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(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R.

To require a pilot program to enhance existing efforts to mitigate vessel impacts on large cetaceans in the San Francisco Bay region, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. LICCARDO introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To require a pilot program to enhance existing efforts to mitigate vessel impacts on large cetaceans in the San Francisco Bay region, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Save Willy Act of
5 2026”.

1 **SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM TO ENHANCE EFFORTS TO MITI-**
2 **GATE VESSEL IMPACTS ON LARGE**
3 **CETACEANS IN SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION.**

4 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
6 after the date of the enactment of this section, the
7 Secretary, with the concurrence of the Under Sec-
8 retary, shall carry out a pilot program to establish
9 a Cetacean Desk, which shall be—

10 (A) located and manned within the San
11 Francisco Vessel Traffic Service; and

12 (B) designed—

13 (i) to improve coordination with the
14 maritime industry to reduce the risk of
15 vessel impacts on large cetaceans in the
16 San Francisco Bay and the strait of Gold-
17 en Gate, including impacts from vessel
18 strikes, disturbances, and other sources;
19 and

20 (ii) to monitor the presence and loca-
21 tion of large cetaceans in the San Fran-
22 cisco Bay and the strait of Golden Gate.

23 (2) DURATION AND STAFFING.—The pilot pro-
24 gram—

25 (A) shall—

1 (i) be for a duration of four years;

2 and

3 (ii) require not more than two full-
4 time equivalent positions, whose respon-
5 sibilities shall also include contributing to
6 other necessary San Francisco Vessel Traf-
7 fic Service duties and responsibilities as
8 needed; and

9 (B) may be supported by other existing
10 Federal employees, as appropriate.

11 (b) ENGAGEMENT WITH VESSEL OPERATORS.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the pilot
13 program, the Secretary shall require personnel of the
14 Cetacean Desk to engage with vessel operators in
15 areas where large cetaceans have been seen or could
16 reasonably be present to ensure compliance with ap-
17 plicable laws, regulations, and voluntary guidance, to
18 reduce the impact of vessel traffic on large
19 cetaceans.

20 (2) CONTENTS.—In engaging with vessel opera-
21 tors as required under paragraph (1), personnel of
22 the Cetacean Desk shall communicate where and
23 when sightings of large cetaceans have occurred.

24 (c) MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING.—The Sec-
25 retary and the Under Secretary may enter into a memo-

1 random of understanding to facilitate real-time sharing of
2 data relating to large cetaceans between the State of Cali-
3 fornia, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administra-
4 tion, the San Francisco Vessel Traffic Service, and other
5 relevant entities, as appropriate.

6 (d) DATA.—The Under Secretary shall leverage exist-
7 ing data collection methods, the program required by sec-
8 tion 11303 of the National Defense Authorization Act for
9 Fiscal Year 2023 (16 U.S.C. 1391), and public data to
10 ensure accurate and timely information on the sighting of
11 large cetaceans.

12 (e) USE OF TECHNOLOGIES.—

13 (1) EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES.—The Sec-
14 retary, in coordination with the Under Secretary and
15 the Commandant, shall evaluate for potential use
16 under the pilot program, and, as appropriate, adopt
17 for such use, new and emerging technologies to en-
18 hance the effectiveness, efficiency, and responsive-
19 ness of the Cetacean Desk, including technologies
20 capable of the following:

21 (A) Improving the detection, identification,
22 tracking, or forecasting of large cetacean pres-
23 ence, including through the use of automated,
24 algorithmic, or artificial intelligence-enabled
25 tools.

1 (B) Improving the integration, processing,
2 or dissemination of data from Federal, State,
3 academic, nongovernmental, and public sources
4 in near real time.

5 (C) Enhancing communication with vessel
6 operators to reduce the likelihood of vessel
7 interactions with large cetaceans.

8 (2) EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS AND PRO-
9 GRAMS.—In carrying out this subsection, the Sec-
10 retary shall, to the maximum extent practicable, le-
11 verage existing research partnerships and other Fed-
12 eral programs.

13 (f) CONSULTATIONS.—In carrying out the pilot pro-
14 gram, the Secretary shall consult with Tribal govern-
15 ments, the State California, institutions of higher edu-
16 cation, the maritime industry, ports in the San Francisco
17 Bay region, and nongovernmental organizations.

18 (g) SAN FRANCISCO VESSEL TRAFFIC SERVICE
19 LOCAL VARIANCE AND POLICY.—The Secretary, with the
20 concurrence of the Under Secretary and in consultation
21 with the Captain of the Port for the San Francisco Bay—

22 (1) shall implement local variances, as author-
23 ized by section 70001(c) of title 46, United States
24 Code, to facilitate communication, reporting, and
25 voluntary coordination between vessel operators and

1 the San Francisco Vessel Traffic Service regarding
2 the presence of large cetaceans;

3 (2) shall ensure that any local variances imple-
4 mented under this subsection maintain safe vessel
5 navigation and are consistent with the communica-
6 tion and coordination functions of the San Francisco
7 Vessel Traffic Service; and

8 (3) may enter into cooperative agreements, in
9 accordance with section 70001(d) of title 46, United
10 States Code, with Federal, State, Tribal, and local
11 officials to reduce the likelihood of vessel inter-
12 actions with protected large cetaceans, which may
13 include—

14 (A) communicating marine mammal pro-
15 tection guidance to vessels;

16 (B) training on requirements imposed by
17 local, State, Tribal, and Federal laws and regu-
18 lations and guidelines concerning—

19 (i) vessel buffer zones;

20 (ii) vessel speed;

21 (iii) seasonal no-go zones for vessels;

22 (iv) protected areas, including areas
23 designated as critical habitat, as applicable
24 to marine operations; and

1 (v) any other activities to reduce the
2 direct and indirect impact of vessel traffic
3 on large cetaceans;

4 (C) training to understand, utilize, and
5 communicate large cetacean location data; and

6 (D) training to understand and commu-
7 nicate basic large cetacean detection, identifica-
8 tion, and behavior, including—

9 (i) cues of the presence of large
10 cetaceans such as spouts, water disturb-
11 ances, breaches, or presence of prey;

12 (ii) important feeding, breeding,
13 calving, and rearing habitats that co-occur
14 with areas of high risk of vessel strikes;

15 (iii) seasonal large cetacean migration
16 routes that co-occur with areas of high risk
17 of vessel strikes; and

18 (iv) areas designated as critical habi-
19 tat for large cetaceans.

20 (h) REPORTS REQUIRED.—Not later than one year
21 after the date of enactment of this section, and annually
22 thereafter for the duration of the pilot program, the Com-
23 mandant, in coordination with the Under Secretary and
24 the Administrator of the Maritime Administration, shall

1 submit to the appropriate congressional committees a re-
2 port that—

3 (1) evaluates the functionality, utility, reli-
4 ability, responsiveness, and operational status of the
5 Cetacean Desk, including a quantification of reduc-
6 tions in vessel strikes to large cetaceans as a result
7 of the pilot program;

8 (2) assesses the efficacy of communication be-
9 tween the Cetacean Desk and the maritime industry
10 and provides recommendations for improvements;

11 (3) evaluates the integration and interoper-
12 ability of existing data collection methods, as well as
13 public data, into the Cetacean Desk operations;

14 (4) assesses the efficacy of collaboration and
15 stakeholder engagement with Tribal governments,
16 the State of California, institutions of higher edu-
17 cation, the maritime industry, ports in the San
18 Francisco Bay region, and nongovernmental organi-
19 zations; and

20 (5) evaluates the progress, performance, and
21 implementation of guidance and training procedures
22 for San Francisco Vessel Traffic Service personnel,
23 as required under subsection (f).

24 (i) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

1 (1) The terms “appropriate congressional com-
2 mittees”, “institution of higher education”, “Tribal
3 government”, and “Under Secretary” have the
4 meanings given those terms in section 11301 of the
5 National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year
6 2023 (Public Law 117–263; 16 U.S.C. 1390 note).

7 (2) The term “Cetacean Desk” means the Ceta-
8 cean Desk established by the pilot program.

9 (3) The term “Commandant” means the Com-
10 mandant of the Coast Guard.

11 (4) The term “large cetacean” means all spe-
12 cies within—

13 (A) the suborder Mysticeti;

14 (B) the genera *Physeter*; or

15 (C) the genera *Orcinus*.

16 (5) The term “pilot program” means the pilot
17 program required under subsection (a).

18 (6) The term “Secretary” means the Secretary
19 of the department in which the Coast Guard is oper-
20 ating.