

To RBAW Members:

Earlier this month, we received a request that recreational boaters take an official “pledge” to give additional distance to Southern Resident Orca Whales in the Salish Sea and including waters between and around the San Juan Islands. The WEC is being joined in this request by several other environmental organizations. We have attached for you a copy of the letters to RBAW and Yacht Clubs, a News Release, and a “Give Orcas Space” graphic that is part of the ‘Take the Pledge’ campaign - [HERE](#).

At the heart of the “pledge” would be a commitment to stay at least 1,000 yards (1/2 nautical mile) away from the Southern Resident Orcas, especially now that three of the whales are pregnant and carrying calves. We wanted to provide to you this information on the ‘Take the Pledge’ request, as well as some background on what we at RBAW believe and have tried to do in respecting the Orca population and the health of our marine environment.

As you review this ‘Take the Pledge’ request, know that there is an updated statute on recreational boating and commercial whale watching distancing from Southern Orcas, collaboratively developed and agreed to in the 2018 Legislature. We’ve provided more detail about that law below. We also have checked with other organizations and with Ports, and while this request has not yet been widely received or is viewed with concerns. We felt it was important enough to share with our membership as we at RBAW believe strongly in protecting Southern Resident Orcas (and all whales), and in maintaining a respectful distance from them.

During the 2018 Session of the Washington State Legislature, RBAW worked very hard with the Governor’s Office and other stakeholders on the passage of **Second Substitute Senate Bill 5577 (2SSB 5577)**, which requires that boaters observe new 300-yard minimum distances from Orcas – or 400 yards if a vessel is behind the Orcas. Prior law required a flat 200-yard buffer. **2SSB 5577** also established a 7-knot go-slow zone within one-half nautical mile of the Southern Resident Orcas. Links to the as-enacted bill and final bill report for **2SSB 5577**, as well as information on the “Be Whale Wise” program we refer to below, are at the end of this document.

- <http://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5577-S2.SL.pdf?q=20200902133229>
- <http://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bill%20Reports/Senate/5577-S2%20SBR%20HA%2019.pdf?q=20200902133229>

Since 2018, we also have been actively engaged with a “Be Whale Wise” educational effort spearheaded by Washington State Parks, our colleagues at NMTA, and others – you’ve no doubt seen the stickers and observed them at the boat shows.

In closing, we are sending you this information on the ‘Take the Pledge’ request because we believe we have a due-diligence obligation to keep you aware of and educated on issues that affect you as recreational boaters. We encourage you to take the actions you believe will be most effective in protecting these awesome creatures and the waters they call home.

If you have any questions about this pledge request, or would like to discuss it further, please don’t hesitate to contact any of us, or an RBAW Board Member that represents your club, or our state lobbyist Doug Levy (Doug@outcomesbylevy.onmicrosoft.com).

Thank you for your time and attention.
RBAW