

[Date]

The Honourable Joanne Thompson
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
Government of Canada

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Dear Minister,

I am writing to respectfully urge you to provide stable annual funding for the continued population monitoring and census of Northern Resident killer whales.

For more than five decades, Northern Resident killer whales have been monitored through annual government funded photo-identification surveys, creating what is widely recognized as the longest continuous population-level dataset for any wild cetacean in the world. Since 1972, researchers have documented every individual whale, their family relationships, births, deaths, movements, and population trends. This remarkable record has formed the foundation of hundreds of scientific publications and has informed conservation and management decisions for generations.

While the Nature Legacy funds have recently been renewed under *A Force of Nature: Canada's Strategy to Protect Nature*, discussions are currently underway to realign funding priorities in accordance with the new government's policies and directives. It is within this broader context that uncertainty has emerged regarding the continued support for long-standing monitoring initiatives. As a result, there is growing concern about the continuity of funding for the NRKW census, and consequently, about the future of this critical long-term dataset.

Today, the Northern Resident population numbers approximately 375 individuals and ranges throughout the coastal waters of British Columbia, Washington State, and southeastern Alaska. These whales live in close-knit family groups, possess sophisticated communication systems, and represent one of the most intensively studied wildlife populations on Earth. They are also listed as Threatened under Canada's Species at Risk Act and continue to face significant challenges, including reduced Chinook salmon availability, vessel disturbance, contaminants, entanglement, vessel strikes, and other human-caused impacts.

The annual census of Northern Resident killer whales provides the information necessary to understand whether conservation measures are working. It allows scientists and managers to track population growth, survival, reproductive success, health trends, habitat use, and emerging threats. Without this monitoring, it becomes increasingly difficult to assess the effectiveness of government investments in whale conservation and salmon recovery, or to identify and respond quickly to changes in population health.

The value of this dataset extends far beyond Northern Residents alone. These whales serve as an important indicator of the health of Canada's coastal marine ecosystems and provide critical context for the management and recovery of other at-risk populations, including Southern Resident killer whales. Their continued monitoring helps ensure that conservation decisions are based on evidence rather than assumptions.

If annual census efforts are reduced or discontinued, Canada risks breaking a globally unprecedented 53-year record of continuous knowledge. Once lost, that continuity cannot be recreated because absences of data reduce the efficacy of population models in accurately detecting trends in abundance. Our ability to identify emerging threats, evaluate conservation outcomes, and understand how environmental change affects Northern Residents over time also disappears. The loss would be felt not only by researchers but also by governments, Indigenous communities, conservation organizations, coastal businesses, and future generations of Canadians.

Importantly, maintaining this program requires only a modest investment. At less than \$250,000 annually, the cost of sustaining this critical monitoring effort is small compared with the scientific, conservation, educational, and cultural benefits it provides. Few government investments deliver such an exceptional return in terms of long-term knowledge, accountability, and conservation value.

Northern Resident killer whales are a symbol of Canada's Pacific coast and of the possibility for humans and whales to coexist under informed and effective management. Their story has inspired people around the world and helped shape modern whale conservation. Continued annual monitoring is essential to ensuring that this success story continues.

I respectfully ask that your government commit to stable annual funding for the Northern Resident killer whale census and monitoring program so that this irreplaceable scientific record can continue uninterrupted for future generations.

Thank you for your consideration and for your ongoing commitment to protecting Canada's marine ecosystems.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[City, Province]