



April 2025

Joint submission of comment by OceanCare and The Green Tank on the draft sector guidance - Marine Transportation and Cruise Lines

Introduction

With this submission of comments, OceanCare and the Green Tank provide feedback on the *draft sector guidance - Marine Transportation and Cruise Lines* developed by the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD).

OceanCare is a global marine conservation organization based in Switzerland and has been committed to marine wildlife protection since 1989. The organization holds Special Consultative Status on marine issues with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

The Green Tank is an independent non-profit think tank developing policy solutions for a sustainable future, based in Athens, Greece.

The focus of the comments provided is on two of the most important threats to marine megafauna, linked to the marine transportation and cruise lines sectors: **underwater noise** and **ship strikes (vessel collisions with marine mammals)**. For both threats there has been increasing attention by global conventions and agreements calling for the development and implementation of mitigation measures. Steadily, more of these mitigation measures are being implemented either by countries or businesses who are stepping up their conservation efforts. They are supported by growing scientific evidence and guidance, technological advances as well as interest from civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Comments

It is positive that both underwater noise and ship (vessel) strikes are recognized in the draft as impacts of the marine transportation and cruise lines sector, and some mitigation measures are recommended. With our comments we aim to enrich the guidance document with respect to the assessment of these threats and to highlight available mitigation measures and techniques.

We note that, especially at the scoping stage, the link between ship strikes and whale presence as a key environmental pressure is not adequately highlighted. The severity of ship strikes is understated, since collisions with large vessels offer whales minimal chances of survival.

Assessment of Operational Practices: The LEAP scoping assessment references a "sampling of fleet" approach in comparison to peer vessels based on structural characteristics ("ship design, propellers and hull shape"). However, it fails to adequately emphasize how **operational**



practices, primarily sail seed and sail route, significantly influence a ship’s environmental performance. This is especially relevant in the context of **underwater radiated noise**, where even modest **reductions in vessel speed** can lead to substantial decreases in noise pollution. This is also true in the context of **ship strikes**, where **re-routing or speed reduction** –both operational measures– can reduce the risk of a ship strike.

In addition, research indicates that even 14 knots (see pages 32, 40) are not enough to effectively protect whale populations, **whereas a 10-knot speed limit** significantly reduces both the likelihood and lethality of ship strikes. This limit is more appropriate when assessing the associated ship strike risk.

Hence, it is important that at the scoping stage and next steps that follow **operational measures (such sail routes and vessel speeds) are located, evaluated, assessed in order to form the basis for the preparation of the response measures.**

Whale protection: While the scoping and various steps of the LEAP Assessment include consideration of the whale migratory routes, this presents an incomplete picture. Focusing solely on migratory routes may mislead organizations seeking to implement measures tailored to specific geographic contexts. The referenced Whale Chart includes areas where specific protective measures are already in place to safeguard critical habitats. Hence, considering interface with sensitive locations (L4), impact materiality assessment (E4), it is important to take into account that in addition to the Marine Protected Areas designated based on international agreements as listed on page 26, there are also national Marine Protected Areas and in the waters of the European Union, Natura 2000 sites, that have been designated specifically for the conservation of marine megafauna. As a list of all marine protected areas may not be practical, **we recommend that the text recognizes that there are several types of international, regional and national marine protected areas that marine transport and cruise line organizations should consider during their assessment.** The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA, <https://www.protectedplanet.net>), as the most complete dataset on Protected Areas, including Marine Protected Areas, **can be added as a key reference** both in the text and in such lists of data sets and tools, as those included in Tables 8 and 11.

In addition, international organizations and agreements, such as the International Whaling Commission and ACCOBAMS, have identified **high risk areas for ship strikes**. As these are specifically relevant to the marine transport and cruise sector, we recommend that they are **specifically listed in the guidance document.**

In this context, **we recommend** that throughout the guidance document, wherever reference is made to marine mammal migratory routes, **a reference to “other sensitive areas” is added**, to include MPAs, IMMAS, PSSA and areas identified as high risk areas for ship strikes.



Preparation, response and mitigation measures: We recommend, a clearer articulation regarding the business approach to protecting marine species, which must clearly identify the available mitigation measures:

Re-routing vessels to avoid critical marine habitats remains the most effective strategy to reduce risk and should be specifically listed. Several sector leaders have announced their voluntary commitment to avoid critical marine habitats in recent years.

Imposing a speed limit of 10 knots follows as a key mitigation measure. Slow steaming offers **multidimensional benefits**, as it mitigates the risk of collisions, lowers underwater radiated noise, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. However, it is a generic, overarching measure, since slow steaming is relative to ships' maximum design speed.

In areas **where rerouting is not feasible, real-time acoustic detection systems can play a vital role**. Such a system is currently being developed in the Strait of Kithira, along the Hellenic Trench, an Important Marine Mammal Area and an identified high risk area for ship strikes. The **SAvE Whales system**, which stands for "**System for the Avoidance of ship-strikes with Endangered Whales**", was first developed in a pilot project between 2019 and 2021 by Pelagos Cetacean Research Institute and the Institute of Applied and Computational Mathematics, of FORTH, fully funded by OceanCare. It offers a pioneering technology, as it is capable to detect the presence of sperm whales and alert the passing vessels in real time, enabling the issuance of immediate, targeted operational guidance to mariners. As such, it serves as a complementary response measure to the threat of vessel strikes, in an area where re-routing is not possible. A Memorandum of Understanding, signed in June 2024, by the Greek Ministry of Environment and Energy, the Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency, OceanCare and The Green Tank provides for the **scaling up and the full implementation of the system in the Kythira Strait by 2028**. The operation of this system will enhance the conservation of the endangered sperm whale population of the Hellenic Trench.

Additional information on the comments raised can be provided by contacting:
Alexandros Xydias, Policy Advisor - Shipping Expert **OceanCare**, axydias@oceacare.org or Ioli Christopoulou, Policy Director, **The Green Tank**, christopoulou.ioli@thegreentank.gr