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Shipping Industry, in Partnership with Federal Agencies, Launches New Programs to Reduce Whale Ship Strikes using a Science-Based Approach for Spotting Whales by Sea and Air

The Bold New Innovative Actions Coincide with New Traffic Lane Changes in Effect June 1

(San Francisco – May 31, 2013) - Today the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association announced a series of bold new measures that begin on June 1 to enhance navigational safety and protect whales from ship strikes off the California Coast, including changes in shipping lanes and the use of airplane overflights to spot where whales are located as they migrate along the coast.

The first of the actions officially takes place tomorrow as PMSA's member shipping companies and hundreds of other commercial vessels nearing California's busiest ports are rerouted under new Traffic Separation Schemes approved by the International Marine Organization (IMO).

In the new routing guidelines, effective June 1 GMT (Greenwich Mean Time), all traffic lanes that cross four national marine sanctuaries (Gulf of the Farallones, Monterey Bay, Cordell Bank, Channel Islands) will be adjusted as part of an overall plan to improve navigational safety with the added benefit of reducing the risk of whale collisions on the approach to San Francisco Bay, the Santa Barbara Channel and the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

Said TL Garrett, PMSA vice president: "We are in full agreement with the shipping changes as they will help assure the protection of both human and marine life and the continued safe and efficient flow of commerce in and out of California ports."

Concern about the impacts of ships on whales led Gulf of the Farallones, Cordell Bank, and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Councils to assess and provide recommendations to reduce the chance of ship strikes. PMSA was an integral part of the Bay Area working group, along with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the United States Coast Guard, biologists, researchers, and representatives of the environmental community, as well as other parties committed to making the seas safer for mariners and marine life.

A Safer Sea for Whales

“Our goal is a balance between the safe passage of commercial vessels into our busy ports and protection of endangered whale populations in and adjacent to national marine sanctuaries. We recognized the success of our efforts hinged on engaging the shipping industry in developing tools to reduce the threat of potential collisions,” said William J. Douros, West Coast Regional Director, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. “With the help of PMSA and other stakeholders, we formed a close collaboration and set on a course of action to begin tracking whale locations using ships as whale sighting platforms.”

New innovative tactics were developed by the working group, and several of those actions go into effect June 1. Those funded and developed by PMSA in cooperation with NOAA, its scientists and independent marine researchers include:

- Funding a series of regular flights over the Santa Barbara Channel to conduct aerial surveys where shipping routes and migrating whales overlap. The overflights are slated to begin June 1 and will continue through the end of the whale season in November.
- The integration of a whale spotter mobile application (App) for iPads, iPhones devices to be used by crews aboard commercial, recreational and pleasure crafts to report whale sightings. The first beta testing on a ship of a new version of this App is underway now and if it proves successful, it could be used by commercial shipping and recreational boaters soon.
- Producing and distributing an educational whale spotter poster to assist commercial cargo vessels in their role as whale observers. The posters eventually will be provided to commercial shipping vessels that sail in California waters and will instruct crewmembers on how to watch for, identify and report whales. That data will be collected and analyzed by NOAA scientists.
- Hosting a NOAA-approved scientist on board its member companies' ships to assist in development of ship-based spotting platforms and to instruct crews on science-based approaches to monitoring, identifying and reporting whale species.

“We share the seas with whales and other marine life, and are fully committed to preventing further ship strikes,” said John Berge, vice president, Pacific Merchant Shipping Association. “Until now, all we had to go on was survey data that is of limited utility in determining whale locations in real time. But under this cooperative new plan with our federal partners, ship captains and crews now can play a central role in helping to reduce the threat by reporting whale observations in near real time, which will inform risk management strategies. ”

For PDF files to see the lane changes in effect or the new PMSA poster designed to educate crews about whale spotting procedures please visit:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/aky6zlx1hrjpyf/SHxukr1zbG>

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Pacific Merchant Shipping Association

PMSA is an independent trade association representing marine terminal operators and ocean carriers operating U.S. and foreign-flagged cargo and passenger vessels engaged in trade at U.S. West Coast ports. The association maintains offices in Long Beach, San Francisco and Seattle.