

FACT SHEET

Conserving Marine Wildlife

Equinor is strongly committed to safeguarding the marine environment in which we operate as we work to responsibly develop enough renewable energy to power over 2 million New York homes. Equinor and our peers in the offshore wind industry do more to carefully track and monitor the marine environment for the presence of whales than any other industry; you can learn about some of the measures we take to protect marine life in this fact sheet.

What's causing recent whale stranding events?

Since December 2022, 23 dead whales have washed ashore along the East Coast, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Most have been humpback whales, and post-mortem examinations point to ship strikes as the likely cause of many of the deaths.

Thanks in part to efforts to clean waters and a 1985 ban on hunting, the humpback whale population has increased, and warmer oceans caused by climate change have altered the migration and feeding patterns of whales and their prey, often bringing whales closer to shore.

Adding to this, increases in online shopping since the pandemic created a surge in cargo shipments, making New York and New Jersey ports the nation's busiest in [2022](#).¹ Merchandise is now shipped on larger vessels that cannot easily maneuver away from whales. The combination of increased shipping traffic and larger whale populations translate into higher risk for ship strikes.²

Offshore Wind Industry vessels account for **less than 2% of tracked marine traffic** from North Carolina to Southern New England. In 2021, the total number of Empire Wind offshore survey vessels was 13, while at the same time almost 20,000 other vessels were present in the area.

What do the experts say?

The NOAA and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) have stated that there are no ties between recent whale deaths and offshore wind development:

- According to the Marine Mammals Commission, [40 percent of whales stranded](#)³ over Winter 2022-2023 that could be examined (some were inaccessible floating at sea) showed evidence of ship strike or fishing gear entanglement. Although these strandings have generated media interest and public scrutiny, humpback whale strandings are not new, nor are they unique to the U.S. East Coast.

“I want to be unambiguous: There is no information supporting that any of the equipment used in support of offshore wind development could directly lead to the death of a whale,” said the Deputy Chief for Permits and Conservation with **NOAA Fisheries Office of Protected Resources**. “There are no known connections between any offshore wind activities and any whale strandings.”

“Shifting blame [for the recent strandings] on offshore wind development is not only irresponsible but dangerous. Offshore wind is one of the solutions to curb the impacts of climate change on our oceans and marine wildlife,” said the **NJ Sierra Club Director**. **Thirteen environmental non-profit organizations** issued a statement supporting the development of offshore wind projects as a key solution to protecting endangered species.

- The humpback whale population is increasing in the Atlantic Ocean, with an estimated 2.8% per year population growth from 2000-2016. NOAA Fisheries has been tracking an [Unusual Mortality Event \(UME\)](#)⁴ of humpback whales since 2016 (prior to the start of activities related to Offshore Wind development) in the Atlantic, and has identified 190 humpback whale strandings on the East Coast and 64 humpback whale strandings in NY/NJ since 2016.

// The lead bioacoustician at **BOEM's Office of Renewable Energy Programs** stated that none of the surveying work being done now off New Jersey and New York has been shown to seriously harm whales and noted that "we have no documented cases of [any whale behavioral changes from surveys] actually occurring in the field."

What requirements must Equinor and the broader offshore wind industry follow to protect marine mammals?

The offshore wind industry adheres to more stringent marine mammal mitigation measures than any other marine industry on the Atlantic Ocean coastline.

- Geophysical survey equipment must be shut down when marine mammals are observed approaching or within "Exclusion Zones" of approximately 1,600 ft (500 m) for North Atlantic right whales, and approximately 300 ft (100 m) for all other species.
- Independent and National Marine Fisheries Service-approved Protective Species Observers (PSOs) must be on duty to enforce Exclusion Zones, document and report marine mammal observations and mitigation actions taken.
- Vessel speeds must be reduced to 10 knots or less when mother/calf pairs, pods, or large assemblages of whales/dolphins are observed near the vessel.
- When marine mammals are observed while a vessel is underway, the vessel must attempt to remain parallel with the animal's course until the animal has left the area.
- If marine mammals are sighted within the separation distance, the vessel must reduce speed, shift to neutral, and wait for animals to clear the area before engaging engines.
- OSW industry uses smaller and lower energy survey equipment than the seismic or sonar equipment used in other industries as there is no need for deep seabed penetration or long-range object detection.



What marine research and monitoring programs does Equinor invest and participate in?

- Equinor deploys sophisticated passive acoustic monitoring buoys in our Empire Wind lease area off the coast of New York to [collect real-time data](#)⁵ to detect the presence of marine mammals in partnership with scientists at the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.
- Equinor is a partner in the New England Aquarium's tracking program of highly migratory marine species such as swordfish, tuna, and sharks.
- As part of its commitment to transparency, data from Equinor's monitoring efforts of marine species and [aerial studies](#)⁶ are available to the [marine community and the public](#).⁷

Have a question about Empire Wind?

Contact empirewind@equinor.com

To sign up for project updates, visit www.empirewind.com

Empire Wind is a 50/50 partnership between Equinor and bp. Equinor will be the operator through the development, construction, and operations phases of the project.

Sources

¹<https://www.panynj.gov/port-authority/en/press-room/press-release-archives/2022-press-releases1/port-of-new-york-and-new-jersey-regains-top-spot-as-busiest-port.html#:~:text=The%20Port%20of%20New%20York%20and%20New%20Jersey%20was%20previously,of%20cargo%20in%20its%20history>

²<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/28/nyregion/east-coast-whale-deaths.html>

³<https://www.mmc.gov/wp-content/uploads/Update-on-Strandings-of-Large-Whales-along-the-East-Coast-2.21.2023.pdf>

⁴<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-life-distress/2016-2023-humpback-whale-unusual-mortality-event-along-atlantic-coast>

⁵<https://whalesofnewyork.wcs.org/>

⁶https://remote.normandeau.com/aer_docs.php?pj=22

⁷<https://www.empirewind.com/environment-and-sustainability/environmental-protection/>