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For the sake of endangered whales: VDR recommends two detours to members

Collaboration with environmental NGOs / Endangered sperm whales off Greece and blue whales off Sri Lanka / Official request to shipping companies to slightly modify routes / Thanks of the NGOs

In partnership with several environmental NGOs, the German Shipowners' Association (VDR) has resolved to recommend to its members to use modified shipping routes in two maritime zones – one in the Mediterranean and another in the Indian Ocean – in the interest of safeguarding the environment and nature. This measure is intended to support efforts to protect endangered whales there.

This makes the VDR the first national association of its kind to ask its member companies to take measures to reroute their vessels in order to reduce the risk of collisions with the endangered mammals. The decision was taken after a coalition led by the environmental organisations OceanCare and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (ifaw) approached the VDR with scientific data.

In the Mediterranean, conservation organisations regard the Hellenic Trench west and south of the Peloponnese and southwest of Crete as a critical habitat for the last 200 to 300 sperm whales there. Many sperm whales feed, breed and bear offspring in this area. A busy shipping route currently cuts through this area, which puts these whales at high risk of being struck by vessels.

In the Indian Ocean, a small population of endangered blue whales are found throughout the year near the coast off the southern tip of Sri Lanka. The thriving local whale-watching sector is also dependent on the presence of these whales for its survival. However, the current location of the official traffic separation scheme (TSS) area leads international shipping traffic directly through this important blue whale habitat and thereby also poses a high risk of injuring or even killing whales there. Dead whales with marks and cuts from propellers have already been found on the shoreline in both Greece and Sri Lanka.

“We have eagerly embraced the NGOs’ proposal and discussed it with our members,” said Dr Martin Kröger, Chief Executive Officer of the VDR. “The feedback has unambiguously indicated that we are all happy to take minor diversions to protect the whales there.” The VDR’s more than 150 member companies have now been officially asked to reroute their ships to avoid these critical whale habitats.

Christian Naegeli, the VDR’s Marine Advisor on Maritime Safety, Nautical & Technical Affairs, and the Environment, explained: “The main shipping routes – the highways of the sea – are the so-called traffic separation schemes, which are designated by the IMO in London. Yet these currently pass right through whale habitats off Sri Lanka. However, Naegeli added: “There are possibilities to bypass the whales’ habitats by just a few nautical miles in both places – safely, legally, and without much extra effort or expense.”



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As a long-term goal, the VDR also supports the joint initiative of the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and the World Shipping Council (WSC) to officially shift the TSS area off Sri Lanka to the south by 15 nautical miles.

“We are pleased with the VDR’s recommendation to its members and hope that companies operating in these high-risk areas will implement the proposed diversionary measures very soon,” the NGOs said in a joint statement. “We also call on all other shipping companies and shipping associations to follow the VDR’s example.”

About the German Shipowners’ Association

The German Shipowners’ Association (*Verband Deutscher Reeder, VDR*) is responsible for representing the common business and social policy interests of German shipping companies at federal and state government level as well as in relation to European and international bodies. Founded in 1907, the VDR merged with the Association of German Coastal Shipowners in 1994. With a membership of around 200, the VDR represents the majority of Germany’s merchant fleet. For more details, visit www.reederverband.de.

Press photographs of Dr Gaby Bornheim & Dr. Martin Kröger:

<https://www.reederverband.de/en/media/downloads/portraits-vdr-association-leadership>

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