



**Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies is a partnership  
for cleaner air, safer whales, and a quieter ocean**

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April 12, 2023

**RE: 2023 Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program**

Dear Carrier Representative:

We are implementing a 2023 Vessel Speed Reduction (VSR) incentive program May 1 - December 15, 2023 to reduce air pollution, fatal ship strikes on whales, and underwater noise. Positive press and public relations incentives will be awarded to participating vessel operators based on percent of distance traveled by all of their vessels through the VSR Zones at 10 knots or less, termed “percent of cooperation,” during the identified time period. Average speed of a transit throughout the entire VSR Zone must not exceed 12 knots in order to receive credit for distance traveled at 10 knots or less.

After receiving feedback from participants over the years - and given that nearly 80% of the participants declined monetary incentives in 2022 - we have determined that there is now greater interest and value in positive press and public relations campaigns rather than monetary incentives for participation in this program. In lieu of financial awards, program participants will receive additional recognition for their participation through the positive public relations campaign to draw industry and public awareness to the VSR program and your company’s participation. The level of public recognition will be scaled according to each company’s level of participation.

Each vessel’s speed transiting the VSR Zones will be verified via analysis of Automatic Identification System (AIS) data. Participation is voluntary and does not commit shipping industry participants beyond the program period. If companies are enrolled in the program and unable to meet the minimum program criteria, there is no penalty, but public relations and positive press incentives will not be awarded.

Please note the expansion of the northern VSR zone throughout Monterey Bay region, and the southern California VSR zone expansion to include recent International Maritime Organization modifications to the Santa Barbara Channel Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) and Area To Be Avoided (ATBA). Vessels may deviate from the speed and routing recommendations whenever necessary to maintain safe maneuvering.

Whenever possible, to reduce the overlap of vessel traffic with high concentration areas of endangered whales, vessels are requested to prioritize use of the western traffic lane of the San Francisco TSS when traveling in the San Francisco Offshore TSS.

While the scope of the program is limited to Southern California region and the San Francisco and

Monterey Bay regions (see Attachment A), air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and the threat of ship strikes on whales extends beyond these zone areas. Every effort should be made by participating vessels to not increase speed while outside the VSR Zones to “make up time,” which negates the positive benefits of your participation.

This VSR incentive program complements existing seasonal whale advisories and voluntary slow speed requests in effect in the Southern California region and San Francisco and Monterey Bay regions from May 1 - December 15, 2023. The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the United States Coast Guard (USCG), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) strongly recommend that *all vessels 300 gross tons or larger* reduce speeds to 10 knots or less in these vessel slow speed zones. For more information on the seasonal whale advisories, please consult the [USCG 11th District Local Notice to Mariners](#).

To enroll, companies are required to sign a Letter of Understanding and Sign Up Form (Attachment B). Please return the completed and signed forms to Jessica Morten (contact information provided below) **by May 1, 2023 so that your company’s information can be included in a news release**. Enrollments after May 1 will be accepted, but ship speeds during the entire program period will be included in all award level determinations.

For more information about the VSR incentive program, please visit [www.bluewhalesblueskies.org](http://www.bluewhalesblueskies.org)

Please also see Attachment C to learn how to report sightings of endangered whales to NOAA.

Enrollment materials, comments, or questions may be directed to:

**Contact:** Jessica Morten – NOAA Channel Islands, Cordell Bank, Greater Farallones, and Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuaries & California Marine Sanctuary Foundation

**Email:** [jessica.morten@noaa.gov](mailto:jessica.morten@noaa.gov)

By working together, we can maintain vibrant maritime commerce, enhance corporate responsibility, and protect human health and the marine environment. We thank you in advance for your company’s participation in the Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program.

Sincerely,

The Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Partners

Cc: Marine Exchange of Southern California  
Marine Exchange of the San Francisco Bay Region  
Pacific Merchant Shipping Association  
World Shipping Council

Attachments:

- A. Maps of the VSR Zones in the San Francisco and Monterey Bay and Southern California Regions
- B. Letter of Understanding / Sign-Up Form
- C. Whale Sightings Form