



December 5, 2020

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
PO Box 43200
Olympia, Washington 98504-3200

Re: Commercial Whale Watching Draft Rules

Dear WA Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed rules for commercial whale watching of Southern Resident killer whales.

PCC Community Markets is a community-owned, co-operative food market that began as a food-buying club of 15 Seattle families in 1953. Today, we have more than 82,000 active member-owners and 15 stores in seven cities, generating over \$300 million in annual sales — making PCC the largest consumer-owned and operated grocer in the United States. We are a triple bottom line organization, advocating for consumers and the community in everything we do.

As a Pacific Northwest retailer committed to a triple-bottom line, we are deeply committed to ecological conservation and protecting the iconic species of the region. PCC has already taken a number of steps to support the survival of the Southern Residents, including developing our own PCC Chinook Sourcing Standard (a place-based Chinook salmon sourcing standard aimed at minimizing impacts on Southern Resident prey availability and Chinook stocks), partnering with Salmon-Safe certified farms, providing financial support to local organizations working to protect and repair marine ecosystems, and educating our consumers and public on the issues, science, and potential solutions to the issues facing the Southern Residents and other iconic aquatic species of our region.

It is through these efforts and the research of our partners at the National Fisheries Conservation Center in developing the PCC Chinook Sourcing Standard that we recognize stronger sourcing standards can only do so much. We must take action to address the multiple threats facing the Southern Residents and the marine environment. This is why PCC supported the passage of SB 5577 and supports the statute's implementing regulations that will bring more consistency and oversight to the whale watching industry and hopefully reduce negative impacts on the Southern Resident population.

Establishing stricter whale watching seasons, setting limits on the number of boats that can be in the vicinity of whales, and requiring better tracking and log procedures for vessels are all important steps in mitigating the impact of whale watching on the Southern Residents. **Because we believe in establishing the strongest standards possible concerning these proposed categories of regulation, we are in favor of Option A of the proposed rule.**



We do, however, believe that both the law and existing science would allow WDFW to incorporate even stronger protections. For example, there is solid research that shows that boats traveling at faster speeds produce more noise that disrupts Southern Residents and other marine mammals.¹ Setting speed limits for vessels would add another layer of protection beyond simply limiting the number of boats in the vicinity of the whales. While the industry may voluntarily follow recommendations for lower speeds around whales, we believe it would be important to establish official rules as part of the regulations to help ensure all boats are following the same practices.

We also recognize that this is only the first step in establishing better protections for the Southern Residents. As you are aware, WDFW must convene a scientific panel to evaluate best scientific practices and continue to adaptively manage the program using the most current and best science available. In this next phase, we would encourage WDFW to consider additional protections that will likely be recommended by the scientific panel.

We would like to thank the WDFW for their work on moving forward these important regulations and we look forward to future efforts to continually improve these protections for the Southern Residents.

Sincerely,

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¹ Juliana Houghton et al., “The Relationship between Vessel Traffic and Noise Levels Received by Killer Whales (Orcinus Orca),” *PLoS ONE* 10, no. 12 (December 2, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0140119>.