

Notice of Exemption

Appendix E

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

County Clerk

County of: Ventura

From: (Public Agency): _____
Ventura County Air Pollution Control District

(Address)

Project Title: Approval of Memorandum of Understanding Between the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District (VCAPCD) and the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation (CMSF)

Project Applicant: Ventura County Air Pollution Control District

Project Location - Specific:

Ventura County

Project Location - City: _____ **Project Location - County:** Ventura

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The Marine Vessel Speed Reduction Incentive Program (VSR Program), also known as the Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program, is a voluntary vessel speed reduction program that provides incentives to participating ocean-going vessel operators to reduce ship strike risk to whales, underwater noise, and air pollution by voluntarily transiting at 10 knots or less.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: County of Ventura

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Ventura County Air Pollution Control District

Exempt Status: (check one):

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- ☐ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
- ☐ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
- ☒ Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: Sections 15307 (Class 7) and 15308 (Class 8)
- ☐ Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

Reasons why project is exempt:

The VSR Program is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines sections 15307 and 15308 (actions by regulatory agencies to protect the environment and natural resources), and, in addition, there is no reasonable possibility that the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances and the proposed project is not otherwise ineligible for a CEQA categorical exemption, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15300.2

Lead Agency

Contact Person: Tyler Harris **Area Code/Telephone/Extension:** 805 303-3661

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? ■ Yes No

Signature: Tyler Harris **Date:** 06/25/2026 **Title:** Manager – Planning, Rules, and Incentives Division

Signed by Lead Agency Signed by Applicant

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.
Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FROM CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT

TO: County Clerk
County of Ventura
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

FROM: Ventura County Air Pollution Control District
4567 Telephone Rd. Ste. 200
Ventura, CA 93003

DATE: June 23, 2026

Project Title:

Approval of Memorandum of Understanding Between the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District (VCAPCD) and the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation (CMSF) for VCAPCD to Provide Funding to CMSF for the Marine Vessel Speed Reduction Incentive Program in the amount of \$973,863 for Fiscal Year 2026-2027

Project Location:

California coastal waters statewide, and additional areas of the Pacific Ocean within the United States Exclusive Economic Zone as specified in Figure 1 below. Includes coastal waters of the following counties: Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Sonoma, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego.

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The Marine Vessel Speed Reduction Incentive Program (VSR Program), also known as the Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program, is a voluntary vessel speed reduction program that provides incentives to participating ocean-going vessel operators to reduce ship strike risk to whales, underwater noise, and air pollution by voluntarily transiting at 10 knots or less.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project:

Ventura County Air Pollution Control District

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project:

Ventura County Air Pollution Control District and California Marine Sanctuary Foundation

Exempt Status:

The VSR Program is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines sections 15307 and 15308 (actions by regulatory agencies to protect the environment and natural resources), and, in addition, there is no reasonable possibility that the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances and the proposed project is not otherwise ineligible for a CEQA categorical exemption, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15300.2.

Reasons Why Project Is Exempt:

The VSR Program is a voluntary program that incentivizes ocean-going vessels to reduce speeds to 10 knots while traveling in the VSR zone. Reducing vessel speeds within VSR zones results in significant reductions of criteria pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions.^{1,2} Additionally, reducing vessel speeds reduces the risk of fatal ship strikes to

¹ California Air Resources Board, In-use Emissions Test Program at VSR Speeds for Oceangoing Container Ship (June 2012). <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/classic/ports/marinevess/vsr/docs/vsr.pdf>

² Environmental Protection Agency, Marine Vessel Speed Reduction Reduces Air Emissions and Fuel Usage, <https://www.epa.gov/ports-initiative/marine-vessel-speed-reduction-reduces-air-emissions-and-fuel-usage>.

whales³ and underwater noise pollution.⁴ Since the VSR Program is voluntary, it does not impose regulatory requirements on participating vessels. The program does not authorize or require any construction, physical modifications, or changes to existing facilities or infrastructure.

Based on historical program data, participation results in overall environmental benefits, including reductions in overall air emissions, greenhouse gases, and ocean noise, as well as decreased risk of fatal ship strikes to whales. Nautical miles traveled at 10 knots or less within the VSR Zone grew from 181,306 miles in the 2020 season to 481,273 miles in the 2025 season. Moreover, the 2020 season resulted in nitrogen oxides (NOx) emission reductions of 748 tons and greenhouse gas emission reductions of 24,258 metric tons. In the 2025 season, emission reductions were significantly higher with NOx emission reductions of 1,491 tons and greenhouse gas emission reductions of 55,700 metric tons. Additionally, from 2020 to 2025, risk of fatal ship strikes has been reduced by an average of 48%, and underwater noise has been reduced by an average of 4.7 db.

Cumulatively, since the VSR Program has started, 76 shipping companies have participated, resulting in 2,077,281 nautical miles traveled at 10 knots or less, NOx emission reductions of 7,394 tons, greenhouse gas emission reductions of approximately 260,000 metric tons, 70% reduction in underwater acoustic intensity, and 40% reduction in ship strike risk to whales.⁵ As such, the VSR Program results in several environmental benefits.

Project Approval: June 23, 2026

Date Received for Filing: June 25, 2026

³ Garrison LP, Lisi NE, Gahm M, Patterson EM, Blondin H and Good CP (2025) The effects of vessel speed and size on the lethality of strikes of large whales in U.S. waters. *Front. Mar. Sci.* 11:1467387. doi: 10.3389/fmars.2024.1467387.

⁴ ZoBell, V.M., Frasier, K.E., Morten, J.A. *et al.* Underwater noise mitigation in the Santa Barbara Channel through incentive-based vessel speed reduction. *Sci Rep* **11**, 18391 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-96506-1>

⁵ Blue Whales Blue Skies, Program Impact and Latest Results, <https://bluewhalesblueskies.org/impact/>.

Contact Person:

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Tyler S. Harris

Manager – Planning, Rules, and Incentives Division

Figure 1: Project Location

