

DISCUSSION GUIDE & FEEDBACK FORM**Draft Recovery Strategy for Transient Killer Whales**

Fisheries and Oceans Canada has developed a **Draft** recovery strategy for transient killer whales. The recovery strategy describes this population and its habitat needs, threats to their survival and habitat, knowledge gaps, identifies recovery goals and objectives, and strategies to address threats and effect recovery. We are now seeking input on the draft from those interested in and/or affected by recovery of these whales. Your input will help to finalize the recovery strategy and enable the development of more specific actions for recovery in the next phase of planning.

Please feel free to attach additional pages if the space provided is not sufficient or to provide comment on sections of the recovery strategy not outlined below. Some topics you might not know much about – feel free to skip those and move on to other questions. See Section 6 for information on submitting your input.

1 Population and Biology (Sections 1.3 and 1.4 of the Recovery Strategy)

Transient killer whale populations are not expected to achieve high abundances due to their ecological position as upper trophic-level predators and their apparent propensity to live in relatively small populations. It is thought that population abundance has been limited by a high contaminant burden and prey availability and it is unknown as to whether the current population is below or at carrying capacity. Your additional input may improve what is known about the species and their distribution.

- Has the recovery strategy missed any information on abundance and distribution?
- Has the recovery strategy captured the relevant factors related to recovery?

Comments:

Please See #3

2 Threats (Section 1.5)

Five major categories of human-induced threats have been identified: Contaminants, Acoustic Disturbance, Physical Disturbance, Toxic Spills and Changes in Prey Availability and/or Quantity. A Threat Classification table has been developed outlining these threats. Your perceptions on the threats will help the Team to portray them accurately in the recovery strategy

- Have the threats been accurately described?
- Do you know of any threats that have not been identified?
- Are there other measures or programs currently underway that may help reduce these threats?
- In your view, are there threats that require priority attention more so than others?

Comments:

Lifeforce believes that a priority should re: Environmental Hazards Response.

Protecting Marine Wildlife from Environmental Hazards

In view of the ongoing accidents involving toxic oil and chemical spills there is an urgent need to be fully equipped to be able to keep endangered orcas and other wildlife away.

While some hazing methods have been developed to scare birds out of polluted areas there is no consistent, permanent approach to protect these and other species.

Attractors and deterrents must be available to protect all species that could be exposed. This would include numerous species, such as transients, which are at risk.

Orcas and other wildlife react to benign, novel sound stimuli. Their curiosity attracts them to such low level sounds and they would drastically change their direction of travel away from oil and chemical spills.

There are also implications for using these methods to reunite lone/stranded dolphins such as transients.

3 Critical Habitat (Section 2.8)

“Critical Habitat” is defined under SARA as “the habitat that is necessary for the survival or recovery of a listed wildlife species”. Transients do not appear to be limited by specific physical features of the environment, other than features that may help them to successfully capture their prey. They generally range widely over the coast, and although transients may be seen year-round, they rarely remain in any one area for extended periods. Transients often return repeatedly to particular areas to forage (e.g. seal and sea lion haul-outs), but our understanding of which of these areas are important to transients on a population level is still very limited. Consequently, a Schedule of Studies was developed to better understand and identify important critical habitat.

- Given your knowledge and experience, is the list of studies to determine critical habitat complete?

- Do you support the recommended studies to determine critical habitat?

Comments:

Critical habitats

Distribution of the Southern Community/Transients

Lifeforce has studied the behaviour and travel patterns of the Southern Community for over 10 years. As part of this work I have looked at important critical habitats. This would include Pt. Grey to Boundary Bay to White Rock (with Birch Bay to Rosario Strait in US) and Bowen Island to Porier and Gabriola Passes (with Boundary Pass in the US). Transients are also located in these areas.

In 2005 and 2006 the Southern Community have spent more time in waters from Pt. Grey to Rosario and, sometimes, Boundary Pass. They are turning more often to stay in these areas. In 2005 they past Pt. Roberts 4 times on two different days. They are spending time for all of their life activities such as foraging, resting and socializing. We also believe that the seal population in this area may also increase the number of transient visits.

We have not published our data in order to give the orcas a break from Whale Watch Companies, Pleasure Boaters and some Research Vessels. We can supply data to support our recommendations that these areas be regarded as “critical habitats”.

4 Goal and Objectives (Section 2)

The recovery strategy has identified goals and objectives for recovery and also considers whether recovery is feasible. Your input will help establish effective and realistic approaches for species recovery.

- Are the recovery goal and objectives realistic?
- Are there additional objectives that should be considered? Why?
- Would you change any of the objectives? Why?

Comments:

In addition to the comments below please see #5.

Additional objectives should include:

Permit Close Approaches

No activity that interrupts the lifestyles and/or cause stress and pain should be permitted in critical habitats. This would include attachment of instruments and biological sampling.

Alternatives to prey sampling must be implanted to stop haphazard close approaches. Sometimes the behaviour is socializing not foraging that is broken up by boats speeding in on them or conducting “focal follows”.

Commercial Photographers

There is an abundance of orca photos available and further close approaches should be prohibited.

“Research” Photographers and Research Activities

The amount of time spent, duplication and other methods to obtain census (such as land base counts) should be evaluated when permitting ID photos. Organizations purporting to be “research” when they are conducting whale watch tours should not be allowed to do close approaches.

There have been several research projects that involve close approaches or “focal follows”. This adds to the know threat of stress/injury and constant interruption of the orcas’ lifestyles due to boat traffic.

Response to Environmental Hazards

Actions should include developing responses to environmental hazards such as oil and chemical spills.

Sewage Controls

a) The dumping of raw sewage by Victoria must be stopped. The sewage contains PCBs and many more contaminants. The sewage is dumped into the identified critical habitat for the Southern Community and transients.

b) Other sewage sources, such as cruise ships, must be stopped.

c) Vancouver sewage treatment must be improved. Presently low-level treatment of sewage is being release into orcas’ critical habitat at the Iona Beach Jetty.

d) Orcas frequently travel in areas with high BC Ferry traffic. Some of the ferry routes cross into US waters. Although the Canadian Government will be implementing new sewage dumping regulations many of the BC Ferries cannot meet the requirements. BC Ferries is thinking that they could dump their wastes into the Greater Vancouver Regional District system but this is only a primary treatment site and would not solve the problem unless the fees paid would upgrade the treatment facility.

BC Ferries should stop all dumping of sewage when orcas are in the area or will be entering their disposal areas.

In additional, similar restrictions should be applied to WA State Ferries and vessel traffic (including pleasure crafts) in US waters.

Commercial Fisheries

Commercial fisheries must be “educated”. For example crab boats off Sturgeon Banks should shut down when orcas are present. They do not follow the guidelines.

Port Expansions

Delta Container Port expansion plans will impact on the orcas’ critical habitat and should be stopped. Their present cargo ships should not dock when orcas are passing.

Docking and bilge wastes

- a) Westshore Terminals boat traffic should not dock when orcas are present. The ships must not empty their bilges that could include oil and other pollutants.
- b) Cherry Point traffic should not dock when orcas are present.

Active Pass – Commercial and Ferry Traffic

Active Pass should be closed to commercial whale watching. When possible, BC Ferries should wait until the orcas have left Active Pass before entering.

Eco Friendly Boating.

In order to reduce and eliminate pollution of the Georgia Basin off Canada's West Coast, it is crucial that we provide ecology information and demonstrate how people can help to develop pollution-free lifestyles.

Aquariums', Whale Watch Guides' and Research Information

What's is the public perception of the Aquariums' touch/feed/swim with programs and Whale Watch Companies continuous blocking of the orcas pathways? And how do pleasure boat operators react when they see research boats pursuing orcas?

Research close approaches and Whale Watch Companies blocking pathways should not be allowed if other boats are present because it sets a bad example.

Aquariums should also not encourage petting and swimming with dolphins because some people will think its okay with "wild" dolphins.

5 Strategies to Address Threats & Effect Recovery (Section 2)

The recovery strategy proposes a number of broad approaches that are designed to meet recovery objectives and help guide the up-coming development of an action plan. Your input will help to ensure that the implications of these approaches are thoroughly considered.

- Can you suggest any additional approaches that have not been considered or any improvements to the current approaches?
- Do any of the approaches raise concerns that should be considered in action planning?
- Please identify whom or how you or other people or groups can get involved in recovery activities?

Comments:

Can you suggest any additional approaches that have not been considered or any improvements to the current approaches?

In general, the present situation regarding whale watch companies and pleasure boaters is appalling. The boats continually pursue them from sunrise to sunset. Monitoring activities and guidelines have not relieved the

pressure. It is time for a totally new approach with whale watch regulations, training (companies and monitors), licensing, better education, No Whale Watch Zones, time limits, and other recommendations as outlined in our Model Watch Watching.

Orca Trails

Land-based whale watching should be promoted. Understanding orca travel patterns has helped Liferforce promote landbased whale watching through Orca Trails - our program to alert Park Managers when orcas and other cetaceans will pass their marine parks.

Orca Days Off/Time Out

Orca breaks make sense. People want breaks throughout the workday and they want days off. Presently the orcas get little, if any, time off when in local waters since the Whale Watch companies spotting network has expanded and increases in locations.

In order to relieve some of the stress we recommend “Time Out” periods of one hour at noon and 5PM each day. Companies can time their tour time to meet this requirement. When orcas are pursued for 1 day the following day is a “Day Off” in which no commercial activity is allowed.

Please include the following attachments in the public record regarding the impact of vessel activities on orcas.

1. Model Whale Watch Plan

2. Monitoring Issues in BC/WA

This information discussed how monitors must be properly trained. They have been witnessed driving into orcas and not understanding the orcas’ behaviours.

3. Boat Harass Photos

Please identify whom or how you or other people or groups can get involved in recovery activities?

1. Marine Wildlife Rescue. Liferforce provides a 24-hour service to respond to marine wildlife injury, sickness, abandonment, stranding and other emergencies. This service includes responding to pollution problems such as oil and chemical spills. In addition, we will remove dolphins, porpoises, pinnipeds and seabirds trapped in fishing nets.

The rescue equipment is kept in our Marine Wildlife Rescue Trailer with a command post and educational displays.

2. Whale and Dolphin Hotline. Liferforce provides a telephone hotline for the public to be able to report marine wildlife stranding, harassment and/or sightings.

3. Lifewatch Boater Awareness Program. Liferforce distributes whale watching regulations to boaters on the water and the general public. The information advises boaters how to safely watch whales and other marine life. It also stops boaters who inadvertently or intentionally harass marine mammals. Liferforce is the only organization providing this service in Southern BC. As part of the Lifewatch program we will conduct investigations of cruelty to marine wildlife.

4. Orca Trails

Liferforce has conducted an Orca Trails Land-based Whale Watching Program for several years.

5. Oil and Chemical Spills

Liferforce has been developing methods to attract orcas away from environmental hazards. In addition to much needed Oil Spill Response Plans, this area should be a priority “critical habitat” since the Southern Community has already been exposed to oil spills off Cherry Point, WA.

6 Submitting Your Responses

Thank you for taking the time to review and comment on the Draft Recovery Strategy for Transient Whales. Submitting your response by XXXX, 2007 will allow us to consider your input in finalizing the Recovery Strategy. There are several ways to submit your input:

1. **In Writing:** Complete and return this form to:

Fisheries & Oceans Canada
Marine Mammal Program – Draft Transient Killer Whale Recovery Strategy
14th Floor – 401 Burrard Street
Vancouver, BC V6C 3S4

2. **By Email:** Complete and return this form or a separate response to:

MarineMammals@pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca

3. **Via the Internet:** Download or complete this form on line at:

http://www-comm.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/pages/consultations/consult_e.htm

7 Your Information

Please fill in the contact information below. The information you provide will be used to update our Marine Mammal Distribution List. If you do not wish to be put on our distribution list for future mail outs and information please check the box below.

No thank you, I do not wish to be added to the Marine Mammal Distribution List.

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