



A Program of Washington Maritime Blue

Quiet Sound Advisory Committee (ORCAs) Meeting Summary

March 14, 2025, 9:00 am-12:00 pm

Action Items & Decisions

Action Items	Who
Thermal Imaging: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Reach out to parties who indicated that they would like to receive thermal detections	Gonzalo Banda-Cruz
Desktop Study: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Explore collaboration with Ruth Joy's Lab (Movement models with potential application to slowdown parameters)	Sara Adams
Passenger-only ferries: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Reach out to SRMU/ECHO on source levels for fast ferries● Work with current PoS operators (King & Kitsap County) to understand their protocols● Work with David Bain to explore possibilities of redirecting funding for hydrophones that can help gather PoS benchmark (e.g. Kitsap Transit PoS source levels)● Develop recommendations for new ferry districts on whale-safe operations.	QS Staff QS Staff Gonzalo Banda-Cruz QS Staff

Meeting Notes

Welcome/Introductions

Following the welcome and introductions, Alle Brown-Law of Cascadia Consulting provided a land and water acknowledgment, recognizing the significance of the Salish Sea and Southern Resident killer whales to Indigenous communities. Grace Ferrara from NOAA Fisheries shared an update on J62, the newest female calf in J pod. Brown-Law provided an overview of the agenda and led the group in an icebreaker activity.

Thermal Imaging Camera Project Update

Gonzalo Banda-Cruz, Quiet Sound Program Manager, provided background information on the thermal imaging camera project, including its goals, scope, and an update on PSP's involvement as a co-sponsor. He discussed the project's status, noting the selection of a certified tower climber group and WhaleSpotter's system testing. He also updated the group on the system's location. The Point Wilson USCG tower has been identified as the optimal location due to its security, accessibility, and height. The permit application was submitted a month ago, with approval expected within 30-60 days. Alternative locations will be considered if a NEPA review is required.

QS inquired whether participants wanted to receive whale detection data. Groups that expressed interest or were suggested include Ocean Wise/WRAS, The Whale Museum, WDFW, marine mammal monitors for construction projects, Orca Conservancy, Soundwatch, Orca Network, ECHO Program, Ocean Wise Sightings Network, Puget Sound Pilots, Acartia.io, and the Navy. Gonzalo mentioned that data sharing for this camera could be established through a data partnership agreement.

Questions/Comments from ORCAs:

- A member inquired about the system's cost. Gonzalo explained that costs vary depending on the camera design and that this system costs approximately \$40,000 to purchase and \$2,000/month to operate, but noted that prices may change due to tariffs on imported technology.
- He also stated that Quiet Sound would like to develop a decision-making tool with the group to determine the location of future thermal systems.
- The ORCAs noted that the benefits of data sharing for conservation outweigh the potential risks. They suggested that if detections are sent to WRAS, they can be archived and used as needed. While real-time access isn't always necessary, the ability to activate data transmission, such as during an oil spill, would be valuable. It was also emphasized that it is important to consider who might need access to this data beyond those currently involved in discussions.
- Finally, some members mentioned that they would like a more in-depth discussion about sharing real-time data publicly.

Admiralty Inlet 2024-2025 Slowdown Update

Sara Adams presented preliminary results of the 2024-25 slowdown, its third season, noting a 66% pilot-reported vessel slowdown rate, with 56% of vessels achieving target speeds (excluding tugs). While this reflects a slight decrease from the previous year, overall transit numbers increased. Passenger vessels (cruise) demonstrated the highest participation of the vessel types tracked by QS, with 86% adhering to slowdown protocols. The 98-day slowdown period included 54 orca-presence days. Due to delayed funding, bi-weekly AIS analysis was not possible this season.

Sara mentioned that efforts are ongoing to evaluate noise reduction. Data analysis is underway, with Quiet Sound and SMRU analyzing noise levels overall, by vessel type, and by frequency range. QS and SMRU are assessing tug data. This is the first season with a target for tugs running lite, and QS, SMRU and tug companies are developing the process of refining tug AIS data to exclude non-qualifying transits for the first time.

Adaptive management: Results will be shared in May. This information will be used to propose slowdown parameters for 2025-2026.

Sara Adams explained how Quiet Sound currently recognizes and celebrates participants, and requested early feedback on potential changes. The current recognition process begins with an intent-to-participate form collected before the slowdown starts, gathering IMO numbers to track participation by company. Participation is assessed on a per-transit basis, but there is no stratification of participation levels or acknowledgment of fleet-wide participation unless requested. Recognition certificates are emailed and shared on social media, but there is no public acknowledgment on the website.

One challenge with the per-transit participation model is fairness. A company that slows down eight out of ten times receives a lower participation rate than a company that slows their only transit. The Blue Whales Blue Skies initiative calculates participation based on the percentage of distance traveled at or below the recommended speed, which could serve as a model for improvement.

Potential enhancements to the recognition process include introducing participation tiers with neutral naming to avoid directly labeling levels as good or bad. There is currently minimal website presence for participants, though this could grow over time. Media outreach is limited, and while a press release could be beneficial, it would require further contact development with other departments in the participant companies. There is also no awards program in place, but the idea of creating an Orca Award could be explored, potentially integrating it into existing programs like the NWSA or Port of Seattle Sustainable Century Awards.

Questions/Comments from ORCAs:

Should Quiet Sound use a dynamic end date (e.g. extend the slowdown if whales are still present)?

- ECHO Program Haro Strait and Boundary Pass voluntary slowdown end date is determined by SRKW presence; if there are two weeks with no Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW) in the

area, the slowdown is ended. ECHO has received feedback from industry that the preference is to communicate the slowdown as the maximum duration, with the potential to end early based on whale presence at the end of the season. ECHO is also in the early stages of evaluating the feasibility of a more dynamic slowdown, activated by SRKW/KW presence in the slowdown area in future years.

- A pilots' representative stated that for the next season, dynamic start and end dates would be manageable with improved communication methods, expressing optimism that communication lines to their pilots about slowdowns will be better in the following season.
- A participant inquired whether an eight-hour advance notice using movement models would be helpful for lead time. Rachel Aronson responded that she has seen some preliminary models from Ruth Joy's lab and that the upcoming season will provide an opportunity to test and refine their use.

Should Quiet Sound continue to recommend that vessels turn off ultrasonic anti-fouling devices?

- Todd Hass inquired about the percentage of vessels that turned off their anti-fouling devices across different vessel categories.
- Pilot responded that this has been problematic, as most ships have policies against shutting these systems down due to the burden it places on engineers. He added that many ships are not prepared for that request, but earlier notice might improve results. He also noted that if someone is asked to shut this system off, they may not be aware of the system's type or implementation, and language barriers can further complicate this.
- Todd acknowledged this clarification, stating that if these mitigation measures cannot be tracked, it doesn't seem meaningful to ask for them. Participants suggested that more effective conversations might occur at the corporate level with companies operating similar ships, focusing discussions on operating companies rather than individual vessels. ECHO mentioned that this is something they inquire about, but it is difficult to 100% determine the exact source of a sound (e.g. specific equipment) through hydrophone detections.

Should Quiet Sound change its public recognition process?

- A member suggested that a participant agreement could offer co-benefits, such as defining how companies want to be recognized and creating opportunities for press releases, potentially increasing company motivation to participate.
- ECHO agreed, stating that a participant agreement could aid in recognition and press outreach, offering more incentives for companies to participate. ECHO noted that shipping representatives in their program have expressed a desire for equal recognition (no tiers) since participation is voluntary. However, she pointed out that Blue Whales Blue Skies has had strong participation, and more clearly defined tiers could be beneficial.
- Another participant asked if there had been any discussion about working with retailers to promote "whale-friendly" shipping, such as outreach to REI or Amazon. Sara responded that

while it was a good idea, it's unclear how cargo operations align with retailers' supply chains. A participant suggested that the Whale Safe Certification Program could be a model to explore. ECHO commented that expanding this approach down the entire West Coast could be more appealing to larger retailers like Costco, Amazon, and IKEA.

Slowdown Desktop Study Update

Sara Adams provided an update on Quiet Sound's slowdown desktop study. The study aims to extend the habitat-improvement benefits of the Admiralty Inlet slowdown to other areas of SRKW critical habitat in the eastern end of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The study includes a vessel traffic analysis using AIS data, historical whale presence analysis, and stakeholder engagement to understand the pros and cons, and feasibility, of potential new slowdown locations. Preliminary options will be shared in May.

Passenger-only ferries: Legislation and Developing Best Practices

Rachel mentioned that House Bill 1923 (2025-2026), aimed at increasing the availability of passenger-only ferries by establishing the Mosquito Fleet Act, was to be discussed at a Senate Transportation Committee hearing on Monday, March 17.

She added that fast ferries are included in the Quiet Sound strategic plan, with a key goal of mitigating the impact of their presence and reducing strike risk to Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW). The floor was open for ORCAs input.

Input on legislation

- A participant noted that a recent House discussion regarding a potential amendment about whales was not reflected in the new bill. Expanding on this, another participant expressed concern about the potential harm to Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW) from the increased noise that would result from an expanded ferry fleet.
- A participant then brought up the World Cup, noting that improved transportation services were cited as a justification for the bill.

Input on data gaps

- A participant inquired if Quiet Sound had data to contrast the Seattle to Kingston ferry with the Seattle to Edmonds ferry. Quiet Sound indicated that they did not have specific data on this but found the inquiry to be of interest.
- ECHO provided relevant information, stating they had measured noise from a fast ferry operating from Vancouver to Nanaimo and can share general information if of interest. They noted that these ferries do not currently operate through ECHO Program voluntary slowdown areas.
- A participant noted that Boston Harbor has dealt with ferry/whale issues and recommended reviewing papers on the subject.

- A participant expressed interest in the noise levels of Kitsap fast ferries, among others, pointing out that water jet propulsion is reportedly quieter than conventional propeller propulsion at comparable speeds.

Recommendations to ferries from QS

- Education: To address the broader issue of ferry operations and their impact, several participants suggested implementing a training program for ferry operators, like the "Whales in Our Waters" program developed by Port of Vancouver, BC Ferries, and Ocean Wise.
- Whale awareness: A participant proposed that combining data from WRAS, Orca Network, and predictive modeling could provide fast ferries with advanced notice of likely SRKW presence, which would aid in route and resource planning.
- Communication and coordination with Washington State Ferries (WSF) was highlighted by a participant, who mentioned working with WSF to alert ferries about impacted routes when whales are in proximity to other whales, stressing the need for strong communication channels. A participant commended the Passenger-only and WSF ferries for effectively sharing their detections with pilots via radio.
- Finally, the operational practices of high-speed ships in other regions were brought up, with one participant noting that these ships often required two officers as lookouts, or the use of automated detection systems to support officers.

Updates from Quiet Sound and ORCAs Members

- The CLIA representative reported that on the IMO safety side, a group is developing Underwater Radiated Noise (URN) reporting and Canada's biofouling guidelines, with discussions planned in the coming weeks to explore making these guidelines mandatory in the next few years.
- ECHO announced that their voluntary ship slowdowns in Haro Strait and Boundary Pass, and Swiftsure Bank, as well as a tug route alteration zone in the Strait of Juan de Fuca will begin on June 1, and that the only change in 2025 is a planned west-south extension to the Swiftsure Bank slowdown area for better coverage of the SRKW hotspot there. Communication efforts to promote awareness start next month.
- Rachel Aronson highlighted that Puget Sound Day on the Hill offers an opportunity to travel to D.C. to advocate for regional priorities, and while talking points are still being finalized, the Washington delegation will be reminded of the critical importance of whale conservation for the state.
- ORCASOUND noted that given the uncertainty of long-term hydrophone funding, investing existing funds in a calibrated hydrophone could be a viable option, and that two University of Washington (UW) groups working on noise monitoring projects may soon be operational and available as a resource.

Attendees:

1. Alexis Morrigan, The Whale Museum
2. Alexandra Brown-Law, Facilitator, Cascadia Consulting Group
3. Andrea Doyle, AltaGas
4. Candice Emmons, NOAA, NWFSC
5. Carson Brock, Notetaker, Cascadia Consulting Group
6. David Bain, Orca Conservancy
7. Derek White, VFPA ECHO Program
8. Elise Adams, NOAA
9. Gonzalo Banda-Cruz, Quiet Sound Program Manager, Washington Maritime Blue
10. Grace Ferrara, NOAA
11. Jason McKinney, Navy
12. Jennifer McIntyre, ECHO Program
13. Jess Scott, Ocean Wise
14. Kathleen Hurley, Port of Seattle
15. Maggie Dour, Navy
16. Marla Holt, NOAA
17. Meghan Reckmeyer, NWSA
18. Mike Moore, Pacific Merchant Shipping Association
19. Monika Wieland Shields, Orca Behavior Institute
20. Rachel Aronson, Quiet Sound Program Director, Washington Maritime Blue
21. Raymond Scott, Kitsap Transit
22. Sara Adams, Quiet Sound Program Manager, Washington Maritime Blue
23. Scott Veirs, Orcasound
24. Shelby Hudspeth, Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA)
25. Stephanie Raymond, Orca Network
26. Terry Federer, King County Metro
27. Todd Hass, Puget Sound Partnership
28. Will Kelly, Puget Sound Pilots