

## **RE: Orca Emergency Response**

Dear Washington State Legislature,

As local leaders who deeply care about the survival and recovery of our Southern Resident orcas, we support Governor Inslee's suite of bills to further enhance the state's commitment for orca recovery. This summer, the Southern Resident orca population lost three members: Crewser, a newborn calf, and Scarlet. The heart wrenching spectacle of Tahlequah refusing to part from her dead calf for more than two weeks touched the hearts of people all over the world. The Southern Resident orca population is on the brink of extinction and need an all-hands-on-deck commitment to action. At a minimum, we need new protections that address their lack of food, impacts from noise and pollution, and the threat of oil spills.

Key elements of the **Orca Emergency Response** priority include:

- Go slow zone of seven knots for all vessels within ½ mile of Southern resident orcas (Recommendation 17 from the Orca Recovery Task Force).
- Increase habitat protections for salmon and forage fish by expanding authority to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to issue civil penalties under Hydraulic Project Approval and change shorelines permitting that streamlines and eliminates loopholes for shoreline armoring such as bulkheads (Recommendations 3 and 4 respectively from the Orca Recovery Task Force).
- Act to phase out chemicals of concern impacting orcas, their prey, and humans (Recommendation 30 from the Orca Recovery Task Force).

The **Oil Spill Prevention** priority addresses the existential risk a sinking oil spill would pose to orcas and the Salish Sea (Recommendation 24 from Orca Recovery Task Force). These measures would:

- Close regulatory loopholes for vessels carrying crude oil by requiring tug escorts for barges and smaller tankers.
- Establish a rescue tug capable of protecting the San Juans .

A spill in these waters would risk the irretrievable loss of the critically endangered Southern Resident Killer Whale population that is teetering at only 76 individuals. To put the risk in perspective, the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1984 spewed 11 million gallons of oil into Prince William Sound, killing up to a quarter-million seabirds and thousands of marine mammals. At least 22 orcas died and a local population known as the Chugach Transients was devastated by the spill, with nine individuals disappearing immediately after the spill and six more shortly after. Twenty-nine years later, the Chugach orcas are functionally extinct, with no reproductive females left alive, no calves observed since the spill, and only seven individuals surviving.

We the undersigned local elected officials urge you to support bills concerning **Orca Emergency Response and Oil Spill Prevention**:

- [HB 1194](#) and [SB 5153](#), Pollution Prevention for Our Future Act
- HB [1579](#), Implementing recommendations of the southern resident killer whale task force related to increasing chinook abundance, and [SB 5580](#), implementing recommendations of the southern resident killer whale task force related to increasing habitat and forage fish abundance
- [HB 1580](#) and [SB 5577](#), Concerning the protection of southern resident orca whales from vessels

- [HB 1578](#) and SB [5578](#), Reducing threats to southern resident killer whales by improving the safety of oil transportation

Respectfully,

(Legislator)