



Hauraki Gulf Forum

Tikapa Moana

Te Moananui a Toi

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Malcolm Nicolson
Chief Executive Officer
Northland Regional Council

RE: Voluntary protocol to avoid ship strike of whales in Hauraki Gulf

Dear Malcolm

Thank you for meeting with myself, Hauraki Gulf Forum Chairman John Tregidga, and Northland Regional Council Chairman Bill Shepherd, on November 21 to discuss the issue of ship strike of Bryde's whales in the Hauraki Gulf.

The following day John and I - along with Ports of Auckland Limited's Communication Manager Matt Ball - met with the Whangarei Harbour Safety Committee, chaired by NRC's Harbourmaster Jim Lyle,

Following is a summary of our discussion and action points from the two meetings.

Background

Bryde's whales (*Balaenoptera brydei*) are listed as a nationally critical threatened species in New Zealand waters due to the year-round presence of a small, open population of around 50 animals.

The inner Hauraki Gulf is an important area for small groups of Bryde's whales year-round, an area also important for commercial and recreational vessels.

Monitoring of whale mortality from 1989 to 2014 shows an average of almost two whale deaths per annum, with necropsies revealing the likely cause of many deaths to be ship strike.

In March 2012, following two whale deaths from ship strike in six months, the Hauraki Gulf Forum and other parties initiated a collaborative working group to explore urgent responses to the situation.

This group of scientists, environmental NGOs, mana whenua, regulatory agencies, shipping and port executives has since met nine times, facilitating the exchange and exploration of: research findings and cultural knowledge, regulatory and non-regulatory responsibilities and options, the operating environment of the port and shipping industry, and international experience in addressing vessel strike.

In response, in September 2013 Ports of Auckland Ltd (POAL) introduced a transit protocol which directed commercial shipping to where possible reduce speed, identifying 10 knots as an internationally-recognised target. It also included a watching and reporting regime, and recommended approaches to the port.

The protocol is communicated to masters entering the port, through interactions with the harbour pilot boat and is an agenda item in meetings of port and shipping operators and shipping federations.

Monitoring of the effectiveness of the protocol has been carried out by POAL and by the International Fund for Animal Welfare utilising AIS vessel tracking data.

This monitoring shows average large vessel (>70 metre) speeds have reduced from 14.2 knots at the time of the introduction of the protocol, to around 10.5 knots. Only one whale death has been recorded in this period (confirmed as ship strike) in September 2014.

The protocol has attracted international attention as a successful alternative to costly and often lengthy processes to regulate shipping activity.

The most recent quarterly monitoring (analysis appended) shows vessels continue to show a difference in average speeds depending on direction of travel, with vessels crossing the Hauraki Gulf (not calling at the Ports of Auckland) representing the highest speed transits, averaging 13 knots. The analysis also shows cruise, oil tankers and cement carriers among the higher risk categories. A detailed spreadsheet (appended) identifies individual vessel transits.

Slowing from 14 knots to 10 knots through the 26.86 nautical mile northeastern transit of the protocol zone would add around 46 minutes to the journey between Northport and Tauranga (analysis attached).

Shipping operators entering and leaving Ports of Auckland by western and southeastern routes have been able to accommodate the protocol by planning for the transit within their whole journey.

It is anticipated that greater awareness of the protocol among shipping operators in Whangarei Harbour and the Port of Tauranga will further assist in reducing higher risk transits through the Hauraki Gulf and prove the success and adequacy of the voluntary response.

Actions arising:

- Northland Regional Council CEO to inform council of issue and meetings.
- Whangarei Harbour Safety Committee to consider the request to communicate and support the voluntary protocol for transit through the Hauraki Gulf among those vessels departing and arriving in Whangarei.
- POAL to share protocol - <http://www.poal.co.nz/sustain/Documents/150112-Transit%20Protocol.pdf> – and learnings with harbour safety committee members.
- Hauraki Gulf Forum to share quarterly monitoring information with the committee to assess uptake of the protocol.

If you would like any further information on these matters please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Tim Higham
Executive Officer, Hauraki Gulf Forum

Copy: Jim Lyle, Whangarei Harbourmaster