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Public Opinion Research Study: Canadians' Awareness and Understanding of Southern Resident killer whales and Boating Safety

Executive Summary

Prepared for Transport Canada

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey conducted by Phoenix SPI on behalf of Transport Canada. The research study was conducted with 750 Canadians between June 16 and 30, 2021.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre Recherche sur l'opinion publique : connaissances et compréhension de la population canadienne concernant les épaulards résidents du sud et la sécurité nautique.

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Executive Summary

Transport Canada commissioned Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. (Phoenix SPI) to conduct public opinion research with residents of south coastal British Columbia and selected areas of Vancouver Island who use or plan to use recreational watercrafts.

Research purpose and objectives

The main purpose of the research was to explore awareness of Southern Resident killer whale (SRkw) protective and voluntary measures and of boating safety in the southern coastal waters of British Columbia. Specific objectives included: determining the behaviours of those who use recreational watercrafts on the ocean (e.g., frequency of boating, use of life vests and personal flotation devices, etc.), understanding the types of watercrafts used for recreational purposes, measuring awareness of the SRKW protective and voluntary measures, and exploring communication preferences.

Methodology

A 9.5-minute random digit dialling (RDD) telephone survey was administered to 750 adults aged 18 and older who reside in coastal communities located on the south coast of British Columbia and selected areas of Vancouver Island who meet the eligibility criteria for watercraft use. To be classified as a watercraft user, respondents must have done the following at least once in the past 12 months (i.e., June 1, 2020 to May 31, 2021) or plan to do so in the coming 12 months (i.e., July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022): 1) owned, operated, rented, or been a passenger¹ on a recreational vessel, motorized or sail; and/or 2) have (or plan to) paddle boarded, kayaked, or canoed on the ocean during this timeframe.

An overlapping dual-frame (landline and cell phone) sample was used to minimize coverage error. The survey results are generalizable to the population: adult boaters 18+ who reside in south coastal British Columbia and selected areas of Vancouver Island. Specifically, this included the coastal communities between Campbell River and Ucluelet on Vancouver Island, and residents of the Sunshine Coast, the Lower Mainland and Howe Sound. Based on a sample of this size, the overall results can be considered accurate within $\pm 3.6\%$, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error is greater for results pertaining to subgroups of the total sample. Data were weighted to reflect the population in terms of age, gender, and area (with the geographic parameters of the study). For a more complete description of the methodology, refer to the Appendix: 1. [Technical Specifications](#).

Key findings

- ***A little more than half are aware generally that there are protective measures in place for Southern Resident killer whales in BC coastal waters. Awareness is considerably lower when the focus shifted to specific measures.***

¹ This excluded watercraft used for commercial purposes, such as tour boats, ferries, or cruise ships, as well as activities on lakes or rivers. As such, to be a passenger, a respondent needed to have gone out on the water in a watercraft they did not operate (e.g., on a vessel owned or rented by someone for recreational purposes).

- 56% of respondents said they are aware that there are measures in place that protect Southern Resident killer whales in BC's coastal waters. Boat owners, year-round watercraft users, Vancouver Island residents, and those aged 35+ were more likely to be aware of the protective measures.
- Awareness of the specific protective and voluntary measures varied considerably.
 - Respondents were most likely to be aware definitely (51%) or vaguely (20%) of the voluntary measure that boats should reduce speed within 1,000 metres of a killer whale.
 - Following this, close to two-thirds were definitely (37%) or vaguely (26%) aware that watercraft must keep 400 metres from killer whales in all southern BC coastal waters.²
 - Awareness of the voluntary measure that fishing should not take place within 1,000 metres of a killer whale was divided: 49% were vaguely (24%) or definitely (25%) aware and 49% were not aware.
 - The majority of respondents were not aware that whale watching boats cannot be followed nor were they aware of any of the interim sanctuary zones.
- ***Half the target population have used a recreational watercraft in the last year.***
 - 52% of respondents have used a recreational watercraft in the last year. Notably, boat owners were more likely than boat renters and passengers to have been out on the ocean in the last year. The rest (48%) intend to go out on the ocean in a recreational watercraft in the next year, either as a boat owner and operator, renter, or passenger.

Many go out on the ocean as watercraft passengers.

- Among respondents who were out on the ocean this past year, 49% said they went out as a passenger, 41% as a boat owner, and 19% as boat renter. In contrast, 62% of those who plan to go out on the ocean in the next year intend to go as a passenger, 35% as a boat owner, and 14% as a boat renter.
- Taken together, nearly half the survey respondents (47%) were (or plan to be) passengers, 23% were (or plan to be) boat owners/operators, and 20% rented (or plan to rent) a watercraft.

² In the survey, the statement read to respondents suggested that this is mandatory rather than voluntary. This could have affected self-assessed awareness; however, upon review of the data, this does not seem to be the case. Only 1% of respondents said they don't know, and awareness was fairly evenly split between definitely and vaguely.

- ***Power boats and kayaks are the most popular recreational watercrafts among respondents.***
 - Four in 10 (42%) have been out on the ocean in a power boat or motor boat in the last few years, while 33% have been out in a kayak. Those on Central Vancouver Island were more likely than others to have been out in a power boat in recent years, especially compared to those in Metro Vancouver.
- ***Majority always wear a life jacket or personal flotation device.***
 - Eight in 10 (80%) always wear a life jacket or personal flotation device (PFD) when out on the ocean.
 - Boat owners and renters were more likely to say they wear a life jacket or PFD compared to watercraft passengers.
 - Seasonal watercraft users were also more likely to report wearing a life jacket or PFD as compared to year-round boaters.
- ***The internet and boat rental shops are the top two sources of boating safety and regulatory information.***
 - 29% said they find their boating safety information online, while 15% turn to boat rental shops.
 - Boat owners were more likely to say they get their boating safety and regulatory information from boating courses (24%), while renters were more likely to mention boat rental shops (38%) and passengers to point to friends, family and colleagues (16%).
- ***Half listen to the radio or use Facebook daily.***
 - When asked to identify from a list which activities they do on a daily basis, half or more said they listen to the radio (59%) and use Facebook (50%) every day. Daily use of YouTube and Instagram was also widespread (44% and 36%, respectively).

Limitations of the research and use of the research

The survey results will be used by Transport Canada to help inform communications planning, outreach and education activities, and to improve boaters' confidence, awareness and compliance with the voluntary and mandatory measures for the SRKW and associated boating safety regulations. Probability sampling was used; therefore, the results are generalizable to the target population. The only limitation are smaller sample sizes when it comes to analyzing the results for sub-groups of the population.

Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of Phoenix Strategic Perspectives that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the *Communications Policy* of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not contain any reference to electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leader.



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Contract Value

The contract value was \$63,897.05 (HST included).