



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

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April 16, 2021

**RE:** 2021 voluntary Vessel Speed Reduction (VSR) incentive program for the Southern California and San Francisco Bay regions off California

Dear Carrier Representative:

We are implementing a 2021 VSR incentive program May 15 - November 15, 2021 to reduce air pollution and fatal ship strikes on whales. The structure of the 2021 VSR Program will be similar to the 2020 Program. Financial incentives will be awarded to companies 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. Average speed of a transit throughout the entire VSR Zone must not exceed 12 knots in order to receive credit for distance traveled at 10 knots or less.

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. In addition, roughly \$300,000 is available to fund financial awards and public recognition efforts in 2021, and award amounts will be scaled according to each company’s level of participation.

The California Marine Sanctuary Foundation will manage the incentive payments to individual shipping lines; please see the Letter of Understanding. Each vessel’s speed transiting the VSR Zones will be verified via analysis of Automatic Identification System (AIS) data. Participation is voluntary and does not commit shipping industry participants beyond the program period. If companies are enrolled in the program and unable to meet the minimum program criteria, there is no penalty but financial and public relations incentives will not be awarded.

While the scope of the program is limited to Southern California and San Francisco Bay Area regions (see Attachment A), air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and the threat of ship strikes on whales extends beyond these regions. 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. Ship speed monitoring using AIS may occur between the Southern California and San Francisco Bay region VSR Zones to determine if ships are speeding up between zones. Please reduce vessel speed outbound and inbound in the Bay Area VSR region and note that we will be monitoring outbound and inbound speeds in the Bay Area VSR region, as we have noticed lower rates of cooperation in recent years with ships departing from the San Francisco Bay Area VSR Zone. Please additionally note the presence of the Voluntary Extended Area To Be Avoided (ATBA) in the Southern California VSR zone, which vessels are asked to route around to avoid important endangered whale habitat. Note that any nautical miles transited by participating vessels within the Voluntary ATBA will not be counted towards a company’s distance traveled at 10 knots or less.

Please note this VSR incentive program complements existing seasonal whale advisories and voluntary slow speed requests in effect in the Southern California region (May 15 - November 15, 2021) and San Francisco Bay Area (May 1 - November 15, 2021) region. The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration

(NOAA) and the United States Coast Guard (USCG) strongly recommend that all vessels 300 gross registered 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 Letter of Understanding. Please return the completed and signed Letter of Understanding and Sign Up Form (Attachment B) to Jess Morten (contact information provided below).

**Please enroll by May 15, 2021 so that your company's information can be included in a news release.** Late enrollments will be accepted, but ship speeds during the entire program period will be included in all incentive award determinations.

For more information about the VSR incentive program, please visit [www.ourair.org/air-pollution-marine-shipping/](http://www.ourair.org/air-pollution-marine-shipping/)

Please also see Attachment C to learn how to report sightings of endangered whales.

Enrollment materials, comments or questions may be directed to:

**Contact:** Jessica Morten – Resource Protection Specialist Affiliate  
NOAA's Channel Islands, Cordell Bank, and Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuaries

**Email:** [jessica.morten@noaa.gov](mailto:jessica.morten@noaa.gov)

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 the voluntary VSR incentive program.

Sincerely,

The Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Partners

Cc: Pacific Merchant Shipping Association  
Marine Exchange of Southern California

Attachments:

- A. Maps of the VSR Zones in the Southern California and San Francisco Bay Area Regions
- B. Letter of Understanding / Sign-Up Form
- C. Whale Sightings Form