



**Assemblymember Damon Connolly, 12<sup>th</sup> District**  
**AB 953 – VOLUNTARY VESSEL SPEED REDUCTION &**  
**SUSTAINABLE SHIPPING PROGRAM**  
FACT SHEET

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## BACKGROUND

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The Bay Area, Santa Barbara County, and Ventura County air districts are part of a unique partnership of federal and local government agencies, foundations, and environmental nonprofits that have administered the voluntary vessel speed reduction (VSR) program *Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies* since 2014. As the name suggests, the program has encouraged ocean-going container vessels and other ships to voluntarily travel 10 knots or less in the designated areas to reduce air pollution and harmful whale strikes by providing small incentives and publicity to program participants.

Since the program's inception through 2021, [it has achieved](#) 526,211 slow speed miles, a reduction of more than 2,300 tons of oxides of nitrogen (NOx), a reduction of over 76,000 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions, and an estimated 50 percent decreased risk of fatal whale strikes during prime migration season in the targeted coastal areas.

## ISSUE

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Every year, the world's largest container ships and auto carriers make thousands of transits along the California coast, with an estimated 120 tons per day of NOx, a major contributor to smog and acid rain, being emitted within 100 nautical miles of the coast. These emissions negatively affect the public health of coastal communities and cause some areas of the coast to exceed national and state ambient air quality standards. However, ocean-going vessels are not subject to any state or federal engine requirements that can guarantee emission reductions.

In addition, the waters off California are major feeding grounds for significant populations of endangered blue, humpback, and fin whales, with a migratory season that coincidentally occurs at a time when air emission reductions are vital to reduce ozone formation. Ship strikes are a [leading cause](#) of death for blue, humpback, and fin whales off California's coast.

Reducing vessel speeds reduces emissions of air pollutants, lowers the risk of fatal ship strikes on endangered whale populations, and reduces ocean noise that can interfere with whale communication and feeding.

## EXISTING LAW

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Existing law establishes the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) to, among other things, establish policies to coordinate the collection, evaluation, and sharing of scientific data related to coastal and ocean resources among agencies.

The 2020-25 Strategic Plan directs the OPC to develop a statewide whale and sea turtle protection plan, with a target of zero mortality and to support research and analysis of impacts of whale strike from the shipping industry and land-based sources.

## THIS BILL

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This bill would task the Ocean Protection Council – in coordination with California air districts along the coast and in consultation with the federal Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the United States Navy, the State Air Resources Board, and other stakeholders – to create a statewide voluntary vessel speed reduction and sustainable shipping program for the California coast in order to reduce air pollution, the risk of fatal vessel strikes on whales, and harmful underwater acoustic impacts.

The bill would build upon the existing *Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies* program as well as any other existing local vessel speed reduction programs. Specifically, the program will provide publicity to participants, collect data on program benefits, and will provide financial incentives to participants to the extent funding is available.

## SUPPORT

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

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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