



Our Vision  Clean Air
And Safer Whales



Ventura County
Air Pollution
Control District



environmental
DEFENSE CENTER



NATIONAL
MARINE
SANCTUARY
FOUNDATION

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Blue Whales & Blue Skies Act Introduced in Congress National Recognition Program for Companies that Slow Ships in Region

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — A coalition of government agencies and non-profit organizations applaud Congressman Alan Lowenthal, with co-sponsors Congressional Representatives Salud Carbajal, Julia Brownley, and Rohit Khanna, for introducing the Blue Whales & Blue Skies Act today. The Act calls on NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to create a program to recognize shipping companies for voluntarily reducing speeds in the Santa Barbara Channel region to reduce air pollution, the risk of fatal ship strikes on whales and harmful underwater acoustic impacts. The bill notes the recognition program would be modeled after the voluntary Vessel Speed Reduction (VSR) incentive program implemented in 2014 by Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District, Ventura County Air Pollution Control District, Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, Environmental Defense Center and National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. The Act would establish an annual recognition of shipping companies for voluntarily slowing speeds in the Channel region, and within the next few years would assess feasibility of extending the program to encompass all shipping channels along the U.S. Pacific Coast between Canada and Mexico.

"Studies show that ship speed is directly correlated to whale mortality in these tragic strike incidents. Along the Atlantic coast, speed reductions have boosted the population counts of endangered right whales. And closer to home a voluntary program at the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles have protected blue and humpback whale feeding areas," Congressman Lowenthal said. "The Blue Whales, Blue Skies Act would recognize these critical efforts, and pave the way for further cooperation between shipping lines and our local communities to protect endangered whales and improve air quality."

Congressman Carbajal added, "Ensuring Americans have clean air and water is one of our greatest responsibilities as legislators. While serving in county government, I was proud to pass a resolution to reduce emissions from marine vessels. I am grateful to continue that work with my colleagues to reduce air pollution levels and protect our marine life."

"I am proud to co-author the Blue Whales and Blue Skies Act legislation to acknowledge the important role of the maritime shipping industry in protecting our marine mammals," Congresswoman Brownley said. "Modeled after a successful Ventura County and Santa Barbara County initiative, the bill would provide national recognition for shipping companies that voluntarily slow ship speeds off our coast. The program not only reduces emissions, improves air quality, and protects blue whales and other marine life, but also demonstrates how local ideas can provide innovative solutions to larger problems."

Aeron Arlin Genet, Director of Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District noted, "We want to thank our Congressional representatives for taking this effort forward to help build our partnership with

the shipping industry. Cleaner air for everyone and safer conditions for whales — that's what all of us are working together to create."

Ships transiting through the region are a major source of air pollution in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. "The Blue Whales & Blue Skies Act offers an opportunity to create a public-private partnership to reduce emissions without the need for additional regulations," said Mike Villegas, Air Pollution Control Officer, Ventura County Air Pollution Control District. Successful VSR incentive programs in 2014 and 2016, modeled after programs at the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, significantly reduced air pollutants in the Santa Barbara Channel region.

Ships also threaten blue, humpback, and fin whales. A study published August 21, 2017 in *PLOS One* focused on ship strikes and whale mortality on the West Coast, and noted that death from collisions with ships may be a significant impediment to population growth and recovery of these whales. The study called out the danger to whales close to shore, including in shipping lanes through the Santa Barbara Channel to and from the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. Slowing ship speeds to 12 knots or less reduces air emissions, the risk of fatal ship strikes on whales, and harmful underwater acoustic impacts.

"We are delighted to see this piece of legislation introduced. The vessel speed reduction program is the result of a decade of partnership between federal and local agencies, non-profits and foundations, and the shipping industry — a unique partnership to be sure," said Kristen Hislop, Marine Conservation Program Director for the Environmental Defense Center (EDC). "EDC and our partners have been working to reduce the impacts of shipping in the Santa Barbara Channel since 2007, when five endangered blue whales drifted onshore after being killed by ship strikes. We hope to build on the success of the vessel speed reduction program through this proposed award program, which will recognize the shipping companies that take action to protect endangered whales and improve air quality. It is great to see this type of partnership celebrated, and we commend Representatives Lowenthal, Carbajal, Brownley, and Khanna for proposing this legislation."

The successful VSR trial incentive program in the Santa Barbara Channel in 2014 gave companies a financial incentive to cut ship speeds to 12 knots or less. The program incentivized 27 slow-speed trips, reducing 12.4 tons of smog-forming nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions, and 500 metric tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In 2015, a Marine Shipping Working Group under the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council explored concerns about shipping impacts on the region and unanimously supported a second VSR Program. These efforts were recognized with a national Clean Air Excellence award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2016. The second VSR program in 2016 incentivized 50 slow-speed vessel transits, reducing 25.6 tons of NOx and 1,000 metric tons of GHGs. The 2017 VSR incentive program started July 1 and will continue until November 15. Eleven shipping companies are participating, and the program has expanded to include the shipping lanes in and out of the San Francisco Bay area (not currently a part of the Blue Whales & Blue Skies Act).

"This year, the VSR Incentive Program partnership expanded across the National Marine Sanctuary System in California bringing greater regional recognition for the need to conserve whales and work to prevent deadly ship strikes," said Kris Sarri, CEO and President of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. "The Foundation appreciates these Congressional champions for introducing this legislation to recognize the efforts of the VSR program to conserve whales and a healthier environment for all."

The Blue Whales & Blue Skies Act, H.R. 3682, was introduced September 6, 2017 by Congressman Alan Lowenthal with the following Congressional Representative co-sponsors: Salud Carbajal, Julia Brownley, and Rohit Khanna.

See <https://lowenthal.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=398882> for more information. Individuals and organizations wishing to send letters to support this legislation may contact Congressman Lowenthal's office for information at (202) 225-7924. To view more information on the VSR programs, visit www.ourair.org/air-pollution-marine-shipping/.