



## Fin Whale, Pacific Population

### [Submit Your Comments Here](#)

Information summary and [survey](#) for the consultations on potentially reclassifying fin whale (Pacific population) from threatened to special concern on the List of Wildlife Species at Risk – **Please provide your input by December 2, 2022.**

#### Consultations

Let your opinion be heard

Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) provides legal protection for wildlife species at risk to conserve biological diversity. It also acknowledges that everyone in Canada has a role to play in the conservation of wildlife species.

Before deciding whether fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*, Pacific population) will be reclassified as special concern under the List of Wildlife Species at Risk, the Government of Canada wants to hear your opinion, comments, and suggestions regarding the possible ecological, cultural, spiritual, and economic impacts of reclassifying this population under SARA.

#### Status reclassification

The process of reclassifying a species under SARA consists of several steps. It begins with a status reassessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and ends with a Government of Canada decision on whether or not to reclassify a species on the List of Wildlife Species at Risk. Public consultations are an important step in this process.



Fin whale (photo credit: Christie McMillan)

#### Who assigns the species status?

COSEWIC is a committee of experts that assesses if a wildlife species is in some danger of disappearing from Canada. It assigns a status to these species. COSEWIC conducts its assessments based on the best available information including scientific data, local ecological knowledge, and Indigenous traditional knowledge. The Pacific fin whale population was designated as threatened in 2005 and listed as such in 2006. In May 2019, the population was reassessed by COSEWIC as special concern due to increasing numbers. Under SARA, a special concern species is defined as one that may become a threatened or an endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

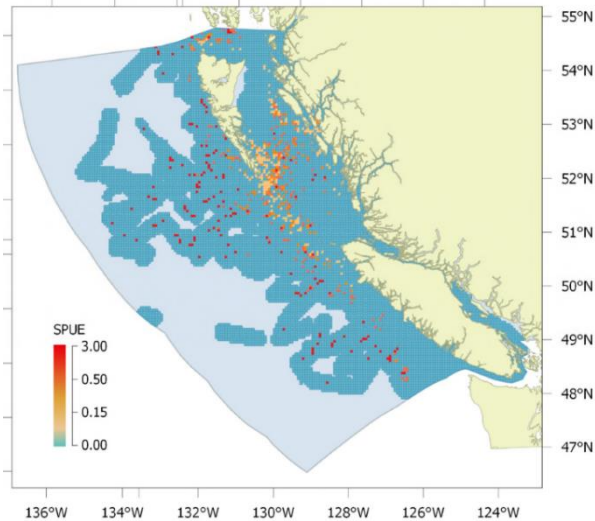
#### Fin whale facts

The fin whale is a large streamlined whale that can reach up to 25 metres in length. They are second in size only to the blue whale. Fin Whales are baleen whales, meaning they use long, thin plates of keratin that hang from their upper jaws to filter small prey from seawater. They are unique due to the colouring on the lower jaw, which is dark on the left and light on the right. Fin whales are capable of prolonged, high swimming speeds, which is their primary escape strategy when hunted by killer whales. Fin whales are found in all major oceans, although they are found at highest densities in cool temperate and subpolar waters. In Canadian Pacific waters, fin whales gather along the continental slope, particularly in areas with localized concentrations of krill, their prey. They are also found in some deep channels between islands along the northern mainland coast of British Columbia. Though there is evidence of a general northward distribution shift in summer and southward in winter, they can be found year-round in Canadian waters. Fin whales reach physical maturity at

## Aquatic Species at Risk



approximately 25 years and may live to be up to 100 years old.



Fin whale sightings per unit effort from 52 DFO ship surveys between 2002 and 2017 (source: DFO in COSEWIC 2019).

### Why is fin whale at risk?

The abundance of this large whale appears to be recovering from depletion due to industrial whaling, which ended in the mid-1970s. Current abundance estimates are less than 1,000 mature individuals, but these do not include Canadian waters beyond the continental shelf where substantial numbers were sighted in a 2018 survey. Additionally, populations in neighbouring US waters are increasing, which could benefit the Canadian population. Individuals continue to be at risk mainly from vessel strikes and underwater noise from shipping.

### If a species is reclassified under the *Species at Risk Act*

If the fin whale (Pacific) is reclassified from threatened to special concern, prohibitions to kill, harm, harass, possess, collect, buy, sell or trade an individual would no longer apply under SARA. Critical habitat – the habitat necessary for survival or recovery – would no longer need to be identified and protected from destruction. However, the species and its habitat will continue to receive protection under the *Fisheries Act* and the *Marine Mammal Regulations*.

If the fin whale (Pacific) is listed as special concern under SARA, the Government of Canada would be required to produce a management plan for the population in an effort to ensure that it does not become threatened or

endangered due to human activity. The management plan would replace the existing recovery strategy and action plan. Management plans developed under SARA include measures for the conservation of the species and its habitat.



Fin whale blows (photo credit: Christie McMillan)

**We would like to receive your comments on the potential impacts of reclassifying fin whale, Pacific population, as special concern or maintaining its current status as threatened on the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA. Your comments are important.**

**Please fill out the [survey](#) by December 2, 2022: we want to hear from you.**

Before completing this survey, you may wish to review the following background information found at the links below:

- [2019 COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on Fin Whale, Atlantic and Pacific Population](#)
- [2006 Recovery Strategy for Blue, Fin, and Sei Whales in Pacific Canadian Waters](#)
- [2017 Action Plan for Blue, Fin, Sei and North Pacific Right Whales in Canadian Pacific Waters](#)
- [Report on the Progress of Recovery Strategy Implementation for Blue, Fin and Sei Whales in Pacific Canadian Waters for the Period 2006 – 2011](#)
- additional information found on the [Species at Risk Public Registry](#)

**Thank you for completing this [survey](#).**

Species at Risk Program, Pacific Region  
200-401 Burrard Street  
Vancouver, British Columbia, V6C 3S4  
[DFO.PACSAR-LEPPAC.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:DFO.PACSAR-LEPPAC.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)