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BC FERRIES SUPPORTS WHALE RESEARCH AT GALIANO ISLAND Thermal imaging cameras installed for a one-year pilot project

VICTORIA - Scientists are getting a better look at whales as they transit near Galiano Island thanks to thermal imaging cameras installed at BC Ferries' Sturdies Bay terminal on Galiano Island. The cameras are active around-the-clock for a year-long pilot project that aims to improve the overall detection of whales in the Salish Sea, even at night.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is the primary funder and the pilot is being done in collaboration with the University of Erlangen in Germany and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts. The goal of the project is to determine if automated thermal imaging technology, when used in combination with visual and acoustic detection, can be a reliable and effective way to detect whales.

"As a stakeholder in the Salish Sea, BC Ferries has a responsibility to understand how our activities may affect marine mammals in general and the Southern Resident Killer Whales in particular," said Mark Collins, BC Ferries' President & CEO. "Our deck crews are always on the lookout for marine mammals, and we voluntarily report sightings to the B.C. Cetacean Sightings Network to help researchers gather information. We believe it is important to support research projects such as this one, as the marine community in general will benefit from these findings."

Installed at Sturdies Bay in June, the cameras use temperature data to differentiate between marine mammals, ships and the surrounding water, even at night. Thermal imaging cameras are also in place near the international shipping lane in Boundary Pass, which separates the Southern Gulf Islands in British Columbia from the San Juan Islands in Washington State.

If the pilot is successful, the system could be used to alert ships to the presence of marine mammals, such as endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW) and humpbacks, in narrow waterways in the Salish Sea, and identify high-risk areas so mariners can make real-time decisions to slow down or use avoidance tactics when whales are present.

"Our crews have standing permission to deviate away from whales at the captain's command when safe to do so. Vessels can also slow down, if deviation is not possible in confined waters," adds Collins. "We are committed to working with scientists and whale researchers to identify new ways we can operate our ships to protect whales, while still meeting our obligations to the communities we serve."

BC Ferries is involved in a variety of initiatives that support whale research. Earlier this year, the company co-developed the [Whales in our Waters](#) tutorial with Vancouver Fraser Port Authority and Ocean Wise. The free tutorial for mariners builds awareness of local whale species and how to identify them and provides navigational strategies to reduce potential interactions between ships and whales in B.C. waters.

BC Ferries has also been a participant in the Port of Vancouver Enhancing Cetacean Habitat and Observation (ECHO) program since 2014. The ECHO program aims to better understand and manage the impact of shipping activities on at-risk whales in the region.

Since 2015, the company's Environment group has been working with Green Marine Underwater Noise Working Group to develop performance indicators around underwater noise for the industry members participating in the environmental certification program.

To learn more about BC Ferries' long-term environmental strategies, see our [Clean Technology Adoption Plan](#) and [Underwater Radiated Noise Mitigation Plan](#).

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