

## **Talking Points: House Natural Resources Committee legislative hearing 3.17.22**

### **H.R. 6987 – Protecting Our Marine Mammals**

#### **Statement**

- Thank you, Chair Huffman. I'm pleased to be speaking to you today about this legislation to protect endangered marine mammal species.
- Marine mammals like Southern Resident Killer Whales in Puget Sound face a variety of threats from human impacts such as boat strikes and habitat destruction.
- These mammals are important cultural symbols and environmental linchpins nationwide.
- Over the course of the past year, I have worked within the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee to

advance legislation that would protect marine mammals and other endangered species.

- Earlier this month, I offered an amendment to the 2022 *Coast Guard Authorization Act* that offers enhanced protections for these species.
- While that language is a step in the right direction, I was heartened to have an offer from Mr. Westerman, Ranking Member of the Natural Resources Committee, to work with all of you to build upon that language.
- I introduced a standalone bill, H.R. 6987, the *Protecting Our Marine Mammals Act* to be considered by this Subcommittee and for future inclusion in the Coast Guard bill.

- I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record the following letters of support for the bill:
  - Port of Seattle
  - Orca Salmon Alliance
  - Joint aquarium letter from 11 national aquariums

### **Protecting Our Marine Mammals**

- This legislation contains multiple provisions to build upon ongoing conservation, science and technology measures.
- Commercial shipping is thought to contribute up to 75 percent of human-caused underwater noise pollution.
- Vessel noise is monitored, in part, by the Ocean Noise Reference Station Network.

- This multi-agency partnership monitors ambient underwater sound, contributing to the protection and management of marine life.
- H.R. 6987 authorizes funding to expand the network beyond its current 12 locations by leveraging federal and non-federal monitoring systems that make up the Integrated Ocean Observing System.
- The bill provides assistance to seaports to minimize vessel impacts on marine mammals.
- Ports play a significant role in minimizing interactions between vessels and marine mammals.

- The Quiet Sound program in Puget Sound is designed to reduce vessel noise and disturbance on Southern Resident Killer Whales.
- This initiative is based on the successful ECHO program run by Canada's Port of Vancouver.
- Other ports in Los Angeles, Long Beach and New York have instituted similar programs to protect local marine species.
- H.R. 6987 establishes grants to assist ports across the nation in establishing or expanding successful initiatives like these that reduce threats to marine mammals from vessel and port activities.
- Accurate data and being able to share that data are instrumental in protecting marine mammals.

- New technologies such as acoustic monitoring, autonomous vessels and drones can provide near real-time data on the location of marine mammals.
- H.R. 6987 will establish a new monitoring program to design and deploy technologies to detect whales and other species.
- This data will be used by vessel operators, monitoring bodies and other stakeholders to directly inform mitigation measures in near real-time to help avoid and minimize vessel and mammal interactions.
- As ship designs continue to evolve, that evolution will lead to vessels that are closer to carbon-free.
- Another benefit of these new designs is they will produce less noise.

- H.R. 6987 establishes grants under the Maritime Administration to help spur research, development and deployment of technologies that reduce vessel noise.
- Finally, the U.S. Navy has developed technologies to significantly reduce the noise of its vessels.
- H.R. 6987 directs the Maritime Administration to study and report on sharing these non-classified technologies with other agencies that design and procure vessels.

## **Conclusion**

- Moving forward, it is vital to make the most of existing resources to provide better protections for marine mammals.

- It is also important to encourage the use of new techniques and technologies to enhance ongoing conservation efforts to minimize the dangers these species face.
- The provisions in this bill were included in the bipartisan, House-passed *National Defense Authorization Act* just a few months ago.
- It is my hope that Congress can build on that effort to include these provisions in the *Coast Guard Authorization Act* once the House considers it on the floor.
- Thank you to Chair Huffman and Ranking Member Bentz for their consideration of this bill.
- I also want to thank my colleague, Mr. Westerman, for his work on this issue, and I look forward to working with him

and all of you to find solutions to protect endangered marine mammals.

- Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

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