



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

April 10, 2024

RE: 2024 Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program

Dear Carrier Representative:

We are implementing a 2024 VSR incentive program May 1 – December 31 in the Monterey and San Francisco region and May 1 - December 15 in the southern California region to reduce air pollution, fatal ship strikes on whales, and underwater noise. The structure of the 2024 VSR Program will be similar to the 2023 Program. 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.

Consistent with the 2023 Program, program participants will receive recognition for their participation through a positive public relations campaign to draw public awareness to the VSR program and your company’s participation. Level of recognition will be scaled according to each company’s level of participation.

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

Please additionally note the presence of the Area to Be Avoided (“ATBA”) in the Southern California VSR zone, which vessels are asked to avoid to reduce overlap with important endangered whale habitat. Any nautical miles transited by participating vessels within the ATBA will not be counted towards a company’s distance traveled at 10 knots or less.

Whenever possible, to reduce the overlap of vessel traffic with high concentration areas of endangered whales, vessels are additionally 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, 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. 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 in the program, companies are required to sign a Participant Agreement. Please return the completed and signed Agreement to Jessica Morten and Amber McEldowney (contact information provided below).

Please enroll by May 1, 2024 so that your company's information can be included in a news release. Please note that 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

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

Jessica Morten – jessica.morten@noaa.gov
Amber McEldowney – amber@californiamsf.org

We believe 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 considering your company's participation in this voluntary VSR program.

Sincerely,

The Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program Sponsors