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Whales Initiative: Canadians' Awareness and Understanding of Southern Resident Killer Whales

Executive Summary

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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 (BC) 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 second follow-up survey to the baseline which was conducted in 2021 on the awareness of Southern Resident killer whale (SRKW) mandatory and voluntary protective measures in the southern coastal waters of BC. Specific objectives of this year's survey included measuring public awareness of Transport Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada's efforts to protect the SRKW; measuring public awareness of the advertising campaign, as reducing threats to their survival is one of the goals of the Whales Initiative; and exploring differences over time in awareness levels.

Methodology

An 11-minute random digit dialling (RDD) telephone survey was administered to 1,059 adults aged 18 and older who reside in coastal communities on the south coast of BC and selected areas of Vancouver Island and who met the eligibility criteria for boating. 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.

The fieldwork was conducted between January 26 and February 29, 2024. 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 Appendix: Technical Specifications.

Key Findings

Awareness that there are measures in place to protect Southern Resident killer whales in BC coastal waters continues to increase, and nine in 10 respondents said they were aware of at least one of the specific voluntary and mandatory measures.

Awareness of measures to protect Southern Resident killer whales in BC coastal waters has been steadily increasing since 2021, with 64% being aware of these measures in 2024 compared to 56% when the baseline survey was conducted in 2021. While awareness of the specific mandatory and voluntary protective measures varied considerably, nine in 10 (91%) coastal BC residents who went out on the ocean in the last 12 months (or who plan to in the coming year) are aware of at least one of the protective measures.

Awareness was highest for the following mandatory and voluntary measures: watercraft must keep 400 metres from killer whales and not be positioned in the path of killer whales (72% aware, including 45% who were definitely aware) and boats should reduce speed when within 1,000 metres of a killer whale (70% aware, including 48% who were definitely aware). Respondents were least likely to be aware of the interim sanctuary zones in key portions of Southern Resident killer

whale foraging areas: 23% were aware of the interim sanctuary zone off the northern part of Pender Island and 21% were aware of the interim sanctuary zone off parts of Saturna Island.

Half of surveyed BC coastal residents recalled at least one of the three Transport Canada advertisements about protecting the killer whales in BC coastal waters.

Recall of Transport Canada's advertisements about protecting the killer whales in BC coastal waters was moderate, with half (51%) of those surveyed recalling at least one of the three digital ads that made up the campaign. Recall was highest for "protecting killer whales by staying away from them when boating", with 44% saying they had seen or heard this ad. Notably, the protective measure most respondents were aware of was keeping 400 metres from killer whales.

Following the ad about avoiding the SRKW, approximately one-third (30%) recalled seeing or hearing an ad about protecting killer whales in BC coastal waters by "ensuring you do not boat in restricted areas", while one-quarter (24%) recalled an ad about "ensuring you do not fish for salmon within closures".

Of those who recalled seeing or hearing an advertisement about protecting killer whales in BC coastal waters, 20% said the main message of the ad was "Slow down and stay away if you see a whale", 19% said it was "Help keep killer whales safe", and 17% recalled the instruction to "Stay 400 meters away from killer whales". The single largest proportion of respondents could not recall anything specific about the advertisements (32%), while an additional 10% mentioned that they were generally aware of, and knowledgeable about, the protective measures (without pointing to anything specific about the ads).

Turning to communications, 'Orca' continues to be the preferred term of reference for killer whales. YouTube and AM/FM radio, followed by Facebook, are the media many said they use every day.

Close to six in 10 (58%) said they use the term 'Orca' most often to refer to killer whales (compared to 53% in 2021). In contrast, 36% said they mainly use the term 'killer whale'. When asked to identify from a list of activities what they typically do on a daily basis, many said they use YouTube (57%; up from 47% in 2022), listen to AM/FM radio (53%; unchanged compared to 2022), or use Facebook (49%; unchanged compared to 2022) every day. Daily use of Instagram (42%; up from 38% in 2022) and Spotify (40%; up from 30% in 2022) was also relatively widespread among survey respondents.

Boating habits of coastal BC residents are similar to previous years: power boats and kayaks are the common watercrafts used by respondents and the frequency of boating in a typical year varies considerably.

Forty-three percent (43%) of survey respondents have been out on the ocean in a power boat in the last few years and approximately one-third (32%) have been out on the ocean in a kayak (inflatable or hard shell). Power boats and kayaks also topped the list of the types of recreational watercrafts typically used by coastal BC residents in the baseline survey (2021) and the follow-up survey (2022).

Nearly two-thirds (63%) typically go out in a watercraft fewer than 10 times a year. This includes 31% who go out once (15%) or twice (16%) in a typical year. At the other end of the spectrum, approximately one-quarter (23%) are out on the ocean for recreational purposes 10 or more times

in a typical year. In the baseline survey, one-third (34%) reported going out on the ocean in a watercraft once or twice in a typical year and one-quarter (24%) said they tended to do so 10 or more times.

Limitations and Use of the Research

Probability sampling was used. The results, therefore, are generalizable to the target population. The only limitation is 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, as well as 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 \$99,238.86 (HST included).

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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