

RESOLUTION of the
Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council

To support Year-Round Protection for Whales

At its meeting on February 29, 2024, the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary (GFNMS) Advisory Council passed a resolution to send a joint letter (with the Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council) expressing support for the resolution letter to support year-round protection for whales and requested to send it to the GFNMS and CBNMS Superintendent, Maria Brown.

Attachments: Joint Proposed Resolution to Support Year-Round Protection for Whales

This resolution was passed with majority vote by a quorum of primary members (or alternate members serving in place of primary members) at a public meeting on February 29, 2024 held in San Francisco, CA and via Google Meet. Council discussion regarding this resolution can be found in Meeting Highlights documentation at https://farallones.noaa.gov/manage/sac_meetings.html.

The council is an advisory body to the sanctuary superintendent. The opinions and findings of this letter/publication do not necessarily reflect the position of the sanctuary and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

COVER LETTER
Supporting Year-Round Protection for Whales

February 29, 2024

Maria Brown,
Sanctuary Superintendent

Dear Superintendent Brown,

By this letter, the Sanctuary Advisory Councils for Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries are recommending that the Greater Farallones and Cordell National Marine Sanctuaries (GF-CBNMS) share the attached resolution with the West Coast Regional Office and the National Office of the National Marine Sanctuaries for timely implementation.

Sincerely,



Jaime Jahncke, Chair
GFNMS Advisory Council



Jeff Dorman, Chair
CBNMS Advisory Council

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PROPOSED RESOLUTION
To Support Year-Round Protection for Whales

Whereas, protecting endangered species and sanctuary resources is a priority issue for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS).

Whereas, ship strikes pose a risk to whales globally. International research has shown higher speeds which pose a higher risk of lethality. California's coastal waters provide year-round habitat, migratory corridors, and feeding grounds for a number of whales, especially including blue, fin, humpback, gray and minke. Blue, fin, and humpback whales — all federally listed threatened and endangered species — are known to concentrate off the west coast of the United States, where they are provided legal protection, including the prohibition of take (incidental or otherwise), under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA, 1972), the Endangered Species Act (ESA, 1973), and the National Marine Sanctuary Act (NMSA, 1972).

Whereas, there were 70 recorded incidents of ship strikes on whales and 49 on threatened and endangered species of whales in California from 2007–2020. Researchers estimate that these observed and reported incidents represent a small percentage of the total number of ship strikes occurring since most incidents with large vessels go unnoticed and most whales sink after death.

Whereas, modeling studies estimate that 83 blue, fin, and humpback whales are killed along the U.S. west coast between May and September each year. This amount of annual mortality exceeds the blue and humpback Potential Biological Removal (PBR) values, defined under the MMPA as the maximum number of animals, not including natural mortalities, that may be removed from a marine mammal stock while allowing that stock to reach or maintain its optimum sustainable population.

Whereas on February 10, 2022, the Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Councils passed a resolution to adopt the report and recommendations of the Ship Strike Work Group. The report recommends voluntary year round vessel speed reduction (VSR) within National Marine Sanctuary boundaries.

Whereas on February 24, 2023, the Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Councils approved the Marine Mammals Topic Briefing and staff recommendation to implement management measures to reduce the risk of lethal ship strikes, with a goal by a minimum of 50% to endangered and threatened blue, humpback and fin whales.

Whereas, current sanctuary programs aim to reduce vessel strike threats to whales, the sanctuary is not reaching their goal of reducing ship strike risk by 50% in sanctuary jurisdictions.

Whereas, San Francisco Bay ports are major maritime commerce hubs for international trade on the West Coast. The co-occurrence of ships and whales creates a high likelihood that ships moving in and out of San Francisco Bay in the traffic lanes may transit through aggregations of feeding whales.

Whereas, the timing of the current program from May to December fails to protect whales that arrive as early as March and stay as late as January. Preliminary acoustic data shows baleen whales are present year-round in central California sanctuaries, and not just during the May 1 – December 15 period when the vessel speed reduction is effective.

Therefore be it resolved, that the Sanctuary Advisory Councils for Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries hereby jointly recommend expanding the voluntary, sanctuary-wide, vessel speed reduction to include year-round VSR measures to protect whales in the waters of the Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries.

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