



GREAT WHALE CONSERVANCY (GWC) SHIP STRIKES STRATEGY

Dwarfing all dinosaurs, the **blue whale** is the largest animal to have ever graced our planet. This intelligent marine predator is a keystone species of our oceans. Through their defecation, blue whales fertilize the microscopic phytoplankton, upon which all sea life depends. Phytoplankton, in turn, helps mitigate climate change by capturing carbon, and also produces more than half the world's oxygen. This interplay between whales, phytoplankton, and the atmosphere is a key to sustaining a healthy ocean and planet. Tragically, this extraordinarily important species is endangered worldwide.

Before industrialized whaling, approximately **350,000 blue whales** swam the seas. Now, it is estimated that there are only <10,000> blue whales alive today. NOAA, IFAW, Cascadia Research Collective, and Centro de Conservacion Cetacea in Chile have all reported that ship strikes pose one of the greatest threats to all great whale species. Because of their intrinsic value, small numbers, and slow rate of reproduction, each individual blue whale life matters greatly in our effort to restore their population to a healthier level.



OUR GOAL: To double blue whale numbers by 2050 by significantly reducing ship strikes with a primary focus on the Southern Oceans where the greatest number of blue whales lived prior to the tragic era of industrialized whaling.

SOLUTIONS

The solution to reducing whale deaths due to ship strikes is conceptually straightforward: to prevent ship strikes, we need to separate whales and ships in either space or time.

Shifting the spatial relation between ships and blue whales is important given the intersection of shipping lanes with critical feeding, nursing, and migration habitats. The good news regarding shifting of existing shipping lanes is that marine routes have already been successfully moved to save whales in several areas, such as Boston Harbor and Panama. In order to build on these successes in other geographic locations, governments in whale-sensitive areas need to be convinced by science and political self-interest to make a request of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) – the United Nations body governing global shipping routes – to move shipping lanes. GWC will support the science and advocacy needed to persuade governments to make these requests, and to propose whale-safe alternatives to the existing shipping lanes.

Shifting the timing of ship movements is important because blue whales come to the surface to feed at night on krill, their primary light-sensitive prey, making them far more susceptible to collisions at night than during daylight hours. In order to change the timing of ship arrivals and departures, the largest shipping companies, such as Maersk, have to be engaged in finding solutions, as they determine much of the flow of the complex network of maritime commerce comprised of cargo ships, oil tankers, and cruise ships.

OUR STRATEGY

Our plan is to separate ships from blue whales in space or time in targeted countries – Australia, Canada, Chile, Indonesia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and the United States – using four key strategies. We will:

1. **Support and conduct targeted data collection** to inform decision makers of solutions.
2. **Educate, advise, and influence stakeholders** who can modify shipping lanes or movements.
3. **Recognize and publicize successes** to reward stakeholders and incentivize more progress.
4. **Galvanize public awareness** about the value of preserving this keystone species

In all countries, we will persuade key stakeholders to modify ship movements and change shipping lanes using cutting edge science and data collection to educate, advise, and influence their decisions. We will use an interactive world-wide map that the GWC is creating to document the problem zones where shipping lanes and prime whale habitat overlap to educate these decision makers about the problem and negotiate the best solution in each targeted area. In order to incentivize industry to make these essential changes, we will recognize and publicize their participation in a “whale-safe” program we are developing, which will award “whale-safe” flags to recognize shipping companies meeting established criteria.

In targeted ports in the U.S. and Chile, we will work to shift nocturnal ship traffic to a daytime schedule during the annual blue whale season in those areas. Where a time modification is an issue we will use our interactive maps and blue whale dive profiles to negotiate solutions with shipping companies and associations, such as Europe-based Maersk and the U.S.-based World Shipping Council. In addition, we will continue to develop and leverage our partnerships with governmental officials, NGOs, and marine biologists to achieve our goals.

In both Australia and New Zealand, shipping lanes need to be physically moved to a different location. To accomplish this, we will collaborate with local NGOs and scientists. Our field work will focus on filling gaps in whale distribution maps, and identifying where whale-free transit lanes exist. This will allow us to make recommendations to government officials, who are then able to ask the IMO to move shipping lanes to whale-safe areas. We will continue to support similar efforts underway in Sri Lanka and Canada. Country-specific strategies for Indonesia will need to be developed. To motivate reluctant governments to make progress on this issue, we will also employ a social media campaign to encourage public awareness and activism about the plight of blue whales.

WHY GWC?

The GWC is a whale advocacy organization that meets with decision makers at the highest levels in government, science, and industry to develop strategies for more responsible, or “whale-safe” ways for commercial shipping to conduct business. The GWC has made good progress in this regard because we have created excellent relationships with these key stakeholders, using sound science to educate them about the situation. We have also convened meetings to bring these decision makers together to discuss sensible solutions, meshing environmental concerns and business interests, as we work together to remedy the ship strike problem.