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Whales Initiative: Canadians' Awareness and Understanding of Southern Resident killer whales and Boating Safety

Executive Summary

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

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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 1,003 Canadians between January 26 and March 20, 2022.

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 conduct a follow-up study to the one conducted in 2021 on the awareness of Southern Resident killer whale (SRKW) mandatory and voluntary protective measures and of boating safety in the southern coastal waters of British Columbia. Specific objectives included measuring the awareness of Transport Canada's efforts to protect the SRKW, measuring the awareness and recall of the related advertising campaign, and determining the use of depth finder technology since reducing the impact of underwater noise is one of the goals of the Whales Initiative.

Methodology

An 11-minute random digit dialling (RDD) telephone survey was administered to 1,003 adults aged 18 and older who reside in coastal communities on the south coast of British Columbia and selected areas of Vancouver Island and who meet the eligibility criteria for boating. The fieldwork was conducted January 26 and March 20, 2022. For the purposes of this research, to be classified as a boater, adults must have done the following at least once in the previous 12 months or plan to do so in the coming 12 months:

- 1) own, operate, rent, or be a passenger on a recreational vessel, motorized or sail; and/or
- 2) paddle board, kayak, or canoe on the ocean during this timeframe.

Based on a sample of this size, the overall results can be considered accurate within $\pm 3.1\%$, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error is greater for results pertaining to subgroups of the full 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

More than half are aware there are measures in place to protect Southern Resident killer whales in BC coastal waters. Awareness is considerably lower when the focus is on specific measures.

There was relatively widespread awareness (60%) of protective measures in place to protect Southern Resident killer whales in BC coastal waters (a slight increase from 2021, when 56% said they were aware). 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 mandatory and voluntary protective measures varied considerably. In total, 73% said they were aware (47% definitely, 25% somewhat) of the measure that boats should reduce speed within 1,000 metres of a killer whale. Following this, close to six in 10 were definitely (35%) or somewhat (24%) aware that watercraft must keep 400 metres from killer whales in all

southern BC coastal waters. Awareness of the voluntary measure that fishing should not take place within 1,000 metres of a killer whale was divided: 46% were somewhat (20%) or definitely (26%) aware and 53% were not aware. The majority of respondents were not aware that whale watching boats should not be followed nor were they aware of any of the interim sanctuary zones.

Two-thirds have used a recreational watercraft in the last year. Many go out on the ocean as watercraft passengers.

Two-thirds 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 (34%) 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.

Among respondents who were out on the ocean this past year, 42% said they went out as a passenger, 32% as a boat owner, and 19% as boat renter. In contrast, 59% of those who plan to go out on the ocean in the next year intend to go as a passenger, 9% as a boat owner, and 22% as a boat renter. Taken together, nearly half the survey respondents (48%) were (or plan to be) passengers, 24% were (or plan to be) boat owners/operators, and 20% rented (or plan to rent) a watercraft.

Power boats and kayaks – most common watercrafts among respondents. More than one-third use a depth finder. Navigational purposes, fishing are the top reasons for using a depth finder.

Approximately four in 10 (43%) have been out on the ocean in a power boat in the last few years, while 31% have been out in a kayak. A range of other watercraft were used or will be used by 14% or fewer respondents. Residents of the Sunshine Coast and 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.

Two in five (37%) use a depth finder when out on the ocean. Boat owners and passengers were more likely to say they use a depth finder compared to watercraft renters. Powerboat users and year-round watercraft users were also more likely to report using a depth finder. Just over two-thirds (68%) who use a depth finder use it for navigational purposes, while 57% use it for fishing. Not surprisingly, boat owners were more likely than passengers to use a depth finder for navigation.

Large majority wear or would wear life jacket or PFD when boating.

In total, 78% always wear or plan to 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. Those who go out in kayaks were also more likely to report wearing a life jacket or PFD.

Google – top source for boating safety and regulatory information.

The source for obtaining boating safety and regulatory information used most often by respondents was Google (16%). Following this, 14% turn to friends, family, and colleagues, while almost as many (13%) reported getting this type of information from boat rental shops. Nine percent pointed to Transport Canada and the internet as their main sources of their boating safety and regulatory information. Nine percent of those surveyed said they have never needed to look for this type of information. Boat owners were more likely to say they get their boating safety and regulatory

information from the internet (24%), while renters were more likely to mention boat rental shops (44%) and passengers to point to friends, family, and colleagues (17%).

Roughly half say they recall an ad campaign. Among those who do, one-third recall seeing an ad on TV, with multiple other sources also cited with some frequency. "Help keep killer whales safe" was the message referred to by the plurality of respondents.

Just under half (47%) recalled hearing or seeing an advertisement about protecting the killer whales in BC coastal waters by staying away from them when boating. Boat owners and year-round watercraft users were most likely to recall seeing or hearing an advertisement. Vancouver Island residents were also more likely to recall hearing or seeing an advertisement.

Of those who recall seeing or hearing any advertisement about protecting killer whales in BC coastal waters (n=531), one-third (32%) said they recall seeing an advertisement on television.¹ Just under one-quarter said they recall the advertisement from social media or from the radio (23%, respectively). Respondents from Metro Vancouver and Central Vancouver Island were more likely to say they recall the ad on television. Boat owners were more likely to recall seeing an advertisement on a physical poster, sign, or pamphlet, while passengers were more likely to recall the ad on television.

Twenty-eight percent of those who recalled an ad, said the main message of the ad was "help keep killer whales safe". This was followed by "slow down and stay away if you see a whale", mentioned by 24%. Additionally, 19% said they recall the message of "Stay 400 metres away from killer whales." Boat owners were most likely to recall a message about "stay 400 metres away from killer whales."

Limitations and Use of the Research

Probability sampling was used. The results, therefore, 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. 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 protective measures for the SRKW and associated boating safety regulations.

Contract Value

The contract value was \$84,709.25 (HST included).

¹ Note: the ad campaign did not air on television. Despite this, television was the medium or source of recall mentioned by the single largest proportion of respondents.

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