give us like the
19 dimensions of the buoy, what the thickness of the steel is, and
20 all that stuff, right?

21 MR. BLAKEY: Yeah, so he will have that. I also have the
22 invoice I sent to ██████████ you guys may have that.

23 MR. FURUKAWA: Yep, we got that.

24 MR. BLAKEY: But yeah, actually, I think -- I don't think the
25 invoice clarifies the thickness of the steel, but I'm certainly --

1 I'm sure that he'll provide and share that information.

2 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. I think that's it for me. Thank you,
3 Ben.

4 MR. BLAKEY: Yeah, no, my pleasure.

5 And, [REDACTED] is there -- I'm just trying to think. As soon as
6 we accept the bid and we have the operation underway, I assume
7 we'll be sending you the accepted plan. Each bid comes with a
8 proposed remediation plan, so when we accept it, there should be a
9 document that you guys can look at to see what the next steps are
10 for removal.

11 CWO [REDACTED] Yeah. The salvage plan when it's finally
12 accepted, we'd like to get a copy of that, yes.

13 MR. BLAKEY: Yeah. And like I said, I think that should be
14 in the next couple days. Like I said --

15 CWO [REDACTED] Okay.

16 MR. BLAKEY: -- bid deadline is today at 5. We've already
17 gotten one of them, so after we get the second bid, I don't think
18 it's going to take us long to just accept one. We are trying to
19 get this done quicker than not, so --

20 CWO [REDACTED] Right, right.

21 MR. BLAKEY: -- I would expect to get something from me here
22 in the next couple days.

23 CWO [REDACTED] Yeah. I'm sure you've seen the storm
24 intensity is only getting stronger as winter approaches.

25 MR. BLAKEY: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we're aware of that. And

1 that's actually one of the reasons why we often choose to not try
2 and tow it out of Bristol Bay just because of the -- you know,
3 there's a lot more risk in hauling it out in October around
4 through False Pass and down. I just figured, if we put it on land
5 and get it out of harm's way, it'll just make it easier.

6 CWO [REDACTED] Right. I think that's a wise decision. But I
7 don't have anything else. Jon, do you -- Ben, do you want to add
8 anything, any comments for the record while we're recording? You
9 can. If not, we'll go ahead and stop the recording at this time.

10 MR. BLAKEY: Yeah, I mean, I don't really have any other
11 comments on the record other than, you know, the mooring assembly
12 itself actually worked really well except for the mooring buoy.
13 You know, a lot of -- around here, there's a lot of miss -- a lot
14 of times, people say, oh, it dragged anchor.

15 And just for 100 percent clarity, we did not drag anchor. If
16 anything, it was -- if it had dragged, maybe the mooring buoy
17 would not have broken the way it did. But I think it's been
18 pretty clear with all of our testimony that that's the case, but I
19 do find myself having to repeat that to folks up in the bay and
20 other vendors/partners.

21 CWO [REDACTED] Yeah. I mean, I can't speak for NTSB, but
22 that's what I see is the buoy failure is what caused the barge to
23 go adrift, and then it's just weather took over after that.

24 MR. BLAKEY: Yeah --

25 MR. FURUKAWA: Yep.

1 MR. BLAKEY: -- precisely. So yeah, that's what I have to
2 say. And yeah, I appreciate your time. If you guys have any
3 follow-up questions, don't hesitate to reach out.

4 MR. FURUKAWA: Okay. And let me say that it's 1544 Eastern
5 Daylight Time on Tuesday the 29th of September 2020, and we're
6 ending the interview with Mr. Benjamin Blakey, the president of
7 Northline Seafoods.

8 (Whereupon, at 3:44 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF: GROUNDING/STRANDING OF THE FISH
 TENDER BARGE *SM-3* IN NUSHAGAK BAY
 NEAR EKUK, ALASKA, ON AUGUST 30, 2020
 Interview of Benjamin Blakey

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA20FM027

PLACE: Via telephone

DATE: September 29, 2020

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.


Autumn Weslow
Transcriber