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Protecting North Atlantic right whales from collisions with vessels in the Gulf of St. Lawrence

From: [Transport Canada](#)

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Transport Canada is committed to the protection and conservation of endangered North Atlantic right whales and is taking actions to help protect this iconic species in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The measures for the 2024 season have been developed with the collaboration of the marine transportation industry, non-governmental organizations, academia, and other government departments.

Overview of Transport Canada's actions to protect North Atlantic right whales:

Current position:00:00:00

Total time:00:02:50

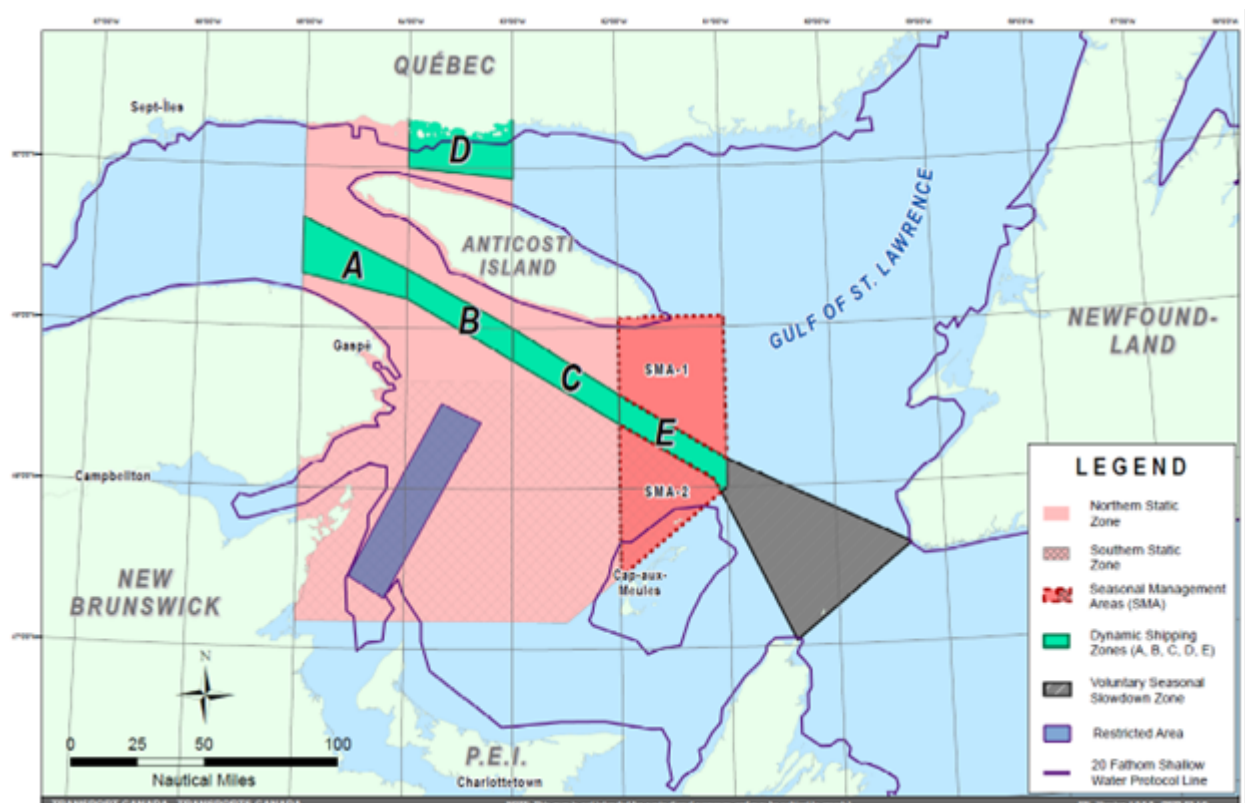
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Overview of 2024 protection measures

From April 17 to November 15, 2024, Transport Canada establishes the vessel traffic management measures outlined below to help protect the North Atlantic right whale in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.



This map is for visual representation only and is not to be used for navigation or enforcement.

Each traffic management measure listed in the map's legend is outlined below.

Static zones

A fixed speed restriction for vessels more than 13 metres in length is in effect from April 17 to November 15, 2024, in a large area called the static zone that is divided into a northern and a southern zone. These vessels are required to travel at a speed not exceeding 10 knots over the ground in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Other vessels are encouraged to respect this speed limit. Both static zones are shown in the map above (in pink for the northern zone and hatched pink for the southern zone).

Temporary speed restriction in shipping lanes

A temporary speed restriction of 10 knots over the ground for vessels more than 13 metres in length can be enforced in the following shipping lanes:

- South of Anticosti Island: divided into four dynamic shipping zones (see areas A, B, C and E in green on the map above).
- North of Anticosti Island: part of the shipping lane labelled as dynamic shipping zone (see area D in green on the map above).

A speed restriction is activated in the dynamic shipping zones, as follows:

When at least one North Atlantic right whale is detected:

- in any dynamic shipping zones north and/or south of Anticosti Island; or
- within 5 nautical miles south of the dynamic shipping zones or within 2.5 nautical miles from the eastern and western edges of these zones.

Each speed restriction is in effect for 15 days beginning on the day of detection. If North Atlantic right whales are not detected during the last 7 days of the 15-day period, the speed restriction is lifted at the end of the period.

When Transport Canada is unable to conduct aerial surveillance for North Atlantic right whales in aforementioned zones that are not acoustically monitored (usually due to inclement weather) within the following schedule:

- a 14-day period at the beginning of the season (from April 17 to May 28, 2024);
- a 7-day period mid-season; and
- a 14-day period at the end of the season (from September 18 to November 15, 2024),

a speed restriction is applied to the affected dynamic shipping zone(s) until another surveillance flight confirms there are no North Atlantic right whales detected..

Surveillance flights take place as soon as weather conditions improve and permit surveillance of North Atlantic right whales.

Weather and sea conditions can impact the safe operation of a vessel. When a speed restriction is in effect, vessels in the static zones and dynamic shipping zones are required to operate at a maximum of 10 knots, unless it is unsafe to do so. Navigational warnings lifting the speed restriction are issued when adverse weather conditions can jeopardize the safety of vessels and mariners.

To subscribe and receive navigational warnings (formerly known as notices to shipping) that are currently in force, visit the [Canadian Coast Guard website](#).

Seasonal management areas 1 and 2

A fixed speed restriction in two seasonal management areas (SMA), located north and south of dynamic shipping zone E, is in effect from April 17 to June 25, 2024, for vessels more than 13 metres in length.

These vessels are required to travel at a speed not exceeding 10 knots over the ground within both seasonal management areas. Vessels are allowed to proceed at safe operational speeds from June 26 to November 15, 2024, unless a North Atlantic right whale is detected. If a North Atlantic right whale is detected, the seasonal management area is subject to a 15-day mandatory speed restriction of 10 knots over the ground. Both seasonal management areas are shown in the map above in dark pink labelled SMA-1 and SMA-2.

Restricted area

In the summer months, a large number of the North Atlantic right whale population is anticipated to gather for feeding and surface activity in and near the [Shediac Valley](#). Since this makes the North Atlantic right whale more vulnerable to vessel collisions, a mandatory restricted area will be implemented in this area and will come into force once 80% of the restricted area is closed to fishing for the season as per [the Department of Fisheries and Oceans's right whale closure protocol](#) or at the latest on June 19th, 2024. The restricted area will be lifted once the North Atlantic right whale detections decrease in the restricted area or at the latest on September 25, 2024. Exact coordinates of this zone will be confirmed and communicated to mariners through the [Ship Safety Bulletin on the protection of the North Atlantic right whales in the Gulf of St. Lawrence](#) and the April special edition of the Notices to Mariners [401/24](#). Coordinates will also be communicated through a navigational warning and a notice to fish harvesters. The restricted area will be lifted once North Atlantic right whale detections decrease in the restricted area.

When the restricted area is in effect, vessels more than 13 metres in length are required to:

- avoid the area unless they qualify for the exceptions listed under the [2024 Interim Order](#);
- if the vessel is excepted, it has to transit the area at a speed not exceeding 8 knots over the ground.

The restricted area is shown in dark blue in the map above.

Voluntary seasonal slowdown zone in the Cabot Strait

To coincide with North Atlantic right whales' migration in and out of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in large numbers, a voluntary seasonal slowdown is in place from April 17 to June 25, 2024, as well as from September 25 to November 15, 2024.

- During this period, vessels more than 13 metres in length are asked to voluntarily reduce their speed and not to exceed 10 knots over the ground.
- Outside the slowdown periods, vessels are to proceed at safe operational speeds.

The Cabot Strait voluntary seasonal slowdown zone is shown in the map above in grey, and spans from the Cabot Strait to the eastern edge of dynamic shipping zone E.

Voluntary slowdown outside Transport Canada's Vessel Traffic Management Zones

North Atlantic right whales often visit eastern Canadian waters to feed. They are most abundant from April to December. They spend a lot of time at the surface feeding and resting, which makes them vulnerable to ship strikes.

Mariners are asked to remain vigilant and exercise caution in Canadian waters to avoid collisions with whales. If a North Atlantic right whale is detected outside of Transport Canada's vessel traffic management zones, mariners are asked to voluntarily reduce their speed to no more than 10.0 knots over the ground and to report whale sightings to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans [Report a marine mammal or sea turtle incident or sighting](#).

If unable to contact the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, whale sightings may be reported to Canadian Coast Guard marine communications and traffic services' centers by radio.

Additional measure

Again this year, a speed limit exemption in waters of less than 20 fathoms is applied to all commercial fishing vessels in the northern and southern static zones. When a North Atlantic right whale is detected in waters of less than 20 fathoms, a Navigational warning (NAVWARN) is issued in addition to a Notice to fish harvesters, enforcing a speed restriction of no more than 10 knots over the ground to all fishing vessels in the zone where the detection was made.

In addition to the speed restriction implemented by Transport Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada also implements [other measures related to the fisheries sector](#) to help protect North Atlantic right whales.

Monitoring and reporting tools and ongoing research on thermal imaging systems

Transport Canada's National Aerial Surveillance Program monitors for the North Atlantic right whale in shipping lanes north and south of Anticosti Island. To complement the aerial surveillance, up to three underwater acoustic gliders will be deployed to monitor the shipping lanes.

In addition, as part of a multi-year research program to study new North Atlantic right whale detection technologies, four thermal imaging cameras have been deployed in Cabot Strait since June 2022. The goal of this research is to assess the ability of land-based thermal imaging systems to automatically detect the North Atlantic right whale in near real-time. If successful, these systems could be another tool used to detect the North Atlantic right whale in the future.

Post-season voluntary slowdown period

In late fall, weather conditions are generally less favorable for both navigation and whale-monitoring activities. For this reason, from November 15 to December 31, 2024, Transport Canada asks all vessels to slow down to 10 knots over the ground on a voluntary basis if:

- North Atlantic right whales are detected in the area; and/or
- maritime conditions permit vessels to safely operate at this speed.

Compliance and enforcement

The statutory [2024 Interim Order](#) enables the issuance of Navigational Warnings (NAVWARN), which imposes a speed or navigational restrictions on vessels.

To verify compliance, Transport Canada uses vessel data provided by the Canadian Coast Guard.

If a vessel more than 13 metres in length appears to have exceeded the speed limit implemented in any zone or proceeded through the restricted area and is not an excepted vessel under the [2024 Interim Order](#), our Transport Canada marine safety inspectors will:

- review information provided by the Canadian Coast Guard, including the Automatic Identification System data; and
- seek additional evidence by contacting the vessel's master. This will allow for the collection of more data including information from the vessel's log-book and the verification of its content with the master.

Aside from the exceptions listed in the [2024 Interim Order](#), Transport Canada will not grant exemptions in advance. However, if a deviation from the speed restrictions or restricted areas is necessary for safety reasons, the following information must be entered into the bridge logbook:

- reasons for deviation;
- speed at which vessel operated;
- latitude and longitude at time of deviation;
- time and duration of deviation;
- master of the vessel shall sign and date the bridge logbook entry.

For any deviation, Transport Canada will review and consider reasons such as:

- navigating to ensure vessel safety;
- weather conditions;
- unforeseeable circumstances; and
- responding to emergencies.

If it is determined that a vessel did not comply with the North Atlantic right whale speed restrictions or restricted area, vessel owners could face administrative monetary penalties of up

to a maximum of CAN \$250,000, or could be found liable on summary conviction to a fine of not more than \$1,000,000 or to imprisonment for a term of not more than 18 months, or to both.

If charged with a violation, vessel owners will have 30 days to pay the penalty to the Minister or request the Transportation Appeal Tribunal of Canada to review the facts of the alleged violation or request a reconsideration of the penalty amount.

Compliance update

Transport Canada takes the speed restriction very seriously and examines all potential case of alleged non-compliance.

Numbers from May 24, 2024

Total number of vessel movements monitored in the speed restriction zones as of May 24, 2024:
1866

Total number of vessels with speed recorded above the speed limit or entering the restricted area:
14

Compliance Statistics

Status	Number of Vessels
Closed	12
Penalties Issued	0
Under Review	2
Total	14

Action taken to date

Since 2017, Transport Canada has been implementing vessel traffic management measures to protect North Atlantic right whales in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. See what actions Transport Canada has taken each year [here](#).

Planning for the future

Transport Canada continuously engages with its partners and stakeholders to acquire and share valuable information to help protect the North Atlantic right whale. Assessing lessons learned from the past seasons and finding the right path forward for all is done together.

Roseway Basin Area to be Avoided - June 1 to December 31

Mariners with vessels of 300 gross tonnage or more are reminded of the Roseway Basin's recommended seasonal area to be avoided, which is in effect from June 1 to December 31, 2024, to protect the North Atlantic right whale. All mariners are encouraged to avoid this area if possible, to support the recovery of this endangered species. For more information, click [here](#).

2024 Interim Order

The Interim Order for the Protection of North Atlantic Right Whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, 2024 enables the issuance of Navigational Warnings imposing speed and navigation restrictions. For more information, click [here](#).

Date modified:
2024-05-24