

# 2019 Report of Vessel Traffic and Vessel Traffic Safety: Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound Area



*Billions of gallons of oil travels through Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca each year. Oil spills pose a risk to declining populations of Southern Resident Killer Whales. (Killer whale photo by David Ellifrit, Center for Whale Research)*

## WHY IT MATTERS

The Act recognizes the risk oil transportation places on the Salish Sea, its inland corridors, and its rivers, streams, and bays.

Low-probability, high risk and high impact spills from oil laden tank vessels are one of the biggest threats. While there is a strong safety regime in place, oil transportation through our waters represents ongoing risk of oil spills to endangered salmon runs, Southern Resident Killer Whales, cultural resources, public health, and our economy.

Read the report:

<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1908002.html>

In 2018, the Legislature passed the Strengthening Oil Transportation Safety Act (E2SSB 6269). The Act directed the Department of Ecology to undertake several policy initiatives to help address new and evolving risks, including development of a report on vessel traffic and vessel traffic safety in the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound area. It also directed Ecology to consult with the Puget Sound Partnership and Washington State Board of Pilotage Commissioners, as well as with stakeholders, tribes, and First Nations.

The Legislature asked Ecology to assess and evaluate several topics related to oil movement in the study area using existing current vessel traffic risk assessments and other available studies, and to develop recommendations for:

- Vessel traffic management and vessel traffic safety.
- The viability of tug escorts for oil tankers, articulated tug barges (ATBs), and other towed waterborne vessels or barges in reducing oil spill risk.
- The viability of an emergency response system in Haro Strait, Boundary Pass, and Rosario Strait in reducing oil spill risk.

## Development and methods

Ecology relied on existing studies including vessel traffic risk assessments. Ecology partnered with the Puget Sound Partnership and the Washington State Board of Pilotage Commissioners (BPC) in developing the report. Ecology also consulted with tribes, First Nations, and stakeholders.



The study area includes the marine waters of northwestern Washington State and the waterways of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Haro Strait, and Boundary Pass, shared with British Columbia.

## Five recommendations

### Conduct rulemaking on tug escort requirements

Ecology recommends amending RCW 88.16.190 to direct the BPC to conduct rulemaking on tug escort requirements for oil laden tank vessels between 5,000 and 40,000 deadweight tons (DWT) when traveling beyond a point east of a line extending from Discovery Island Light south to New Dungeness Light. The rulemaking must require tug escorts for Rosario Strait and connected waterways to the east.

The rulemaking should also evaluate potential impacts of increased marine noise as a result of additional vessel traffic and consider mitigation for underwater noise, especially on solo tugs returning from escort duty, to reduce impacts to Southern Resident Killer Whales.

### Evaluate effectiveness and funding of an emergency response system

Ecology recommends a collaborative process to determine the potential effectiveness of an emergency towing vessel (ERTV) in Haro Strait and Boundary Pass. The process should include U.S. and

Canadian stakeholders, tribes, and First Nations, and should result in recommendations to the Legislature and other governmental bodies, including tribes and First Nations.

### Develop Standard of Care for voluntary vessel speed reduction program

Ecology recommends the Puget Sound Harbor Safety Committee (PSHSC) consider updating the Puget Sound Harbor Safety Plan (PSHSP) and develop Standards of Care (SOC) for a voluntary vessel speed reduction program.

### Develop Standard of Care for wheelhouse watch stander

Ecology recommends the PSHSC consider updating the PSHSP and develop SOC for a second watch stander in the wheelhouse of ATB and tug-towed tank vessels on certain routes and in specific conditions.

### Expand requirements for reporting oil movement and oil transfer information

Ecology recommends expanded reporting to fully understand the oil movement picture and evaluate all potential impacts for oil movement by rail, pipeline, and vessel statewide. The additional data would assist Ecology with determining the need for additional prevention and preparedness measures.

For more details on these recommendations and the research behind them, [read the full report](#).

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