Communications Toolkit for the Whale Communications Committee Release of Final FAQ Document (V5)

Spring 2025

The Offshore Wind Environmental Technical Working Group (E-TWG), led by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), formed a Specialist Committee that convened in 2023-2025 to develop communications materials to aid in the dissemination of accurate, readily understandable information around recent whale mortality events and the level of potential risk to whales from offshore wind energy development activities. This committee, made up of a diverse set of subject matter experts, included representatives from environmental nonprofit organizations, state agencies, and offshore wind energy developers. External reviewers of committee products encompassed scientific experts, including federal and state agency representatives, academics, and other environmental stakeholders.

The main outcome of this effort is a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) which serve as a resource for stakeholders who are in direct communication with the general public and regularly receive questions about whales and offshore wind. Given the urgency of disseminating accurate information, this effort released a series of FAQs over the course of this time period to address emerging questions related to whales and offshore wind energy development.

We are providing this communications toolkit to facilitate and encourage entities to

1) share and amplify the release of the final FAQ document, and

2) develop your own communications products and/or adapt the information in the FAQ document as you see fit.

Note: The FAQ document is intended primarily as a resource for stakeholders who are in direct communication with the general public, and who regularly receive questions from the public on these topics. The intent of this document is to provide scientifically sound, accurate answers, in varying levels of detail, to address common questions. This is a technical document, and users should be mindful of the audience they are communicating with when determining how best to share information.

This toolkit includes:

Feel free to adapt any of the following materials to best suit your needs. Contact Eleanor Eckel (eleanor.eckel@briwildlife.org) with any questions, and please let us know if you share this document on social media or reference it so we can track where the information is being shared. Thank you!

Section 1: Materials to announce a new FAQ release

1.1 Direct Links

- Whale Communications Committee Website: www.nyetwg.com/specialist-committees/wildlife-faqs/whale-communications OR accessed via the QR code:
- E-TWG Website: www.nyetwg.com
- Whale Communications FAQ Document Handout

1.2 Key talking points

A group of scientific experts has produced Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about whales and offshore wind. The intent of this effort is to provide scientifically sound, accurate answers to address common questions.

The final version of this FAQ document was released in April 2025. New FAQ responses in the final release include:

- How much vessel activity is expected from OSW development and what does that mean for strike risk to whales?

- Can publicly available data and reports from Protect Species Observers (PSOs) help improve our understanding of marine mammal populations?
- What are the risks and benefits of tagging whales?
- What marine mammal-related monitoring is conducted by OSW developers and what resulting data are public?
- What kinds of marine mammal harassment from OSW development can be authorized under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)?
- What are the drivers of recent humpback whale strandings on the East Coast of the United States
- Are whale and prey distributions changing? If so, why?
- How do marine mammals experience sound differently from humans?
- How do scientists study whales?

The FAQ document provides multiple levels of detail in response to each FAQ: 1) Brief bulleted summary (i.e., talking points for each topic); 2) Short answer in paragraph form (when necessary); and 3) Detailed answer with associated scientific citations, to provide readers with a better understanding of the facts and information sources.

1.3 Sample general posts around releases

Entities may share these posts as is or create posts of a similar nature in the tone of the organization that is sharing the content.

- My organization, XXX, participated in an expert working group that has released an FAQ document to aid in the dissemination of scientifically sound information about whale mortality events and the level of potential risk to whales from offshore wind energy development activities. The FAQ responses are available at https://www.nyetwg.com/specialist-committees/wildlife-faqs/whale-communications

- To meet the need for accurate and readily understandable information about whale mortality events and the level of the potential risk to whales from offshore wind energy development activities, a group of experts (including from MY ORGANIZATION) has released an FAQ document with answers to common questions. **A final version of the document with additional FAQs** is now available at https://www.nyetwg.com/specialist-committees/wildlife-faqs/whale-communications.

  New FAQ responses include:

- How much vessel activity is expected from OSW development and what does that mean for strike risk to whales?

- Can publicly available data and reports from Protect Species Observers (PSOs) help improve our understanding of marine mammal populations?
- What are the risks and benefits of tagging whales?
- What marine mammal-related monitoring is conducted by OSW developers and what resulting data are public?
- What kinds of marine mammal harassment from OSW development can be authorized under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)?
- What are the drivers of recent humpback whale strandings on the East Coast of the United States
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- How do marine mammals experience sound differently from humans?
- How do scientists study whales?

Feel free to contact me for more information.

Section 2: Other example content

Entities may share these posts as is or use graphics and content from the FAQ document to create posts of a similar nature.

2.1 Sample posts

1. *Do you know that Protected Species Observers (PSOs) are trained professionals who monitor for federally protected marine animals to help a wide range of industries meet their regulatory compliance needs? Learn more about PSOs and the data they collect here: www.nyetwg.com/specialist-committees/wildlife-faqs/whale-communications*

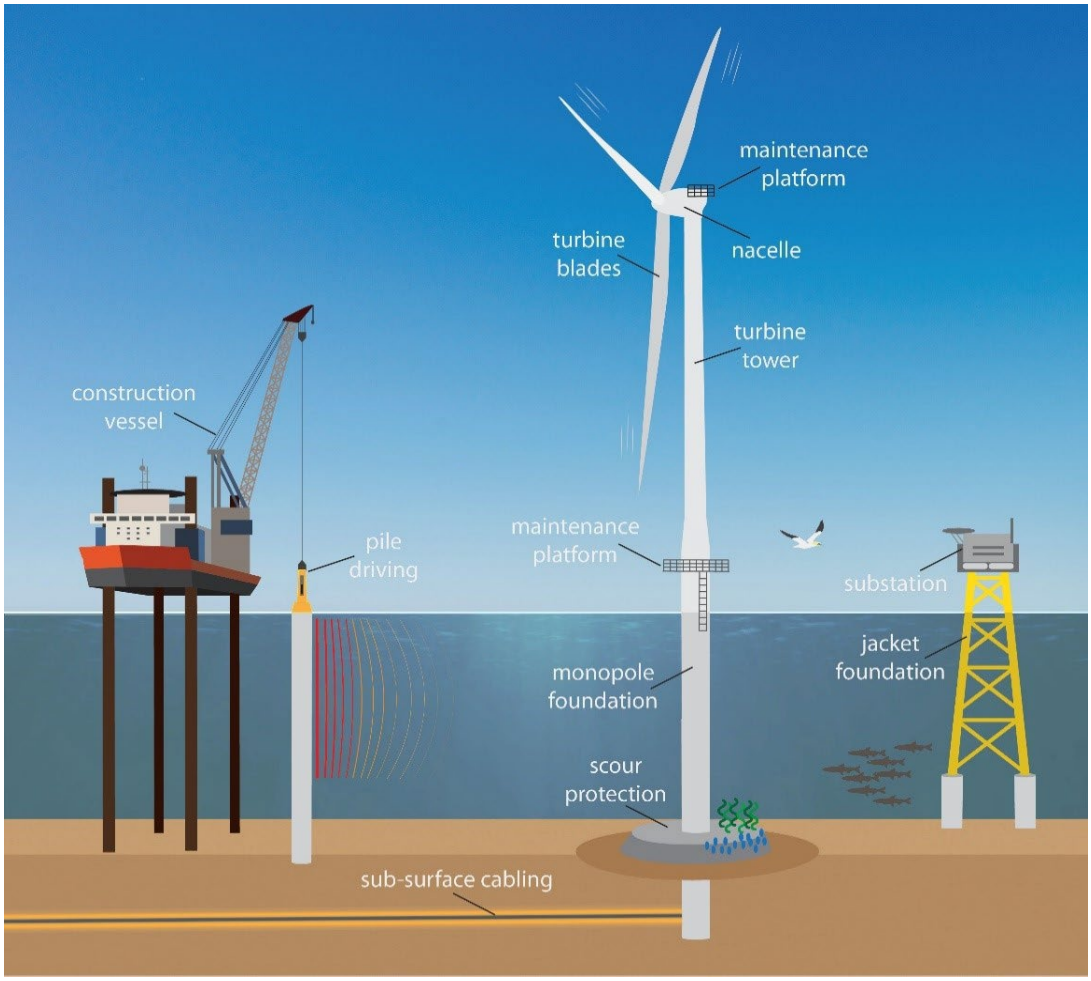
2. *Do you know that there is evidence that whale distributions are changing in the Northwest Atlantic marine ecosystem? Many species are shifting in a northerly direction in response to changes in oceanography, including temperature, currents, and stratification. Learn more about the changes in whale and prey distribution here: www.nyetwg.com/specialist-committees/wildlife-faqs/whale-communications*

3. *Researchers employ a variety of methods to study large whales. These include visual observations from boats or aircraft, underwater acoustics to record whale vocalizations, physiological and biological sampling to assess health, biologging or "tagging" to track movements and behavior, and resighting or cataloging individual whales to monitor*

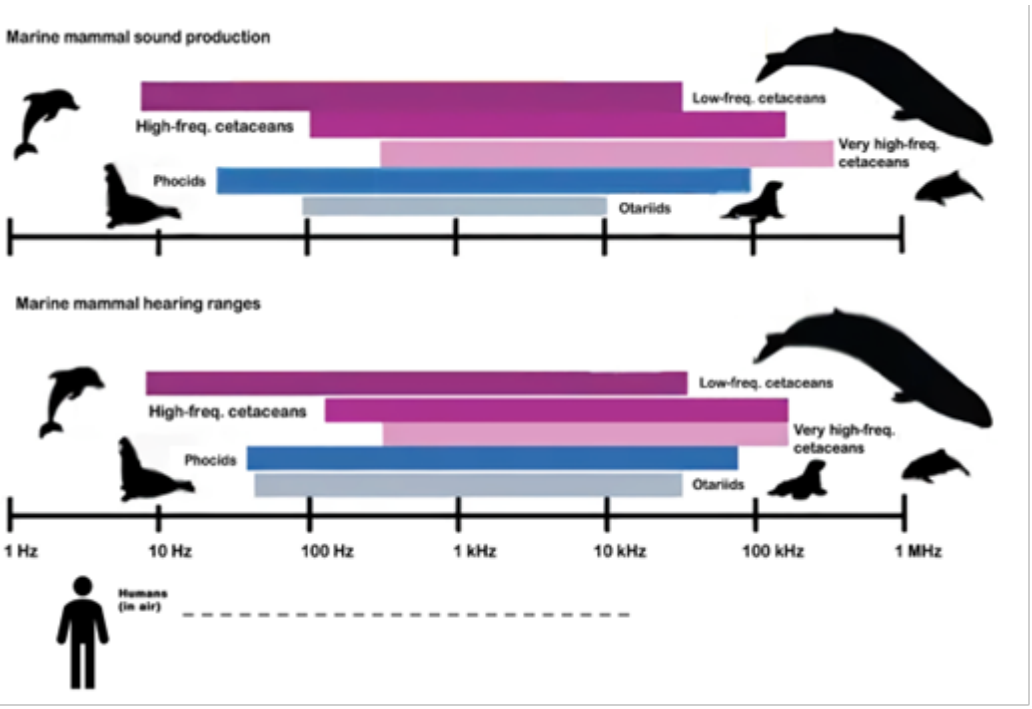
them over time. Learn about these techniques in greater detail here: www.nyetwg.com/specialist-committees/wildlife-faqs/whale-communications

4. *Offshore wind development involves many kinds of vessels over the life of a wind farm, and vessel needs change during each project phase. The contribution of offshore wind vessel activity to strike risk is generally considered to be very low both because of the small relative contribution of this industry to existing maritime vessel traffic, as well as the strict rules in place for offshore wind activities that are intended to reduce strike risk to whales. Learn more about vessel activity from offshore wind development here:* www.nyetwg.com/specialist-committees/wildlife-faqs/whale-communications*.*

2.2 Sample graphics

1. 

Do you know all of the components that make up an offshore wind farm? They are typically comprised of turbines, whose rotors convert mechanical energy from wind into electrical energy, and an offshore substation, which are linked to each other by a network of electrical cables. The electricity is transported onshore via export cables (which are typically buried in the seafloor) so that the energy can be integrated into the electrical grid. Learn more about the major components of an offshore wind farm here: www.nyetwg.com/specialist-committees/wildlife-faqs/whale-communications. Graphic source: Biodiversity Research Institute.

2. 

Did you know that humans and marine mammals experience sound differently because air and water have different physical properties that influence sound propagation? Humans and whales also have different anatomies for hearing and producing sound living above- vs. Underwater. Sound travels much faster and farther in water than it does in air due to the different densities of the two mediums. Learn more about how marine mammals experience sound differently from humans at www.nyetwg.com/specialist-committees/wildlife-faqs/whale-communications. Graphic source: Adapted from diagrams by C3P0Lab and NOAA Fisheries.

3. 

Do you know that biologging devices known as "tags" can be attached to marine mammals to help us understand their movements and behavior? This provides an opportunity to gather data on whale movement and behavior when they are not visible to observers at the water's surface. Suction cup tags (pictured above) are attached to a long pole in readiness to be deployed on the back of a whale. Learn more about the tagging process and the benefits and risks of tagging whales here: www.nyetwg.com/specialist-committees/wildlife-faqs/whale-communications. ***Photo credit:*** *New England Aquarium*