



# Jonathan Wilkinson

NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

June 19, 2024

## Killer whale progress - with more to do

Swiftsure Bank, at the western mouth of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, is a critical foraging area for at-risk Southern Resident killer whales. It's also the main international shipping route in and out of the Port of Vancouver.

Underwater noise from ships is one of the key threats to killer whales, due to its interference with their ability to hunt, navigate and communicate via echolocation.

In 2014, the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority launched a program to reduce the impact that noise from commercial shipping has on at-risk whales. It's called the Enhancing Cetacean Habitat and Observation Program - ECHO – and it is working.

Earlier this month, I was pleased to announce a \$3.2 million continuation of federal funding for ECHO's vitally important work, and heard some encouraging statistics.

### Slowdowns reducing noise

Swiftsure Bank is one of three whale-sensitive areas where ECHO coordinates a voluntary slowdown for large commercial ships - in collaboration with government agencies, Indigenous communities, the marine transportation industry, and environmental groups.

Preliminary analysis of hydrophone data indicates that a high level of participation in the 2023 Swiftsure Bank slowdown reduced underwater sound intensity by up to 62 percent, or 4.2 decibels, compared to 2019, before slowdowns were introduced.

ECHO has also implemented route alterations for tugs in the Strait of Juan de Fuca away from key areas of interest for the Southern Resident killer whales, reducing underwater noise by up to 75%.

The program's positive impact goes beyond mitigating underwater noise. According to a study completed last year, the slowdowns have reduced ship strike risk to humpbacks and grey whales by an estimated 30% and reduced localized air emissions by up to 25%.

Across the border in Washington State, the ECHO Program has inspired a sister program, called Quiet Sound. And at the global level, ECHO's work is helping to shape the International Maritime Organization's guidelines for reducing underwater noise from ships.

### Complex effort

The ECHO Program is one component of a complex, multi-stakeholder, inter-connected effort spearheaded by the federal government.

Canada's Oceans Protection Plan and our Whales Initiative, supported recently by an additional \$151.9 million in Budget 2023, have been advancing the survival and recovery of endangered whales by implementing protection measures, increasing research and monitoring activities, and addressing the key threats to their survival and recovery.

Like many who live on the Pacific coast, this work is personally significant.

I've worked very hard on this file - first as the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, then as Minister of Environment and Climate Change – and continue to care deeply about the health of our oceans and marine life in my current role as Minister of Energy and Natural Resources and as the Member of Parliament for North Vancouver.

This work is vitally important. It's getting results. And we know there is more to do.

Contact us: **Constituency Office 604-775-6333**

Email: **Jonathan.Wilkinson@parl.gc.ca**

Website: **JonathanWilkinson.libparl.ca**