

MONTHLY REPORT for ICS

March 2026

NOTE TO THE READER: Reference to the Federal Register may be found at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=FR>.

References to legislation may be found at <https://www.congress.gov> at the center of the page.

CSA Jones Act Waiver Response

Letters to the [Secretary of Homeland Security](#) and [Secretary of War](#) were submitted regarding the Administration's recent decision to issue a 60-day Jones Act waiver in response to fuel price volatility. A similar letter was also sent to the Administrator of MARAD.

CSA remains a supporter of the Jones Act as currently written. In our communication to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), we highlighted several key concerns:

- **Impact on Investment:** Temporary waivers introduce uncertainty into the maritime framework, risking the stability essential for national security and a skilled American workforce.
- **Alignment with National Policy:** We emphasized that increasing reliance on foreign-flag vessels runs counter to the objectives of the Administration's own Maritime Action Plan, which seeks to reduce strategic vulnerabilities in our supply chains.
- **Limited Effectiveness:** Historical data suggests these waivers have only short-lived impacts on fuel prices while potentially eroding the domestic industrial base.

Rather than relying on waivers, CSA has urged the government to focus on measures that enhance domestic capacity. To ensure vessel operations are not impacted, we specifically recommended that the Coast Guard adopt flexible policies similar to those used during previous national emergencies, such as:

- Deferred vessel inspections.
- Remote inspection techniques to ensure U.S. vessels maintain uninterrupted operating schedules

CSA will continue to monitor the implementation of the Jones Act waiver and stands ready to provide additional information or support to federal decision-makers.

**California Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program – 2026 Program
Expansion and Awards Criteria Adjustments**

It should be recalled that the State of California implemented a voluntary program, Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program, a number of years ago which focused on the air emissions reductions and mitigation of whale ship strikes associated with implementation of vessel speed restrictions (VSRs) in coastal areas off of certain California ports. California Assembly Bill AB 14 was passed in the Fall of 2025 and included a geographic expansion of the program off the entire California Coast out to 55 nautical miles (proposed 2027 program would extend to 70 nautical miles). The program is open to all vessels 300 GT and larger with participating vessels asked to transit covered waters at 10 knots or less during the program dates. The following vessels sectors are encouraged to enroll in the program which include container ships, car carriers, bulk, general cargo, and tank vessels. Added this year are cruise lines. While the 2026 program was proposed to commence on 1 April 2026, industry worked with both California and federal agencies urging a delay in implementation of the 2026 program to the 2027 season due to time constraints for participants to implement the proposed changes including adjustments to vessel operations and voyage planning. Regrettably, these officials decided to implement the program starting on 22 April and running through December 31, 2026.

The 2026 program structure will be similar to the 2025 program including press and public relations incentives for participation based on the percent distance traveled by all vessels in a fleet at 10 knots or less. Participation requires enrollment by a shipping company. Full details of the 2026 program can be found at <https://bluewhalesblueskies.org/operators/> including the full program announcement, participation agreement, zone files, whale sightings report by transit form and other additional details.

CSA COMMENTS, OBSERVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Industry expressed concerns with the state and federal regulators that an announcement which provides less than a month notice for a program with significant changes in the geographic applicability is insufficient for most vessel owners to make the necessary changes in vessel operations, scheduling, and voyage routing changes necessary to implement the new program.
- The value of this voluntary program is the fact that it has realized a 65-70% compliance rate by participating companies across all vessel types and provides important environmental benefits relative to reduction of air emissions, underwater radiated noise and mitigation of whale ship strikes in the 2025 covered areas off San Francisco/Monterrey and the Southern California port complexes while at the same time providing incentives for participation via the multi-level awards criteria.

- Note that shipping companies who wish to participate must enroll in the program prior to 22 April to be eligible to the upcoming 2026 program which starts on 22 April 2026.
- Implementation of the new program which now extends offshore the entire state of California without sufficient time for vessels to comply runs the risk of program devaluation through lower compliance rates due solely to insufficient time for vessels to properly plan for transits in the much-expanded geographical area.
- With that said, shipping companies are urged to participate where practical noting that even if an enrolled company is unable to meet the minimum program criteria (lowest awards level is 30%), there is no penalty other than the positive press and public relations incentives will not be awarded.
- The 2026 program geographic application is the entire coast off California extending approximately to 55 nautical miles at its maximum distance from the baseline. We have been informed that the 2027 program will propose an extended geographic application extending approximately 70 nautical miles at its maximum distance from the baseline with the 2027 program beginning on 1 April 2027 and extending through 31 December 2027. More information on the 2027 proposed program will follow under separate cover.

[VSR 2026 - CSA Analysis](#)
[VSR 2026 - VSR Zone Map](#)
[VSR 2026 - Program Agreement](#)
[VSR 2026 - Whale Sighting Form](#)

**California Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program – 2026 Program
Expansion and Awards Criteria Adjustments – Update on
Considerations for Future Participation**

- As noted above, industry expressed concerns with the state and federal regulators that an announcement which provides less than a month notice for a program with significant changes in the geographic applicability is insufficient for most vessel owners to make the necessary changes in vessel operations, scheduling and voyage routing changes necessary to implement the new program.
- As the result of intra-industry discussions, companies currently participating are considering termination of their respective contracts for the 2026 season based on a recommendation made by the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association (PMSA). Given that the value of this program is the high level of

voluntary participation and if significant resignations from the program occur for the 2026 season, it will send a strong signal to the agencies that better and more timely collaboration with industry is necessary to result in the level of success in past years.

- The 3-year participation contracts note that the carrier already agrees to accept these and any other changes. However, there is a termination clause (text in **BOLD below**). To terminate, a company would simply submit a letter, but as enrollment would cease 20 days following receipt, **this must be done by April 2nd** due to the program start date of April 22nd. If your most recent agreement was signed in 2023, you would not need to do anything as the contract will have expired.
- PMSA notes that their members are speaking internally and while they expect not all will follow suit and terminate their contract, terminations from a few participants will send a strong message and hopefully force the agencies to amend or fully reverse the new and untimely provisions for the 2026 program.
- It is also worth noting that the state legislator that introduced and passed the changes to the new voluntary program is already discussing the possibility of making the program mandatory, so it is important than any changes are subject to an impacts analysis by industry before implementation.

Section 5: "The Company is deemed to accept such changes, modifications or amendments unless the Company provides the Program with written notice to the contrary in writing within 20 days of the date of the notice of such amendments and requests termination of this Agreement"

The Company may terminate this Agreement after 30 days from the Effective Date by providing written notice to the Program [...] of its intent to terminate. This Agreement and the Company's enrollment in the Program shall terminate 20 days after the Program's receipt of the Company's written notice to terminate.

NOAA - North Atlantic Right Whale Speed Reduction Rule – ANPRM

A copy of the Federal Register notice may be viewed at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/03/04/2026-04260/advance-notice-of-proposed-rulemaking-to-amend-the-north-atlantic-right-whale-vessel-strike>

NOAA has published an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking to amend the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction Rule (the speed reduction rule). A copy of our analysis is attached via the link below including recommendations for inclusion in CSA's comments. Comments are due by June 2, 2026. Any comments may be sent to kmetcalf@csashipping.org. We will also discuss this issue at your upcoming meetings.

[Analysis - North Atlantic Right Whale Speed Reduction Rule - ANPRM](#)

US Maritime Security Advisories, Alerts and Piracy Reports

U.S. Maritime Security Advisory 2026-005

[2026-006-Houthi Attacks on Commercial Vessels](#)

U.S. Maritime Security Advisory 2026-005

[2026-005-Black Sea and Sea of Azov-Military Combat Operations](#)

U.S. Maritime Security Advisory 2026-004

[2026-004-Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman-Iranian Attacks on Commercial Vessels](#)

U.S. Maritime Security Alert 2026-0001B

[2026-0001B-Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, and Arabian Sea-Military Operations and Potential Retaliatory Strikes by Iranian Forces and Proxy Forces](#)

Worldwide Threat to Shipping

[WTS April 1, 2026](#) (Current Issue)

[WTS March 25, 2026](#)
