FACTSHEET

FAST SHIPS IN WHALE HABITATS: WHAT'S NEXT FOR CANADA'S PACIFIC WATERS

GLOBALLY, MORE THAN HALF OF THE 90 LIVING SPECIES OF CETACEANS - WHALES, DOLPHINS AND PORPOISES - ARE OF CONSERVATION CONCERN

The decline of ocean species is driven by human activities – interactions with fisheries, shipping activity and coastal development. More is needed to protect cetaceans, and history has shown that social, cultural and economic impacts can be devastating if we do "too little, too late". Some of the world's busiest shipping routes overlap directly with important whale habitat, resulting in a high risk of injury and mortality from ship strikes, masking communication, increasing stress levels and causing hearing impairment and behavioural changes due to underwater noise pollution, among other shipping impacts.

More than 4,000 large vessels travel the trade routes in Canadian Pacific waters. Vessel traffic in BC waters also includes over 50 ferries and more than 300,000 registered private recreational vessels.

SHIP STRIKES AND UNDERWATER NOISE ARE GROWING THREATS

The volume of shipping traffic worldwide has increased by over 300 per cent since the early 1990s, and underwater noise has more than doubled every decade since. Canada's Pacific coast plays a central role globally and nationally, hosting the largest port in the country and acting as the gateway to trans-Pacific and North American trading corridors. Ship traffic is also rapidly growing in the region, with planned port developments and terminal capacity increases. These waters are used seasonally or year-round by 26 populations or species of cetaceans, of which 11 are of conservation concern, including the endangered populations of blue whale, sei whale, North Pacific right whale and southern resident killer whale (SRKW). Both voluntary and mandatory management measures have been developed to address underwater noise pollution to SRKW in the Salish Sea. However, the management of shipping interactions with other species of cetacean on Canada's Pacific coast, including noise pollution and ship strikes, is generally a voluntary endeavor and remains largely unmanaged, posing an increasing threat to recovering cetacean populations.

Download the full paper here ↗

WWF-CANADA'S NEW DISCUSSION PAPER WILL OPEN DIALOGUE AROUND MANAGING THE IMPACTS OF SHIPPING ON CETACEANS IN AREAS DEEMED HIGH RISK FOR VESSEL AND MARINE MAMMAL INTERACTIONS

Shipping Traffic and Speed in Cetacean Habitats on Canada's Pacific Coast provides a preliminary analysis of vessel traffic and speeds within known important whale habitats off the Canadian Pacific coast. Using Automated Identification System (AIS) technology and different data layers identifying cetacean important habitats, a series of maps was created to demonstrate the volume (total distance in kilometres travelled) and speed of the top five vessel categories travelling within said habitats. Results show that some of the most common vessel classes include tugs and pleasure crafts, passenger vessels, bulk carriers, container ships and cruise ships. High-risk areas include the Dixon Entrance to the Port of Prince Rupert, with bulk carriers and container ships; and the Central Coast, Inside Passage and entrance to the Port of Kitimat, with cruise and passenger ships travelling at speeds above 16 knots.

The most effective mitigation measures to reduce risks of shipping to cetaceans will be highly specific to each geographic area and stakeholder, but the document presents options to guide discussions and the development of working groups, encouraging action and support for future studies that will aid in the recovery of Canadian Pacific cetaceans and advance sustainable shipping practices.

WWF

A Canada with abundant wildlife, where nature and people thrive.

wwf.ca

For more information contact:

Kimberly Dunn,
Senior Specialist, Marine Conservation Wildlife & Industry
kdunn@wwfcanada.org