



A Program of Maritime Blue

Quiet Sound Leadership Committee Meeting Summary

July 14, 2026

Meeting notes v.7.16.26

Action Items & Decisions

Action Items	Status
Quiet Sound to look into the cost and feasibility of: - Analyzing STW-validated participation weekly instead of bi-weekly; and - Running both the within-year and 2019 baseline comparisons for speed and estimated noise reduction.	
Quiet Sound and SMRU to explore whether and how the statistical sampling tool can be used to understand maximum noise reduction if certain levels of participation are achieved.	
Quiet Sound to invite the Marine Exchange and MotionInfo to a future LC meeting to provide an update on the AIS messaging work.	
Tara to connect Rachel with Governor Ferguson's natural resources lead for state budget advocacy.	
Leila to provide updates on the IMO's fall activity at the October LC meeting.	

Meeting Notes

Welcome

Rachel welcomed the group and provided a land and water acknowledgment. Candice Emmons and Marla Holt provided the orca moment. L130 was seen in the San Juans in mid-June. Candice and Marla recently returned from the second survey they have done in partnership with the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary out of Neah Bay and Swiftsure, where they saw members of all three pods and collected fecal samples which will give them great information about diet.

ECHO Program Update

Melanie Knight, ECHO Program Manager, shared results of ECHO's 2025 on-water initiatives. Melanie shared ECHO's processes for collating and sharing participation data, and strategies the program is taking to achieve their goal participation rate.

2025 Haro Strait/Boundary Pass slowdown had 84% pilot-reported participation, 64% STW-validated participation (within 1 knot). The March 2026 Haro Strait/Boundary Pass trial saw 83% pilot-reported and 60% STW-validated. Swiftsure Bank met the 85% participation goal, even with the zone extended 5 nm.

ECHO has a 90% pilot-reported participation goal, which they met in 2020-22 but haven't reached in the last few years. ECHO tracks the difference between pilot-reported and modelled Speed Through Water (STW) with a goal of 15% or less difference between the two metrics.

Agents mark their intent to participate in the pilot order system. If the agent says no, then it's no. If the agent says yes or conditional, then it's up to the pilots. If the pilot says no, they must give a reason. AIS data comes from the Canadian Coast Guard. ECHO receives data bi-weekly and shares with industry. ECHO meets with the BC Pilots bi-weekly. With ECHO's new dashboard, they are now able to receive the data daily because much of the process is now automated. Dashboard was built by VFPA and uses PowerBI with APIs to pull in the data. This has saved the program time and money. Shipping and cruise associations, pilots got access first. Next, will focus on ~5 superusers (i.e. shipping companies that care about participation). Eventually, every company that slows down could have access.

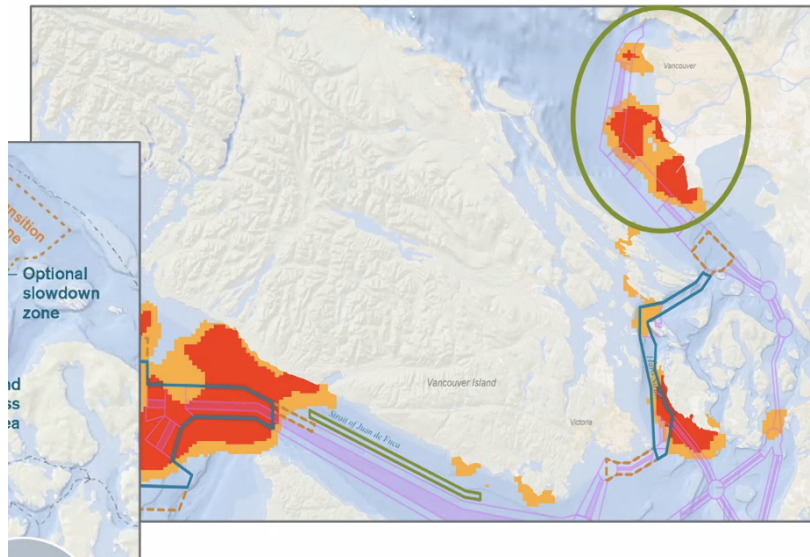
Most agents say 'yes' in the intent to participate. If they do say no, it's because of scheduling or tidal concerns. Conditional responses are due to additional costs, tidal windows, or scheduling. ECHO worked with pilots to expand response options to understand what about 'scheduling' makes participation not possible. 'Operational fatigue' is about slowing when the whales aren't there, or the slowdown has been going on for a long time, not about pilots being physically tired.

ECHO did a deep dive on why pilots said 'no', including geographies, inbound (more no's) vs. outbound. Vessels going to the US are often under tighter time constraints, which is possibly why US vessels have lower participation at Swiftsure Bank. Vessels try to optimize to have a buffer at the end of their trip.

The Government of Canada recently made a significant investment in whales, some of which goes to VFPA to keep the ECHO program going.

ECHO is planning for a dynamic slowdown in Haro Strait/Boundary Pass in 2027. Success would mean it results in equivalent benefit or more. To do that, it would be a minimum of 9 months (currently 6 months).

The Southern Strait of Georgia is a hotspot for SRKW (see image below). Transport Canada was looking into moving the TSS over. ECHO is looking at whether a voluntary initiative would make sense here but many constraints to work through – pilot overage, knowing where the whales are, etc.



Comments/Questions:

- Q: How much does the dashboard cost to maintain?
 - A: ECHO pays for data inputs via APIs (Siitech, PPA, Marine Exchange AIS) = around \$40-60k/year. This is significantly less than their system before, which involved paying one consultant to do all the analysis and it was delayed by two weeks.
- Q: What do you get from Marine Exchange in addition to the Canadian Coast Guard?
 - A: Not AIS data, just information as to whether the ship is a US vessel or not.

SRKW Detections and Alerts updates

Gonzalo provided updates for Year 1 of the thermal camera. The average detection distance is 1.5km and has been stable across seasons. Whalespotter's new directionality module is working great; it indicates pod direction based on aggregated detections. We are working towards using machine learning to identify SRKW ecotype from the thermal signatures, using BC data.

Gonzalo is managing permitting for the cable-to-shore hydrophone. We have received non-opposition letters from the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe and Suquamish Tribe. Permitting is in progress with the Army Corps of Engineers, Kitsap County, Coast Guard and DNR.

Gonzalo provided an overview of the AIS messaging concept. The goal would be to broadcast cetacean activity zones (not individual sightings as that would result in message fatigue) to all Class A AIS vessels. USCG license is required but attainable from private providers. Ocean Wise received funding to pilot this on the East Coast.

Rachel and Gonzalo will ask Marine Exchange and MotionInfo to join a future meeting to share their progress and current thinking around AIS messaging while continuing to look at other providers.

Comments/Questions:

- Q: How will the use of AIS messaging offer ways for mariners to change their behaviors near SRKW or improve?
 - A: If commercial mariners do not have WRAS (either cell phones are not on the bridge or PPU's have lost connectivity), then they do not receive whale alerts. You can also broadcast messages about entering a slowdown zone.
- Q: Can AIS messages come from entities other than the Coast Guard?
 - A: Yes, once you get the proper license. The local Marine Exchange does it in San Diego and Alaska.
- Comment: There is also a group working with the USCG on AIS messaging in Massachusetts (MotionInfo). Recommend gathering information from them on how that works.

2026-27 Slowdown Parameters & Measurement

Sara presented Quiet Sound's recommendations and rationale for the 2026-27 slowdown parameters. Below is a summary of the final parameters and a brief rationale.

Parameter	LC Decision
Location	No change to the current geographic area of the slowdown.
Target vessels and speeds	No change to the current target vessel types and speeds.
Dates	Begin monitoring for SRKW presence on September 1. End the slowdown on or before January 31, 2027 after a 7-day period of SRKW absence.
Participation calculation	Perform at least bi-weekly STW-validation, with a preference for weekly if that is within budget. Receive bi-weekly pilot-reported participation data.
Speed Reduction Estimation	Perform analyses to compare speed reduction during 2026-27 slowdown to a within-year baseline and a similar period in 2019.
Acoustic benefit calculation	Use statistical sampling tool developed in the 2025-26 season to estimate noise reduction of 2026-27 slowdown compared to a within-year baseline period and a similar period in 2019.

SRKW presence	No change; collate SRKW presence through the end of January.
Industry outreach	Continue sending bi-weekly newsletters of pilot-reported and AIS-validated participation and monthly fleet participation reports to operations managers. Increase outreach to 11-knot vessels, specifically bulkers.
Recognition	Distribute recognition certificates; publish press release with top three shipping lines; nominate participants for 2027 NWSA North Star and 2028 Port of Seattle Sustainable Century Award. Recognize participants on Quiet Sound website.
Goals	• 70% of transits reduce their speed. • 65% of transits meet speed targets. • Continually improve dissemination of parameters. • Increase the number of relationships with slowdown participant vessel owners/operators. • Estimate underwater noise reduction benefits of slowdown compared to within-year baseline period. • Engage with other regional VSR initiatives to ensure alignment.
Adaptive management priorities	• Understand where engagement effort is best targeted to maximize noise reduction of different vessel types. • Trial approach of dynamic end date.

Geography:

Quiet Sound recommended that the slowdown zone remain consistent with prior seasons.

The Leadership Committee agreed with this recommendation.

Dates:

Quiet Sound recommended utilizing a dynamic start, whereby the slowdown begins at 0001 PST the day after SRKW are confirmed in the slowdown zone. Quiet Sound recommended beginning monitoring for SRKW presence on September 1, 2026. Quiet Sound recommended utilizing a dynamic end, whereby the slowdown ends following a 7-day period with no SRKW presence in or south of the slowdown zone. The slowdown will then end between January 15 and January 31. Quiet Sound recommends monitoring for SRKW absence starting on January 8, 2027.

The Leadership Committee agreed with this recommendation and proposed protocol.

Comments/Questions:

- Q: Is there a trend to the SRKW presence inconsistency over time? We see Blue Whales Blue Skies lengthening their slowdown into January over the last few years.
 - A: There might be, but it would require further analysis. A LC member shared this article on the changing presence of SRKW and Biggs in our area: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0350181>

Target Vessels and Speeds

Quiet Sound recommended the target vessels and suggested speed targets remain the same as prior seasons:

- 14.5 knots STW: Car carriers, containers, cruise
- 11.0 knots STW: Bulkers, tankers, general cargo

Quiet Sound recommended increasing outreach to the 11-knot group, specifically bulkers, to see if increasing participation results in greater noise reduction from this group. Strategies for this include: direct outreach, beginning to engage Port of Everett and the Port of Seattle grain facility operator, nomination a bulkers as 'best improved' for a regional environmental award, and exploring the noise reduction of different vessel types in addition to speed target groups.

The Leadership Committee agreed with this recommendation, but noted their desire to understand the value of high participation of certain vessel types over others.

Comments/Questions:

- Q: Are general cargo louder when they go slower? What are their typical speeds? How much slower are they going during the slowdown?
 - A: The noise budget and speed information in the decision guide has this information.
- Comment: Would be interested in understanding the maximum noise reduction that could be achieved by the 11-knot group and 14.5 knot group.
- Comment: Will be interested to see whether further engagement with the 11-knot group results in increased participation and noise reduction. Will want to re-visit this next season.
- Comment: ECHO is happy to engage in understanding the overlap of vessels and helping with modeling potential acoustic benefits, if their model is useful.
- Q: Would be interested in modelling if 100% of the 11-knot transits are reduced, what noise reduction would we see and is that worth it?
 - A: We are not sure if the statistical sampling tool is capable of this kind of deduction but Quiet Sound will inquire with SMRU.

SRKW Presence

Quiet Sound recommended collating SRKW presence during the slowdown using a combination of visual sightings from Orca Network and detections with ecotype sent to WRAS.

The Leadership Committee agreed with this recommendation.

Vessel Participation

Quiet Sound recommended correcting AIS data for speed through water and performing bi-weekly validation of transits meeting speed targets. Quiet Sound recommended sharing this data with pilots on bi-weekly basis. Sharing realized transit speeds with pilots and operations managers is important for meeting speed targets. Quiet Sound plans to receive ~bi-weekly data from pilots.

The Leadership Committee agreed with this recommendation but expressed a desire for weekly instead of bi-weekly STW-validated analysis, which Quiet Sound will look into.

Comments/Questions:

- Q: Is it possible to get the SMRU data every week instead of every 2 weeks, to send to pilots?
 - A: Quiet Sound will look into getting it faster.

Speed Reduction

Quiet Sound recommended calculating median speed through water by vessel type for both the slowdown period and baseline periods. Quiet Sound recommended using the 4-weeks following the slowdown as the baseline period for containers, car carriers, bulkers, tankers and general cargo, and the 4-weeks before the slowdown for the within-year baseline period for cruise.

The Leadership Committee agreed with this recommendation and expressed a desire to also calculate speed reduction of the slowdown compared to a similar period in 2019.

Noise Reduction Estimation

Quiet Sound recommended estimating noise reduction using the statistical sampling tool developed for the 2025-26 slowdown. Quiet Sound recommended estimating noise reduction of the slowdown compared to a within-year baseline period (post-slowdown for all except cruise, who would use pre-slowdown). Quiet Sound recommended using ECHO's acoustic data for estimated noise reduction from cruise.

The Leadership Committee discussed the value of having both the within-year and 2019 comparisons for noise estimation. LC members noted that having the 2019 comparison is important for understanding trends but it does not give us a good sense of the fleet's contribution to noise reduction during the slowdown. LC members discussed the resource needs for conducting both analyses. LC members noted that relying on just the within-year comparison makes it difficult to communicate the program's value. LC members noted that having both was beneficial, especially as other programs come onboard.

Quiet Sound will look into cost estimates for undertaking both types of analyses again this season.

2026-27 Goals

Quiet Sound proposed the following goals for the 2026-27 slowdown season:

- New: Increase vessel participation to 70% of transits reducing their speed and 65% of vessels meeting suggested speed targets.
- Continually improve dissemination of parameters.
- Increase the number of relationships with slowdown participant vessel owners/operators.
- Estimate underwater noise reduction benefits of slowdown compared to within-year baseline period as well as 2019 baseline period.
- Engage with other regional VSR initiatives to ensure alignment.

70% participation by piloted vessels is consistent with the state's goal in the Puget Sound Action Agenda.

The Leadership Committee agreed with these recommended goals, but noted they could be refined depending on the capability of the statistical sampling tool.

Comments/Questions:

- Q: Depending on what we find out about using the tool to estimate possible noise reduction seen with 70% pilot-reported participation.
 - A: Note that we have seen 70% participation and we achieved 50% reduction in noise, so we can point to that season as an example of what positive outcomes that participation level can provide.

Adaptive management priorities:

Quiet Sound recommended the following priorities for adaptive management:

- Determine whether increased engagement with the 11-knot group results in increased participation and more noise reduction.
- Trial approach of dynamic end date.

The Leadership Committee recommended broadening the first priority to understanding where engagement effort is best placed to maximize noise reduction.

Comments/Questions:

- Comment: Determining where Quiet Sound's effort is better spent to reduce noise. Would better participation in the 14.5-knot group result in more noise reduction?
- Comment: Would like to see an estimate of how different levels of participation results in noise reduction, but noting that when vessels re-design their propellers, the speed and noise relationship may change.
- Comment: In some cases, energy efficiency approaches are making vessels louder. Also suggest de-coupling vessel targets and speeds if we can increase participation in a way that reduces noise the most.

Standard of Care for the Circumvention of Nearby Orcas by Light Tugs and ATBs

The Standard of Care has officially been published in the Puget Sound Harbor Safety Plan.

Budget Update

Rachel provided an interim update on Quiet Sound's budget.

LC Member Updates

- NWSA is working to develop a vessel recognition program for vessels transiting into Port of Seattle and Port of Tacoma and at-berth to reduce emissions. It would be non-financial. This includes participation in Quiet Sound's voluntary slowdown. They are targeting implementation in 2027. NWSA is considering some of the metrics tracked by the Environmental Ship Index (ESI). Once they have the final list of incentivized/recognized vessel behaviors, NWSA will bring them back to the Leadership Committee.
- USCG will have another Cetacean Desk report to Congress due next year. They hired a new operations manager for the Cetacean Desk. They received another round of funding, and

are navigating what they are allowed to allocate it towards. Cetacean Desk was extended to 2029.

- Makah Tribe provided comments to VFPA and their near-time arrival procedure. Makah Tribe have concerns about loitering in their usual and accustomed fishing areas.
- Tara: Federal government changing definition of harm for Endangered Species Act
 - <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/trump-administration-sharply-cuts-protections-for-endangered-species/>
 - <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/07/14/2026-14195/rescinding-the-definition-of-harm-under-the-endangered-species-act>
- Pinniped Bill (HR 9621) has a hearing next Tuesday, July 21.
- Leila to provide updates on fall IMO activity at the October meeting.

Attendees:

1. [Rachel Aronson](#), Maritime Blue
2. [Sara Adams](#), Maritime Blue
3. [Gonzalo Banda-Cruz](#), Maritime Blue
4. [Cassidy Fisher](#), Maritime Blue
5. [Melanie Knight](#), ECHO Program
6. [Ian McPhillips](#), US Coast Guard
7. [Anthony Pinto](#), US Coast Guard
8. [Jon Sloan](#), Port of Seattle
9. [Adrienne Stutes](#), Washington State Ferries
10. [Candice Emmons](#), NOAA Fisheries
11. [Marla Holt](#), NOAA Fisheries
12. [Meghan Reckmeyer](#), NWSA
13. [Leila Hatch](#), NRDC
14. [Natalie Lowell](#), Makah Tribe
15. [Miguela Marzolf](#), Seattle Aquarium
16. [Tara Galuska](#), Governor's Salmon Recovery Office
17. [Todd Hass](#), Puget Sound Partnership