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QUIET SOUND

A Program of Maritime Blue

Results of 2025-2026 Voluntary Commercial Vessel Slowdown in Washington Waters for the Protection of Southern Resident Killer Whales



Photo Credit: Marla Smith via Orca Network



Photo Credit: Rachel Haight via Orca Network

Acknowledgements

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Leadership Committee

- Makah Tribe
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
- Northwest Seaport Alliance
- Pacific Merchant Shipping Association
- Port of Seattle
- Port of Tacoma
- Puget Sound Partnership
- Seattle Aquarium
- Washington Maritime Blue
- Washington State Ferries
- Advisor: United States Coast Guard

Quiet Sound Funders

The 2025-26 Slowdown would not be possible without the support of Quiet Sound's major funders:

- AltaGas | ALA Energy;
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) with support from NOAA and the US Department of Defense;
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA);
- Northwest Seaport Alliance;
- Port of Seattle;
- Port of Tacoma;
- Puget Sound Partnership; and
- Members of Maritime Blue.

Executive Summary

About Quiet Sound

Quiet Sound, a program of the nonprofit Maritime Blue, aims to understand and mitigate the acoustic and physical impacts of large commercial vessels on endangered Southern Resident killer whales (SRKW) in their critical habitat in Washington waters. Noise pollution from large commercial vessels is one of the major threats to SRKW. The fourth season of the Admiralty Inlet Slowdown continues to show that large vessels can reduce their underwater radiated noise by reducing their speed with no impacts to maritime safety and minimal impacts to maritime trade.

2025-26 Slowdown Results

Orcas utilize habitat in the slowdown zone: Southern Resident killer whales were present for at least 34 days of the slowdown. There was a superpod event in November and in December, a new calf was born to K pod. The 2025-26 slowdown was the longest to date, 3 weeks longer than last season, due to the SRKW arriving earlier in September.

The majority of transits participated and met speed targets: The majority of piloted transits participated in the slowdown, resulting in a 64% participation rate. Due to the longer slowdown, the absolute number of transits meeting suggested speed targets increased by over 100 to 595 out of the 1067 transits meeting suggested speed targets (56%). Similar to prior slowdown seasons, the majority of cruise, container, and bulker transits met suggested speed targets, whereas general cargo, tankers and car carriers demonstrated slightly lower rates (47%, 43% and 42%, respectively).

Vessel underwater radiated noise was reduced: SMRU Consulting leveraged prior datasets from Quiet Sound and ECHO, as well as AIS data from the Marine Exchange and Marine Cadastre, to estimate noise reduction for the entire slowdown period. Compared to a within-year baseline period, the 2025-26 slowdown reduced underwater noise by an estimated 1 dB across all vessel types, representing a 20% less noisy landscape. The 14.5-knot group (car carriers, containers and cruise) demonstrated a 1.5 dB reduction (30%), while the 11-knot group (bulkiers, tankers, and general cargo) saw a 0.4 dB reduction. Underwater noise was reduced by 1.1 dB (15%) and 0.7 dB (22%) in SRKW communication and echolocation frequency bands, respectively. Compared to a similar period in 2019, the 2025-26 slowdown reduced underwater noise by 2.3 dB (40%), and by 2.2 dB and 2.5 dB in SRKW communication and echolocation bands.