



Jonathan Wilkinson

NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

July 20, 2018

Action Plan aims to protect killer whales

A personal note from Jonathan: I wrote this month's column prior to being appointed Wednesday as Canada's new Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. Call it serendipity? I now look forward to playing an even more direct role in the topic below and many others affecting the health of our oceans and waterways.

The Southern Resident Killer Whale captures the collective imagination of British Columbians. It is a powerful symbol of British Columbia itself. However, these iconic mammals are facing imminent and significant threats to survival and recovery.

On June 22nd in Vancouver, Transport Minister Marc Garneau and I - on behalf of the Government of Canada - announced a new comprehensive \$167 million "Whales Action Plan" committed to the recovery of this species.

The plan addresses the three key threats these mammals face:

1) Prey availability

Chinook salmon, a primary food source, have declined dramatically in recent years.

The Whale Action Plan includes a reduction in the Chinook salmon fishery of 25 to 35 per cent. The protection and closure of key foraging areas for the whales is part of the plan.

New fisheries officers will be on the water and increased surveillance from the air as we strengthen Canada's compliance and enforcement capacity.

2) Underwater Vessel Noise

Vessel noise is a key problem for these whales. While a focus in the TransMountain expansion debate has been on tanker traffic, often overlooked is the fact that up to 3,500 large commercial vessels transit to and from Vancouver Harbour each year.

Last summer, a trial vessel slowdown in Haro Strait achieved significant reductions in underwater noise. Building on this success, the Government of Canada and the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority, the shipping industry, marine pilots, Indigenous Peoples have implemented a voluntary vessel slowdown in Haro Strait this summer.

In addition, we are working to route vessel traffic away from key foraging areas - by moving further south within existing shipping lanes in the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

BC Ferries, a significant contributor of noise affecting marine mammals, is demonstrating leadership by voluntarily

developing an underwater noise management plan. Going forward, other domestic fleets will be asked to follow the BC Ferries example.

Should voluntary measures prove insufficient, the Government has indicated it will require Canadian fleet owners and operators to develop plans for reducing underwater noise from their fleets.

In early July, our government also imposed a new mandatory requirement for all marine vessels (including recreational boats) to stay at least 200 metres away from killer whales - double the current distance.

And, we are investing in education and awareness among recreational boaters to reduce their impact on the whales. Up to \$415,000 is earmarked over three years, for example, for the Cetus Research and Conservations Society's "Straitwatch" program which monitors whale-watching and recreational boating.

3) Contaminants

New wastewater treatment facilities are under construction in North Vancouver and Victoria - which will significantly reduce contaminants being introduced into the Salish Sea.

We're also increasing research and monitoring to improve our understanding of the sources and impacts of contaminants on whales and their prey. By 2020, we will put in place stronger controls on contaminants that are likely impacting the marine ecosystem.

Broader dynamic

Protecting the Southern Resident Killer Whale is clearly part of a broader dynamic related to thoughtful and bold action to sustain biodiversity in this country and around the world.

Our government is deeply committed to reversing the decline of biodiversity in Canada and is investing an historic \$1.3 billion for new protected areas and to protect species at risk.

The South Resident Killer Whale population is a fundamental component of that commitment.

On a personal note, I am very proud of this initiative not only because it's due in part to persistent engagement by your three North Shore Members of Parliament, but because it is the product of the collaborative efforts and goodwill of key stakeholders - including environmental, industry and Indigenous organizations. It fortifies my faith in what is possible when we can work together.

CONTACT INFO:

CONSTITUENCY OFFICE: 102 West 3rd Street, North Vancouver
EMAIL: Jonathan.Wilkinson@parl.gc.ca | TEL: 604-775-6333