

Superintendent's Statement

A Message from Maria Brown, Superintendent,
NOAA's Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary

May 4, 2018

NOAA's Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary warns boaters and board sportsters: keep 300 feet distance from whales; asks Bay Area ship traffic to slow down

This week Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary received several reports of endangered humpback whales entering San Francisco Bay. On Thursday, May 3, we observed humpbacks off Crissy Beach, including a young calf. Humpbacks have also been seen nearshore on the Pacific side of San Francisco and San Mateo counties, in sanctuary waters. They are here to feed. If disturbed, especially if a calf becomes separated from its mother, they can be seriously harmed.

This is the third year in which significant numbers of humpbacks have entered the Golden Gate Straits and San Francisco Bay, following schools of fish. Therefore, we are alerting boaters, board sportsters, and large vessel operators to be on the alert for whales, and to maintain a **minimum distance of 300 feet** away to avoid harassment, and even life-threatening collisions.

In addition, on May 1, the Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank national marine sanctuaries, in a collaboration with the U.S. Coast Guard, requested that large ships (300 gross tons or more) slow to a maximum 10 knots in the vessel traffic lanes approaching San Francisco, to reduce the threat of ship strikes on endangered humpback and blue whales. The U.S. Coast Guard is broadcasting an alert throughout the entire area.

Approaching whales nearer than 300 ft., the federal minimum distance guideline, can cause disturbance to them; an offense that could result in fines. All whales are protected against harassment under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA); blue, humpback and other whales are also listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). NOAA Fisheries has regulatory responsibility to implement the MMPA and ESA, and has Cooperative Enforcement Agreements with the State of California and other federal agencies. Whales in a national marine sanctuary are further protected under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

The public should report all harassment, collisions with whales, or observed injured or dead whales to NOAA at 877-SOS-WHALE (877-767-9425), and (510) 437-3146 (local NOAA enforcement), giving detailed information. Or to the U.S. Coast Guard on Channel 16. Report harassment to 877-767-9425. Live sightings can be reported with the free Spotter Pro App (<http://westcoast.whalealert.org/index.php?page=download-spotter>), to alert managing agencies and conservation research groups of the number and locations of whales in the area.

Sincerely,

Maria Brown, Superintendent
Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

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