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American Littoral Society Official Statement on Wind Energy and Whales

We — like many other ocean advocates — are following the news around the recent whale deaths in our region. We deeply cherish the marine life found along our coast, and the deaths of these whales is disturbing and of great concern to us.

At this moment, we don't know conclusively what combination of natural or human causes may be responsible for the deaths. Many experts believe that the growing number of whales in this area — which has some of the busiest ports and shipping lanes in the world — has contributed to an increase in vessel strikes. Notably, the Port of NY and NJ increased its trade volume substantially in the last several years, increasing shipping traffic and the potential for increased vessel strikes. According to the marine mammal experts responding to the strandings, a large number of the whales have been killed by ship strikes.

The American Littoral Society's work includes protecting the coast from a changing climate. We support investment in clean, renewable energy to reduce fossil fuel use which is harming the ocean in many ways. To meet the need for green energy and the protection of wildlife, the Littoral Society continues to call for meaningful and robust stakeholder engagement and responsible siting around offshore wind projects.

It's clear that the whales off our coast are in harm's way, and we must act to protect them to the extent that they are endangered by human activities.

Vessel strikes and entanglement in fishing gear are well established as the two predominant sources of whale mortality due to human impacts. The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration has proposed new rules to expand slow speed zones and to increase the number of vessels subject to these reduced speed requirements. Similarly, rules to reduce fishing gear entanglement have been developed. Both are pending adoption.

While at this time there is no readily available evidence linking wind-power development activities to the death of these whales, understanding the interactions among all offshore human activities and coastal resources is critical to their protection.

We recommend that decision-makers at the state and federal level:

- Evaluate vessel traffic patterns in the near shore for interactions with whales and institute changes in approaches, vessel speed and traffic that would decrease the likelihood of vessel strikes;
- Review and share with the public the possibility of conflict from current activities so that they can be assured that all appropriate measures are in place to protect marine life and habitats, including the whales off our coast. The sustainability of offshore wind depends on appropriate siting and development.

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Leaders in coastal conservation since 1961, the American Littoral Society, a 501 (c)3 non-profit organization, promotes the study and conservation of marine life and habitat, protects the coast from harm, and empowers others to do the same.