



ASSEMBLY BILL 2298

CALIFORNIA PROTECTING BLUE WHALES AND BLUE SKIES

SUMMARY

AB 2298 will establish the *California Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies* program to prevent boat strikes on endangered whale populations and reduce harmful air emissions by incentivizing shipping companies to slow their vessel speeds along the California Coast.

BACKGROUND

Every year, the world's largest container ships make thousands of trips along the California coast, emitting a staggering 200 tons of nitrogen oxide (NOx) per day. These toxic emissions are a major contributor to smog and acid rain, and adversely impact air quality for coastal communities.

In addition, the waters off California are major feeding grounds for significant populations of endangered whales. Increased sea traffic from shipping, industrial operations, and recreational boating adds to the complex marine environment whales must navigate. Ship strikes are the leading cause of death for blue, humpback, and fin whales off California's coast. Furthermore, shipping noise can disrupt their navigation, feeding patterns, and social interactions.

In 2014, a voluntary vessel speed reduction program called *Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies* was formed by the Santa Barbara County and Ventura County Air Pollution Control Districts, which grew to include the Bay Area Air District in 2017. The program encourages ocean-going vessels to voluntarily travel 10 knots or less in designated

areas by providing small incentives and publicity to program participants.

To date, *Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies* has achieved over 1.1 million slow speed miles, reduced more than 4,400 tons of smog-forming emissions, and prevented whale strikes by almost 50%. The success of the program was a result of the strong and dedicated partnership between shipping companies, local governments, marine sanctuaries, and environmental organizations - all working together to protect public health and marine mammals.

SOLUTION

AB 2298 will require the State to coordinate with important stakeholders, such as federal and local agencies, nonprofits, and the marine industry, to establish a statewide voluntary vessel speed reduction program.

By encouraging ships to slow down in critical marine zones, AB 2298 will protect endangered whales from ship strikes, reduce disruptive noise that hampers whale communication, and lower carbon emissions along California's coast.

SUPPORT

Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District (Co-Sponsor)
Bay Area Air Quality Management District (Co-Sponsor)
Ventura County Air Pollution Control District (Co-Sponsor)