Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 24, 2026

The Honorable Dr. Neil Jacobs
Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Ave N.W
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Administrator Jacobs:

We write to you today to express our strong support for the continued implementation and enforcement of the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Speed Rule (VSR) for vessels 65 feet and longer.

We appreciate the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) ongoing efforts to prioritize developing additional tools to reduce vessel strike risk, including exploring emerging communication, monitoring, and detection technologies, as outlined in the recent Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. We support continued investment in and testing of these innovative technologies, including public-private partnerships such as cooperative research. Expanding real-time awareness of marine mammals and navigation hazards, improving data integration, and strengthening compliance tools will be important components of a comprehensive, modern approach to protecting North Atlantic right whales and improving mariner safety at sea.

At the same time, speed reduction is currently the best practice for reducing vessel strike mortality. Seasonal speed restrictions of 10 knots or less in areas of high vessel strike risk remain the most effective and reliable measure available to reduce the risk of fatal collisions or injuries that contribute to reduced reproductive capability.[1]

A recent NOAA-commissioned analysis conducted by MITRE further underscores this point.[2] Many technologies highlighted in the report remain in early or intermediate stages of development. It is important that the systems reviewed demonstrate efficacy in operational environments capable of supporting real-time individual vessel strike avoidance. In order to ensure reliability, these systems must overcome limitations, including dependence on whale behavior and environmental conditions, as well as detection range constraints that can reduce reliability in real-world settings.

Widespread deployment of vessel-based detection systems requires time and investment to design, test, install, and maintain across diverse fleets operating in U.S. waters. There are several outstanding questions regarding who would bear these costs, how such systems would be standardized, and how compliance would be monitored and enforced. These implementation challenges are particularly complex in the context of international shipping, where vessels operating under foreign flags would be subject to additional legal, regulatory, and logistical considerations. Any proposal from NOAA to alter device carriage requirements for

[1] P.B. Conn & G.K. Silber, Vessel speed restrictions reduce risk of collision-related mortality for North Atlantic right whales (D. P. C. Peters, 2013).

[2] Casey Corrado Kirsch et al., Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) for North Atlantic Right Whale Detection and Vessel Strike Risk Reduction (NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service 2025).

U.S. vessels must be coordinated with Congress and the U.S. Coast Guard and must include consultation with the military and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

The VSR provides a clear, predictable, and operationally workable framework for effectively reducing the risk of vessel strikes. By establishing science-based seasonal management areas, the VSR allows operators of vessels 65 feet and longer to plan and incorporate speed adjustments into voyage planning. Maritime stakeholders have long emphasized that predictable, planned slowdowns are preferable for voyage planning rather than unplanned operational disruptions, and the structure of the rule reflects that reality.

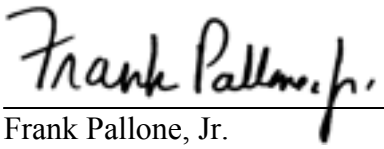
Importantly, the rule also includes built-in safety provisions, allowing vessels to deviate from speed requirements as necessary to maintain safe maneuvering and to address medical emergencies. Economic analyses have found no meaningful impact on port activity or overall maritime commerce, similarly underscoring that the rule is both effective and practical to implement.

One novel technology that we hope NOAA will continue to support is the shore-to-ship Automatic Identification System (AIS). This new maritime technology supports mariner compliance with the VSR through real-time communication, helps mariners head off potential enforcement before it happens through enhanced awareness, and helps bend the learning curve on the rule's requirements for both foreign and American vessel classes with lower rates of compliance. Shore-to-ship AIS does not require changes to carriage requirements, can be used for both conservation and safety-at-sea purposes, and its widespread use has already been approved by both the Coast Guard and the FCC.

Detection and dissemination technologies should continue to be developed as additional tools in the conservation toolbox—capable of enhancing situational awareness, informing dynamic management, and improving compliance—but not as replacements for the baseline speed protections that are keeping the North Atlantic right whale from extinction and that we know work for mariners.

Efforts to modernize whale protection strategies should build upon the scientifically proven effectiveness of speed reduction. We therefore respectfully urge NOAA to maintain the strength and integrity of the 2008 North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Speed Rule, including the seasonal and dynamic management areas, as the agency continues to evaluate, research, and advance new technologies. We stand ready to work with NOAA to support a comprehensive, science-based approach that incorporates both established protections and emerging innovations to ensure the survival and recovery of the North Atlantic right whale.

Sincerely,



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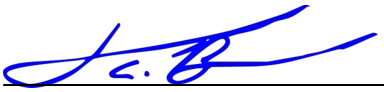

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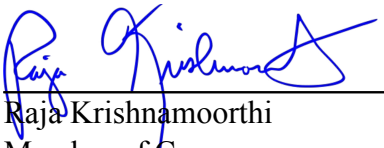

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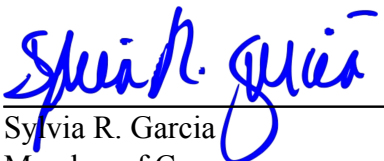

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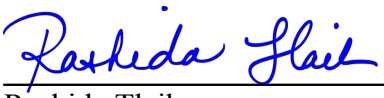

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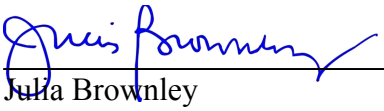

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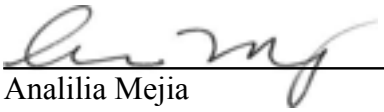

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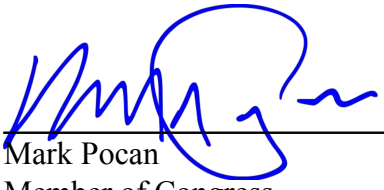

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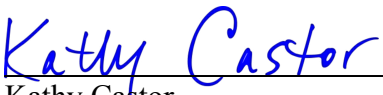

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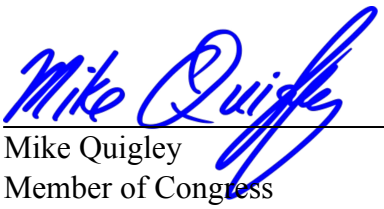

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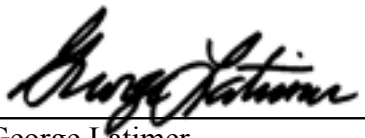

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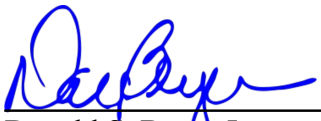

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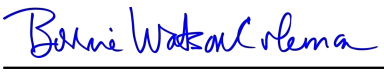

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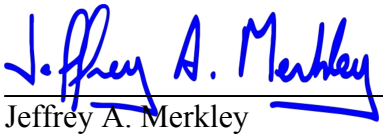

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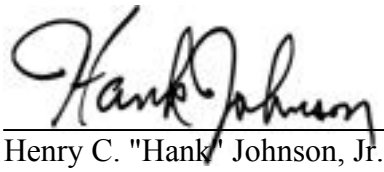

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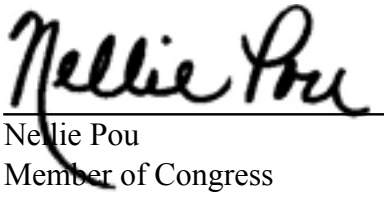

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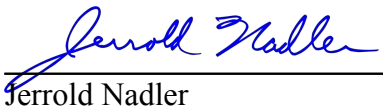

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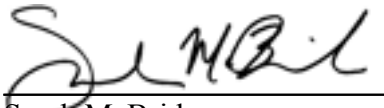

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