



A Program of Washington Maritime Blue

Quiet Sound Advisory Committee (ORCAs) Meeting Summary

Sep 19, 2025

Meeting notes v. 10/06/2025

Action Items & Decisions

Action Items	Who
Continue to provide monthly fleet participant data to fleet operations managers during slowdown	Sara Adams
Send a note to cruise line agents about the Admiralty Inlet slowdown to ensure information is reaching vessel operators.	Mike Moore, PMSA
Finalize and publish the best practices document for passenger-only ferry operations.	Sara Adams
Provide an update on the emissions reduction co-benefit study at the next orca meeting	Meghan Reckmeyer, NWSA
Circulate information on the parameters and status of the Admiralty Inlet slowdown throughout the coming months.	ORCAs members

Meeting Notes

Welcome/Introductions

The meeting was facilitated by Rachel Aronson, who provided a land and water acknowledgement. Grace Ferrara of NOAA Fisheries shared an "Orca Moment" about a new J-pod baby spotted near West Seattle, offering a moment of hope in contrast to the recent news of a stillborn calf. The meeting began with a round of introductions and a short icebreaker activity.

Thermal Imaging Camera Project Update

Gonzalo Banda-Cruz presented an update on the thermal imaging camera project, which is part of the effort to reliably detect Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW) at all hours of the day and alert commercial mariners.

- The camera is installed at the Point Wilson USCG VTS radar tower and uses two lenses: a narrow, long-range lens and a wider, shorter-range one.
- The system's AI detects thermal signatures and a human verifies the sighting, with an alert then sent to mariners via the Whale Report Alert System (WRAS). This process takes between three to five minutes.
- When a definitive species ID cannot be made quickly, the system sends an alert marked "unidentified whale" to prioritize real-time alerts to mariners.
- Since April 18th, there have been 47 killer whale encounters and 900 detections, with a mean detection distance of 1.5 kilometers. The furthest detection was nearly 5.5 kilometers, which was a welcome surprise.
- The AI's average certainty of detection is high, at 0.8 on a scale of 0 to 1.
- Analysis of the data shows that killer whale detections tend to cluster in the late evening, early morning, and midday. A notable and surprising finding has been the consistent detection of fish, which appear at all hours of the day.
- Funding is in place for verification and data management services until June of next year. Next steps include enhancing and expanding the system and developing a clear plan for data sharing.

Questions and Comments:

- **Q: Does detection at 10 PM relate to sunset?** A: So far, detections have been consistent in the evening hours, but more data is needed over the winter to confirm if this is related to sunset times.
- **Q: Is there any issue with identification during sunrise?** A: The camera is pointed northeast to avoid direct solar radiation, which would make the footage unusable.

- **Q: Is it possible to get individual frames from the video to identify whether the whales are resident or transient?** A: The current system is not set up to support this, as it doesn't store raw video data. The team will check if it's possible to recover frames for this purpose.

Long-Term Hydrophone Project Update

Gonzalo Banda-Cruz also provided an update on the long-term hydrophone project.

- The need for a permanent, calibrated hydrophone in the slowdown area was identified in a Quiet Sound-led workshop and confirmed by a Port of Seattle/NOAA analysis. A permanent hydrophone would be more cost-effective for Quiet Sound in the long term than deploying temporary ones for every slowdown.
- The current timeline aims for site selection by December, a system design by February, and permitting by May or June of next year. Installation is not yet funded.
- Site selection will involve a multi-step process, including traffic analysis, operational feasibility, and stakeholder engagement with tribal partners and landowners.

Questions and Comments:

- **Q: Is the Port of Seattle/NOAA gap analysis available?** A: Kathleen Hurley (Port of Seattle) and Marla Holt (NOAA) offered to share the document by email, and NOAA is working to make it publicly available.
- **Comment:** Scott Veirs shared a link to the BC Hydrophone Network's [website](#), which visualizes noise statistics from vessels, noting that it may be a good model for future work.

Project Updates: Admiralty Inlet Slowdown Discussion

Sara Adams provided an update on the Admiralty Inlet slowdown, which began on September 14, 2025 and remains in effect through January 11, 2026.

- The slowdown parameters remain the same as 24-25 season: 14.5 knots for car carriers, cruise ships, and containers; and 11 knots for general cargo, bulkers, and tankers. We have discontinued the speed target for tugs running lite.
- Last season's slowdown was the longest to date, at 98 days, with orcas confirmed in the slowdown zone on 54 of those days. There was a slight drop in overall participation from previous years, and this may be due to the longer slowdown period, reduced communication with vessels about their speed registered via AIS, and poor offshore weather conditions.
- A pilot noted a communication gap, where a ship was not informed of the slowdown before entering the area. Mike Moore (PMSA) offered to contact the vessel's agent to ensure they receive the information. Quiet Sound noted that it takes a few days to get the word out to vessels due to the dynamic start.

- Quiet Sound analyzed the speed of vessels transiting the areas south of the Admiralty Inlet slowdown. On average, vessels transited at slower speeds in Central Puget Sound than in Admiralty Inlet regardless of whether the slowdown was in effect or not.

Questions and Comments:

- **Comment:** Some participants noted that extending the slowdown to areas where a natural slowdown is already occurring would provide other benefits, such as increased awareness and reduced emissions and ship strike risk. Others noted that given vessels are slowing during all times of the year, it might be inaccurate to claim the slowdown was reducing their speed. It was also pointed out that extending the slowdown into a busy ferry zone could make it difficult to measure underwater noise reduction benefits.
- **Comment:** David Bain noted that Washington State Ferry noise already dominates the soundscape in the southern portion of the current slowdown zone.

Project Updates: Slowdown Desktop Study

Sara Adams provided an update on the Slowdown Desktop Study, which focused on three areas in the east end of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The goal was to examine how SRKW presence overlaps with large commercial vessel traffic intensity.

- The areas of greatest SRKW presence and vessel traffic overlap were identified as Southern Haro Strait to Admiralty Inlet, Port Angeles to Admiralty Inlet, and Rosario Strait.
- In Southern Haro Strait, car carriers, containers, and cruise ships saw the greatest overlap with SRKWs from June to September.
- In the Port Angeles to Admiralty Inlet area, car carriers, containers, and cruise ships saw the greatest overlap with SRKWs from July to September.
- In Rosario Strait, tankers and tugs saw the greatest overlap with SRKWs from March to August. Quiet Sound noted that because these vessels are largely encumbered, a slowdown might not be the right intervention.
- The study resulted in a decision guide and recommendations that will be presented to the Leadership Committee.

Project Updates: Passenger-only Ferry Best Practices

Sara Adams presented a rapid review of best practices for passenger-only ferries, a project undertaken in response to growing interest in increasing ferry capacity in Washington.

- The draft best practices document recommends five key areas: knowing the rules, having a plan, being whale-aware, assessing impact, and designing for the future.
- The draft report, which is still being finalized, will be made available on the Quiet Sound website.

Other updates

- **Procurement:** Gonzalo Banda-Cruz announced a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for providers of visual sightings to support existing sighting networks, not to create a new one. This is part of a longer-term procurement process, and details are available on the Maritime Blue website.
- **Research:** Meghan Reckmeyer of the Northwest Seaport Alliance is conducting a study to analyze the emissions co-benefits of vessel slowdowns, with results expected this fall.
- **Sabbatical:** Scott Veirs announced he will be going on sabbatical for a year but will continue to stay involved and collaborate.
- **WRAS app:** Jessica Scott of Ocean Wise announced the launch of the new combined Whale Report and WRAS app.
- **Maritime Blue:** Rachel Aronson announced several upcoming events, including an event on the Statsraad Lehmkuhl tall ship and the One Ocean Week Seattle summit.
- **Funding:** Tara Galuska from the Governor's Salmon Recovery Office provided an update on a new \$22 million grant for salmon habitat restoration
- **Mariner Updates:** Mike Moore (PMSA) reported a 2.8% drop in vessel arrivals and a 9.2% drop in pilot assignments, noting that maritime traffic is dynamic and can be affected by global events.
- **Whale monitoring:** David Bain of Orca Conservancy shared an update on a new human operated optical camera in Burien that will allow online viewers to watch whales.
- **Collaboration:** Matt Hannuksela (Puget Sound Pilots) affirmed the pilots' commitment to collaborating with Quiet Sound and their partners to champion efforts to minimize noise on vessels.
- **SRKW and ferries:** Scott Veirs noted that the killer whales are now doing a "Seattle shuffle," or traveling back and forth in the main basin of Puget Sound. He commented that the predominance of ferries in the soundscape of these areas poses a risk to whales that should be addressed.

Attendees:

1. Adrienne Stutes, Washington State Ferries
2. Anthony Pinto, USCG
3. Candice Emmons, NOAA
4. Cheryl Ng, ECHO Program
5. David Bain, Orca Conservancy
6. Derek White, VFPA ECHO Program
7. Erin Ashe, Ocean Initiatives
8. Gonzalo Banda-Cruz, Quiet Sound
9. Grace Ferrara, NOAA

10. [Jessica Scott](#), Ocean Wise
11. [Jostein Kalvøy](#), Puget Sound Pilots
12. [Julie Watson](#), WDFW
13. [Marla Holt](#), NOAA
14. [Matt Hannuksela](#), Puget Sound Pilots
15. [Meghan Reckmeyer](#), NWSA
16. [Mike Moore](#), Pacific Merchant Shipping Association
17. [Monika Wieland Shields](#), Orca Behavioral Institute
18. [Rachel Aronson](#), Quiet Sound
19. [Scott Veirs](#), Orcasound
20. [Serena Tierra](#), Orca Network
21. [Stephanie Raymond](#), Orca Network
22. [Tara Galuska](#), GSRO
23. [Terry Federer](#), King County Water Taxi