

Subject: Regarding the Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW) Imminent Threat Assessment

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To: "aburger@uvic.ca" <aburger@uvic.ca>

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Alan E. Burger, PhD
President
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Dear Dr. Burger:

Thank you for your correspondence of August 1, 2018, regarding the Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW) Imminent Threat Assessment and your specific ideas on how to conserve and recover this iconic species. I understand that ministers Wilkinson and McKenna have also responded to your inquiry. Please accept my apology for the delay in replying.

Transport Canada is working closely with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, as well as Environment and Climate Change Canada, to support the recovery of all endangered whales in Canada, including the SRKW, the North Atlantic right whale and the St. Lawrence Estuary beluga.

My department is also working in collaboration with Indigenous communities, the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority's Enhancing Cetacean Habitat and Observation (ECHO) Program, BC Ferries, non-governmental organizations, and the broader marine industry to address the key threats to the SRKW.

As you have pointed out, this past summer we partnered with the ECHO Program on a voluntary vessel slowdown in the Haro Strait, where the SRKW are often found, to reduce the underwater noise levels of vessels in this area. I am encouraged by the participation rate of around 90%, as this demonstrates the marine industry's willingness to participate in finding and implementing solutions.

Additionally, Transport Canada collaborated with the ECHO Program on a lateral displacement trial in the Strait of Juan de Fuca with the goal of reducing vessel noise in key SRKW feeding areas along the southern shore of Vancouver Island. Supported by the U.S. Coast Guard, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and others, this trial ran from August 20, 2018, until October 31, 2018. Acoustic, operational, and qualitative results of this trial are currently being assessed.

The Government of Canada is increasing its surveillance by acquiring an additional plane for the National Aerial Surveillance Program (NASP), as well as state-of-the-art \$34-million radar and infra-red sensors for the entire fleet to meet the new and growing demand on the NASP. The government is also increasing its ability to listen underwater by deploying hydrophones in the SRKW's critical habitat in the Salish Sea to help assess the effectiveness of measures to reduce underwater noise.

This October, we announced an additional \$61.5 million in measures to support the recovery of SRKW in the Salish Sea. These include:

- exploring an increase in the size of vessel slowdown areas to increase the amount of SRKW critical habitat that is transited at lower speeds, thereby increasing the impact of this noise reduction measure;
 - developing collaborative arrangements with key stakeholder groups, like commercial shippers and BC Ferries, aimed at formalizing current voluntary noise-reduction measures;
 - expanding vessel-monitoring systems to help in the development of real-time ability to avoid whale encounters;
 - providing funding to Ocean Wise to further develop the Whale Report Alert System that could assist in alerting mariners to the presence of whales in a given area; and
- working with U.S. partners at both the federal and state levels to implement additional measures to reduce the impact of underwater vessel noise on SRKWs.

As well, on October 29, 2018, the Government of Canada introduced in Parliament proposed legislative amendments to the *Canada Shipping Act* to strengthen the authorities to put in place regulations to better protect marine ecosystems from the potential impacts of marine vessels, including the impacts of underwater noise on SRKWs.

These are some of the measures Transport Canada is taking to protect the SRKW population under the Government of Canada's Whales Initiative, all with the goal of ensuring we maintain a safe and secure marine transportation system.

I too share the concerns you have raised regarding the threats facing the SRKW; the Government of Canada is taking action and is committed to the recovery of this iconic species.

I appreciate your taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,

The Honourable Marc Garneau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Transport

c.c. The Honourable Catherine McKenna, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Environment and Climate Change

The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard