

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 14 (Hart, et al.)

As Amended August 29, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Codifies and allows for the expansion and implementation of the Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies (PBWBS) Program, a voluntary vessel speed reduction (VSR) and sustainable shipping program off the California coast designed to reduce whale strikes and air pollution.

Senate Amendments

Strike a provision that required that if any conflicts with existing port-related vessel speed reduction programs cannot be resolved, the PBWBS Program shall exclude the ocean territory within 40 nautical miles of the affected port.

COMMENTS

The main transport mode for global trade is ocean shipping: around 90% of traded goods are carried by oceangoing ships. As demand for global freight increases, maritime trade volumes are expected to triple by 2050. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, shipping represents 2.9% of total greenhouse gas emissions and is responsible for approximately 30% of total global nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions. NOx are a family of poisonous, highly reactive gases that form when fuel is burned at high temperatures. NOx are air pollutants by themselves, and NOx react in the atmosphere to produce acid rain and smog.

The PBWBS program is a voluntary VSR program along the coast of California that incentivizes companies to incorporate sustainable shipping practices across their global supply chain. The existing PBWBS Program, formed by the Santa Barbara Air Pollution Control District (Santa Barbara County APCD) and Ventura County Air Pollution Control District (Ventura County APCD), has been operating in Southern California since 2014, expanded to the San Francisco Bay area in 2017, and now includes coordination between the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (Bay Area AQMD), Monterey Bay Air Resources District, the San Luis Obispo County Air Pollution Control District, the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, NOAA, and Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory. By creating seasonal and predictable slow speed zones, this program is intended to protect endangered whales, reduce fuel use and regional greenhouse gas emissions, and improve air quality and human health outcomes.

Since 2014, the existing PBWBS Program has avoided emissions of over 200,000 metric tons of regional greenhouse gas emissions, about 5,900 tons of NOx emissions, about 35 tons of toxic diesel particulate matter emissions, and resulted in an estimated 50% decrease in whale strikes in the affected areas.

The Ocean Protection Council (OPC), in its 2020–2025 Strategic Plan, identified developing a statewide whale and sea turtle protection plan by 2022 with a target of zero mortality as a priority. To accomplish this goal, the OPC notes the following under Objective 3.3, Target 3.3.5: "With [the California Air Resources Board], coastal air districts, ports, and the National Marine Sanctuary Program, develop a permanent, statewide, Vessel Speed Reduction Program that

incentivizes the shipping industry to prevent whale strikes, reduce coastal air pollution, and minimize marine noise pollution."

This bill effectively codifies this element of the OPC strategic plan, but without the engagement of the CARB or necessarily the engagement of OPC. OPC recently released a draft of the 2026–2030 Strategic Plan which includes Target 4.3.2, "By 2026, identify priority actions to reduce whale vulnerability to ship strikes, including expansion of existing vessel speed reduction programs." This bill will help accomplish that new target.

According to the Author

"The Santa Barbara voluntary vessel speed reduction program [existing program] is a prime example of what happens when we prioritize public health, protect the marine ecosystem, and showcase the beneficial partnership between shipping companies, public health agencies, marine sanctuaries, and environmental organizations. [This bill] provides participating companies with the official endorsement of the State of California for their efforts to reduce emissions and protect whales. This invaluable state-level recognition will increase visibility, interest and support for conservation efforts along the California coast."

Arguments in Support

A varied collection of organizations write in support of this bill citing the benefits from the existing program for both marine mammals and air quality for coastal communities. This bill is sponsored by Bay Area AQMD, Santa Barbara County APCD, and Ventura County APCD, which all write in support and indicate their commitment to reducing air pollution. Ventura County APCD writes, "These emissions negatively affect the public health of coastal communities and contribute to ground-level ozone or smog formation in Ventura County, which is classified as a serious nonattainment area for the 2015 National Ambient Air Quality Standard for ozone and does not meet California's health-based ozone standard. Because ocean-going vessels are not subject to any state or federal engine requirements that can guarantee emission reductions, voluntary vessel speed reduction is a simple act that can yield public health and marine ecosystem benefits."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, the version that passed the Assembly would have resulted in the following fiscal impact:

- 1) Minor and absorbable costs to OPC for participating as a stakeholder and in an advisory capacity to the PBWBS Program, which is a partnership between federal and local government agencies, foundations, and nonprofits.
- 2) The provisions related to local air districts do not constitute a state-mandated local program. The bill language explicitly states that "the program and each component of the [PBWBS] Program are based upon voluntary actions initiated by entities pursuant to this section."

The Senate Appropriations Committee did not hear this bill and, instead, reported it to the Senate Floor pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8; indicating this bill does not appropriate money, does not

result in significant state costs or require the appropriation of funds, and will cause no significant reduction in revenues.

VOTES:

ASM WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE: 13-0-0

YES: Papan, Jeff Gonzalez, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bennett, Boerner, Caloza, Hart, Macedo, Celeste Rodriguez, Rogers, Tangipa

ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 14-0-0

YES: Bryan, Alanis, Connolly, Ellis, Flora, Garcia, Haney, Hoover, Kalra, Muratsuchi, Pellerin, Schultz, Wicks, Zbur

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Sanchez, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 76-0-3

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

ABS, ABST OR NV: Chen, McKinnor, Papan

SENATE FLOOR: 35-0-5

YES: Allen, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Alvarado-Gil, Becker, Padilla, Reyes, Umberg

UPDATED

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