



March 23, 2026

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary for Natural Resources
Chair, Ocean Protection Council
California Natural Resources Agency
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Support for OPC's Participation in Protecting Blue Whales & Blue Skies Program (Item 9)

Dear Secretary Crowfoot and Councilmembers:

The Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District (APCD), San Luis Obispo County APCD, Ventura County APCD, San Diego County APCD, Bay Area Air District, and Monterey Bay Air Resources District, appreciate the opportunity to provide public comments and express support for the Ocean Protection Council's (OPC) participation in the Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies (BWBS) Program. Since 2014, some coastal California air districts have partnered with several federal and state government agencies, foundations, and environmental nonprofits, including the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation, the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to implement the BWBS Program, which is a voluntary vessel speed reduction (VSR) program that incentivizes shipping participants to reduce air pollution, fatal ship strike risk to whales, and underwater noise impacts by transiting at 10 knots or less. Since its inception in 2014, the BWBS Program has resulted in:

- Over 2 million slow-speed miles logged,
- 7,394 tons of nitrogen oxides (NOx) reduced,
- 260,432 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions avoided,
- Over 44 tons of toxic diesel particulate matter eliminated,
- An estimated 40% reduction in risk of fatal whale strikes during peak migration seasons, and
- A 70% reduction in acoustic intensity during vessel transits.

In October 2025, Assembly Bill 14 (Hart) was signed by Governor Newsom, authorizing the expansion of the existing BWBS Program statewide and requiring OPC to participate as a stakeholder and in an advisory capacity. Recently, OPC has begun engaging with the BWBS Program partners and has been involved in several planning meetings and stakeholder briefings, leading up to the launch of the 2026 VSR season this spring. OPC's participation in the BWBS Program will help to elevate the program's reach across the state as well as helping to advance OPC's 2026-2030 Strategic Plan Goal 4: Enable a sustainable blue economy that protects ocean health and Objective 4.3: Reduce impacts from other industrial uses of the ocean.

The Santa Barbara County APCD, San Luis Obispo County APCD, Ventura County APCD, San Diego County APCD, Bay Area Air District, and Monterey Bay Air Resources District, appreciate the opportunity to provide comments and look forward to the enhanced air quality and marine life benefits that statewide expansion of voluntary VSR will bring to California coastal communities. Our agencies support OPC's participation in the BWBS Program and look forward to future collaboration with the state on continuing implementation of the BWBS Program. If you have any questions about the BWBS Program or these comments, please feel free to reach out to Alex Economou at (805) 979-8333 or via email at EconomouA@sbcapcd.org.

Sincerely,



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Air Pollution Control Officer
Santa Barbara County APCD



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Air Pollution Control Officer
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