

EURONAV MAKES WHALE PROTECTION MEASURES MANDATORY FOR ITS FLEET

- *Voluntary measures for the Canadian East Coast, the waters around California (USA) and the Hellenic Trench included in Instruction to Masters*
- *Collaboration with environmental NGO, the Great Whale Conservancy*

The North Atlantic Right whale and the Eastern Mediterranean Sperm whale are classified as “endangered” by the IUCN and there is clear evidence that both species are negatively impacted by shipping activity including ship strikes. Moving ships away from critical habitats is essential to mitigate the risk for these animals and give the population a chance for survival. To protect these endangered creatures, Euronav has teamed up with the Great Whale Conservancy (GWC), an environmental NGO dedicated to the protection of great whales and their habitat, to investigate how ship strikes can be avoided. A first result is the inclusion of the voluntary measures of the Canadian East Coast, the waters around California (USA) and the Hellenic Trench in the 2022 Instruction to Masters, making the measures de facto mandatory for its vessels.

Whales are critical to a sustainable ocean and a liveable planet because they are ecosystem engineers. Not only do they capture carbon dioxide in their bodies, but they also fertilise the ocean with their nutrient rich excrement which is essentially a phytoplankton farm. These microscopic creatures thrive on it. Phytoplankton also need to absorb carbon dioxide in surface waters to grow, so the more phytoplankton, the more capacity is created in the ocean. Phytoplankton already captures 40% to 60% of all carbon produced on our planet using solar energy to do their own photosynthesis (that is the equivalent of 1.7 trillion trees). Consequently, the more whales, the more phytoplankton, the more carbon dioxide can be absorbed. It is simply protection and restoration of a lost ecosystem.



Therefore, and undoubtedly, whales are an irreplaceable component of the ocean's capacity to regulate the atmosphere. Sadly, whales knew a massive decline in numbers (approximately 98%) due to industrial whaling in the 19th and 20th centuries until an international ban in 1986. Today, their existence is further threatened by entanglement in abandoned nets or fishing lines, ship strikes, loss of habitat, plastic pollution, noise pollution, climate change and ocean acidification.

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has recognized the problem, but mandatory protection measures like re-routing ships and/or speed reduction have so far been implemented in a few locations only. Voluntary measures are recommended in a lot of areas, but unfortunately these do not have the impact of permanent measures and are

often overlooked by ship operators. Euronav teamed up with the Great Whale Conservancy to investigate how ship strikes can be avoided.

"Euronav wants to set the example for the industry," says Hugo de Stoop, CEO of Euronav. "We have looked into the different voluntary measures and the commercial impact for our operations is insignificant, whereas the impact for the local whale habitats is huge. If large ships stay out of the critical breeding and feeding habitats of these magnificent animals, we can reduce the ship strike problem drastically and improve the quality of life of those mammals so that they can mate and gradually grow their population. These elementary measures are the right thing for us to do as a responsible ship owner. We claim that the ocean is our environment, so we must live up to that standard. That is also why we are the first industry member of GWC's recently launched [Whale Guardian program](#). We hope that other shipping companies will follow our steps in protecting these endangered species. If the industry shows that these measures are easy to implement, this will be a clear sign for policy makers to pass the necessary legislation and ensure there is a level playing field for all ship owners, not just the ones that take corporate responsibility seriously."



Avoiding ship strikes without commercial impact

Together, Euronav and GWC identified the Canadian East coast, the waters around California (USA) and the Hellenic Trench as their first areas of concerns. The 2022 Instructions to Masters, issued to the entire fleet, orders all Euronav vessels to adhere to the local voluntary measures, making them mandatory for its entire fleet.

Hugo De Stoop continues: *"Our ships will stay out of critical habitats where these whales breed, feed and nurse their offspring. These deviations have very little negative economic impact for shipowners, including ourselves, so avoiding these areas is really a question of paying attention to the issue rather than making a big economic sacrifice. We would like other tanker companies to realize that this is not a difficult decision to make. These three areas are the start, but we are looking into other regions around the world where our ships regularly pass and where voluntary measures are published. Our stewardship for the ocean and for whales in particular is not stopping here."*

Michael Fishbach, founder of the Great Whale Conservancy is incredibly happy with the steps that Euronav is taking. *"The GWC is an NGO that for the past decade has been laser focused on minimising global ship strikes on the world's great whales. Getting a first-class tanker company like Euronav aligned with our cause is essential to us,"* says Fishbach. *"Whales are a keystone species in the oceanic ecosystems, 2/3 of the oxygen we breathe originates from phytoplankton in our oceans. Additionally, whales are a natural carbon capture 'machine'; with each individual whale capturing many tons of CO₂ during its lifetime. The more whales there are, the better it is for our planet. If other shipping companies follow Euronav's lead, we will be more than happy to assist them. We have the scientific and nautical experience in our team to assist any shipping company in this matter. We strongly believe that this problem can only be solved from within the industry. You need shipping experts around the table to produce workable low-impact solutions".*

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For more information:

- www.greatwhaleconservancy.org
- www.Wholesave.com: has [webpage](#) that checks the adherence percentage of ships following the voluntary measures in California.
- WWF Whales: [World-First Map Exposes Growing Dangers Along Whale Superhighways](#)
- Financial Times – YouTube: [What if the Whales Could Save Us? | Rethink Sustainability](#)
- Terra Mater – YouTube: [Why Thousands of Whales Die Every Year](#)



Image credits: Great Whale Conservancy