



March 21, 2023

Assembly Member Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, Chair
Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee
1020 N Street, Room 160
Sacramento, California 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 953 (Connolly/Hart): Statewide Vessel Speed Reduction Program - SUPPORT

Dear Chair Bauer-Kahan and Committee Members,

The undersigned organizations are dedicated to the preservation and improved health of California's ocean and coastline. We recognize that, to achieve this goal, it is imperative that large container ships along the California coast slow down to protect migrating whales, reduce air pollution in coastal communities, and to limit underwater acoustic pollution. For these reasons, we support Assembly Bill 953 to incentivize safe shipping along our coast with a voluntary vessel speed reduction program.

Each year, thousands of large container ships travel to and from California ports through shipping lanes that are shared by at least three endangered whale species, including blue, humpback, and fin whales. These vessels are also a significant source of air pollution, including smog-forming nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxide, greenhouse gases, and other air pollutants. Slowing freight vessel speeds off the California coast can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, coastal air pollution, and protect endangered whale species.

For those reasons, the undersigned organizations strongly support AB 953 (Connolly/Hart) in order to develop and implement a statewide voluntary vessel speed reduction and sustainable shipping program for the California coast in order to reduce air pollution, the risk of fatal vessel strikes on whales, and harmful underwater acoustic impacts.

California is home to iconic, keystone marine species that provide both cultural and economic value to its communities. Whales along the California coast enhance the predictability and stability of marine ecosystems, while fueling the state's vibrant coastal tourism economy and a multi-million-dollar whale watching industry. Each year, thousands of large container ships go to and from California ports through shipping lanes that are shared by at least three endangered whale species. Slowing ship speeds reduces the risk of fatal ship strikes on whales, while simultaneously reducing air emissions.

In 2017, a partnership between NOAA Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District, Ventura County Air Pollution Control District, Bay Area Air Quality Management District, and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation began an initiative to cut air pollution and protect endangered whales through the Vessel Speed Reduction (VSR) incentive program, which includes speed-reduction zones in the San Francisco Bay area and the Santa Barbara Channel Region. The program built on the foundation of the 2014 VSR Trial, the 2015 Marine Shipping Working Group process, and the 2016 VSR Program.

To ensure that the state incentivizes safe shipping along our coastline, the undersigned organizations express their support of AB 953.

Sincerely,

Sean Bothwell
Executive Director
California Coastkeeper Alliance
The Otter Project

Erin Woolley
Policy Advocate
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Angela Kemsley
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WILD COAST

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