



A Program of Maritime Blue

Quiet Sound Leadership Committee Meeting Summary

January 27, 2026

Meeting notes v. 2.19.26

Action Items & Decisions

Action Items	Who	Status
Quiet Sound to share hydrophone budget with Tara.	Rachel	
Quiet Sound to provide Leila with hydrophone schematic/ SMRU's responses to technical questions.	Gonzalo	
Katie will share the charter and final report of recommendations with Tara.	Katie Wrubel	
Tara to share Oregon Southern Resident killer whale contact with Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary staff.	Tara	
Jessica Morten and Rose Arsers to connect re: speed analyses.	Jessica Morten	

Meeting Notes

Welcome/Introductions

Rachel provided a land and water acknowledgement and orca moment. Rachel provided an overview of the agenda. Grace Ferrara will be stepping away from Quiet Sound activities until further notice given NOAA staff capacity.

SRKW Detections and Alerts to Mariners: Thermal Camera

Gonzalo presented an analysis of nighttime detections and alerts. Nighttime whale detections peaked in September. Night detections fall into two buckets: killer whale and unidentified whale, likely due to the unique thermal signature of killer whales. Whalespotter goes back to annotate the data with the species information. Most nighttime alerts go to Washington State Department of Transportation, followed by the University of Washington, Maritime Blue, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Royal Caribbean Cruises, FRS Clipper. Most alerts are received by operations centers via the web browser. Alerts sent to Puget Sound Pilots go through their navigation software and therefore don't show up in this analysis. Users are mostly email/SMS combinations of receiving data. The time between detection to alert generation for killer whales is about 4 minutes. Upcoming analyses include: a retrospective analysis of vessel behavior using AIS and Whale Report Alert System (WRAS) logs to understand whether we can measure vessel behavior in response to receiving whale alerts; species temporal distribution analysis to understand when different marine mammal species utilize the area in front of Point Wilson. Whalespotter is also developing a software module to estimate the direction of travel for a killer whale pod. Finally, Quiet Sound is working on developing data visualizations and video material for public outreach for whale conservation.

SRKW Detections and Alerts to Mariners: Long-term Hydrophone

Currently working on site selection, system design, and permitting which is all funded by NFWF. Site selection process includes: a vessel traffic analysis to identify vessel routes, operational feasibility screening to evaluate potential deployment sites, stakeholder engagement and tribal consultation, and finally, selecting the site based on operational and cultural criteria.

Gonzalo presented potential deployment sites that SMRU Consulting shared and solicited feedback on during the December 19th ORCAs meeting. Candidate areas include: Fort Flagler, Lagoon Point, Nodule Point, Bush Point, Double Bluff, Point No Point, Possession Point, and Lighthouse Park. Following feedback from the ORCAs group, Point No Point was identified as the ideal location for deployment (depth, availability of shoreside power, land ownership, topography, nearby transit corridor, proximity to cetacean activity).

Next steps for this project include initial tribal consultation with the Suquamish Tribe and Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe. To confirm the site, SMRU will model current, identify sediment type, confirm land ownership, conduct a site visit, and deploy a SoundTrap.

Rachel shared that funding for the hydrophone was included in the recent Congressional appropriation. It is a NOAA Special Project, the funding was appropriated by Senator Cantwell.

Comments/Questions:

- Q: What is the budget for the hydrophone and potential funding sources?
 - A: Quiet Sound is developing a budget for construction and operations. Quiet Sound can share this with Tara.
- Q: Temporary bottom-mounted SoundTrap would result in different acoustics from a permanent installation. Could I see a schematic of the permanent hydrophone? Interested in the flow conditions for the cable.
 - A: Quiet Sound will connect Leila with SMRU for a hydrophone schematic.
- Q: What is your top frequency for sampling? Curious about the sampling rate and how that factors into analysis and budget.
 - A: Quiet Sound will look into this with SMRU. Design is based on the system at Lime Kiln.

Voluntary Commercial Vessel Operational Measures: 2025-26 Admiralty Inlet Slowdown

Sara shared final participation numbers for the 2025-26 slowdown. The slowdown was 21 days longer than last season's due to an earlier start date (Sep 14). According to pilot-reported data, 64% of transits reduced their speed and 56% met the suggested speed targets.

SMRU provided Quiet Sound with AIS-validated participation every two weeks. Pilots provided participation data as well, though with less consistent delivery. Sara provided monthly fleet reports to 11 shipping companies.

Sara provided a recap of the adaptive management meeting that took place earlier in the month. In the absence of a hydrophone this season, SMRU will use a statistical sampling approach to estimate noise reduction of the entire slowdown period, which will result in CDF-like analyses comparable to previous seasons. ECHO has given Quiet Sound/SMRU permission to use acoustic data from Lime Kiln to fill acoustic gaps for cruise and tankers. Quiet Sound is amending SMRU's scope to also include a pre-Quiet Sound (2019) acoustic baseline estimation using the same approach as the within-year acoustic benefit estimation.

Questions and Comments:

- Q: Any idea why there's a mid season dip on participation rates?
 - A: We typically see some drop-off mid-season. There was also a weather system offshore that vessels were trying to avoid.
- Q: What is the baseline comparison period for the slowdown (pre-Quiet Sound)?
 - A: We haven't determined yet what is the time period, whether is a full year is depending on the data needs to be purchased
- Q: What is the purpose of looking at pre-slowdown speeds? How would you deal with the soundscape being different in summer months versus winter months?
 - A: The current time period includes 4 weeks before and after the slowdown season, the goal is to understand if the speed trends are the same pre vs post slowdown. If relatively the same, that validates the use of the post-slowdown period as the baseline. If the speeds are much different between pre and post-slowdown periods, Quiet Sound and SMRU would look into using the pre-slowdown period as the

baseline period instead. SMRU would have to do further analysis to control for seasonal variability in the data if the pre-slowdown period was used for baseline comparison.

Guest Speaker: Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary - Ship Strike Risk Reduction Working Group

Katie Wrubel from the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (ONCMS) and Jess Morton from the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation (CMSF) provided an update on engagement efforts around a potential voluntary speed reduction program on the outer coast to address ship strike risk to large whales. There have been over 40 fatal ship strikes on whales in Washington since 2000, offshore and inland Puget Sound. A number of members of the Quiet Sound Leadership Committee have participated in this process. The group is hoping to advance a recommendation or suite of recommendations to the Sanctuary Advisory Council in March. The OCNMS will work with partners on implementation.

Dr. Anna Nisi (University of Washington) leads [research](#) on ship-strike risk models, which identified Washington Coast as an area of high risk.

Their study area includes biologically important areas for threatened and endangered whales. The work group requested Swiftsure Bank be included in the study area. The study area also included Area to Be Avoided (ATBA) and the Pacific Port Access Route Study (PAC PARS) Fairway Proposal.

Cargo (bulk carrier, container, car carrier) and tanker represent 50% of the total area travelled. Speeds range from 10.66 - 13.56 knots. Their model shows significant reduction in risk with reduction of speed to 10 knots.

The group is currently considering 6 options that include different levels of biologically important areas (i.e. feeding areas), in Oregon and Canadian waters, extension to include PAC PARS fairways. Seasonality of the measure is yet to be decided, but considering year-round or May-December. The speed target is 10 knots. The goal is to pilot the measure in 2026.

The group anticipates benefit to SRKW through a larger area of reduced speed within critical habitat on the coast and in Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Questions and Comments:

- Comment: I would add that there are some mitigation measures in place that weren't developed for this reason but nevertheless are relevant (queueing of vessels to avoid remaining offshore like during the supply chain crisis, ATBA which you mentioned, moving the entrance out farther to avoid cutting the corner, Swiftsure bank sanctuary and getting folks to not cut inside on the way north).
- Q: Do you have any written information that Tara can use to communicate to the Governor's Office Natural Resources staff?
 - A: Katie will share the charter and final report of recommendations.
- Q: Is there anyone from Oregon on the working group?
 - A: No, we would need to talk to them, especially U.S. Coast Guard Sector Columbia River, etc if that is a recommendation that's put forth.

- Comment: Oregon did just list SRKW as endangered. Tara can give their contact to OCNMS for them to give them a heads up.
- Q: How would the sanctuary implement?
 - A: The group's goal is providing advice. Implementing it would be a different group. The State of Washington, ports, trade associations could work with Sanctuaries in implementing.
- Q: Is there funding for monitoring, participation, etc?
 - A: Yes, sanctuaries has funds budgeted to support implementing measures in California and scoping measures in Washington through the Protecting Blue Whales Blue Skies (BWBS). There is funding and intent for BWBS to support this in Washington (fleet participation, recognition, communication).
- Q: Have you done a more spatially restricted risk assessment? Interesting to see speeds so close to 10 knots. It would be interesting to see how much risk reduction each scenario can confer.
 - A: Did analyses to understand how much traffic and and what proportion of the biologically important area (BIA) is captured under each alternative. Still waiting for a species distribution model that would give us risk reduction, but that's an important next step.
 - A: Hoping to work with Scripps to understand potential underwater radiated noise benefits (work with Vanessa Zobell).
- Comment: The Enhancing Cetacean Habitat and Observation (ECHO) Program has a rudimentary model to look at speeds, vessel make-up, and distance for estimating acoustic benefit. Also allows for plugging in participation rate. ECHO can look into sharing that.
- Q: Were those average speeds? Those numbers look a little low.
 - A: Distance weighted mean speed. Not sure about min and max vessel speed.
- Q: Are you thinking about how the current administration's position on sanctuaries and protected areas and their goal to open them up for fishing and other industry needs might impact this?
 - A: Fishing is allowed in OCNMS. National Marine Sanctuaries are mandated to consider compatible uses.
- Q: Are acoustic benefits anywhere in the direct mandate of this vessel speed reduction program?
 - A: Looking at acoustic benefits as a co-benefit. OCNMS has a SoundTrap at the entrance of the Strait to monitor underwater noise.

Voluntary Commercial Vessel Operational Measures: LC-led projects

Meghan Reckmeyer (Northwest Seaport Alliance (NWSA), Port of Tacoma) shared results of their preliminary analysis on NWSA Vessel Speed Reduction Program. A key action of their Clean Air Action Plan is developing and launching a vessel incentive/recognition program. Currently looking at what kinds of vessel behavior to incentivize, and what incentives would be available (financial or otherwise).

Study area for a vessel speed reduction analysis (for container and ro-ro vessels only) included the Quiet Sound slowdown zone, as well as the area north to Port Angeles Pilot Station/ San Juan Islands and south to Tacoma.

Estimated benefits at 17 to 10-knot cap, at 1-knot increments. Also looked at when a new pilot would be triggered. For Tacoma, Potential emission reduction increases from 17 → 13 then remains steady, reductions in NOx, diesel particulate matter, CO2. For vessels just visiting Seattle, pilot trigger happens at 11 knots. Greatest benefit would be realized if ship speed was capped at 12-13 knots for containers/ro-ro. Target behavior somewhere between Port Angeles and the area outside of the harbor.

NWSA is looking at the design of the program over the next year. They need to decide what incentives make sense, and consider the patchwork of other vessel speed reduction programs. NWSA is focused on reduction of local criteria pollutants rather than greenhouse gas benefits because it can't control if vessels speed up after leaving the VSR area.

Questions and Comments:

- Q: Why are offshore speeds so dramatically lower than vessel speeds in NWSA's presentation?
 - A: Not sure. Jess and Rose Arsers will touch base about this.
- Q: Is NWSA part of the International Association of Ports and Harbors (IAPH) Environmental Ship Index (ESI) system?
 - NWSA is interested in aligning their clean vessel program with ESI.

Voluntary Commercial Vessel Operational Measures: Standard of Care for Tugs

Sara shared that Quiet Sound is facilitating a Standard of Care for light tugs operating in the vicinity of orcas through the Puget Sound Harbor Safety Committee. They've received helpful feedback from tug operators thus far. The Ad Hoc Committee will meet in March; Quiet Sound plans to submit the final Standard of Care for vote at the May Harbor Safety Committee meeting.

Connect Washington to National and International Vessel Quieting Policy Opportunities

Quiet Sound is continuing conversations with IAPH in regards to collaborating on submitting lessons learned to the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Experience Building Phase for the Underwater Radiated Noise Guidelines. Sara and Leila will share highlights of the November IMO Workshop on Energy Efficiency and Underwater Noise at the April Leadership Committee.

Attendees:

1. [Rachel Aronson](#), Washington Maritime Blue
2. [Sara Adams](#), Washington Maritime Blue
3. [Gonzalo Banda-Cruz](#), Washington Maritime Blue
4. [Randy Lumper](#), Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
5. [Adrienne Stutes](#), Washington State Ferries
6. [Kathleen Hurley](#), Port of Seattle
7. [Nika Hoffman](#), Makah Tribe
8. [Natalie Lowell](#), Makah Tribe
9. [Miguela Marzolf](#), Seattle Aquarium
10. [Mike Moore](#), Pacific Merchant Shipping Association

11. [Melanie Knight](#), Enhancing Cetacean Habitat and Observation Program
12. [Leila Hatch](#), Natural Resources Defense Council
13. [Tara Galuska](#), Governor's Salmon Recovery Office
14. [Jason Jordan](#), NWSA/Port of Tacoma
15. [Meghan Reckmeyer](#), Northwest Seaport Alliance
16. [Anthony Pinto](#), U.S. Coast Guard Sector Puget Sound
17. [Ian Mcphillips](#), U.S. Coast Guard Sector Puget Sound
18. [Katie Wrubel](#), Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary
19. [Jessica Morten](#), California Marine Sanctuary Foundation