

1 **Environment and Climate Caucus Resolution ECC 24-06-22 - ADOPTED**
2 **Recognize the Inherent Rights of the Southern Resident Orcas**

3 **RECOGNIZE THE INHERENT RIGHTS OF SOUTHERN RESIDENT ORCAS**

4 **WHEREAS**, the Southern Resident Orcas are culturally, intrinsically, spiritually, and
5 economically important to the people of Washington State and considered a sacred species to
6 the indigenous people and Tribes of the North Olympic Peninsula; and

7
8 **WHEREAS**, in May 2018, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians of the United States passed
9 a resolution recognizing Blackfish, otherwise known as “Orcas”, as revered relations for which
10 there is a sacred obligation to ensure they are treated “in a dignified manner that reflects tribal
11 cultural values that have been passed down for countless generations.” (1); and

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13 **WHEREAS**, despite legal protections at state and federal levels for nearly two decades, the
14 population of Southern Resident Orcas continues to decline and is critically endangered, with
15 less than 75 individuals remaining (2). Major factors for decline include 1960s and 70s captures
16 for marine parks, decimated salmon runs, pollution, loss of habitat, increasing vessel traffic, and
17 noise levels in both Puget Sound and contiguous oceans (3); and

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19 **WHEREAS**, the rights of marine mammals to exist and flourish have been recognized,
20 internationally and locally, including through the Helsinki declaration (2010), the Marine Life
21 Proclamation of the city of Malibu, California (2014), and the city of San Francisco's resolution
22 guaranteeing the free and safe passage of whales and dolphins in San Francisco's coastal
23 waters, (2014) (4); and

24
25 **WHEREAS**, the Northwest Animal Rights Network (NARN) and Legal Rights for the Salish Sea
26 (LRSS) along with a growing number of counties and cities in Washington State including: San
27 Juan County, Jefferson County, Pierce County, Port Townsend, Langley, Bainbridge Island, Des
28 Moines, and Gig Harbor have signed proclamations recognizing the inherent rights of Southern
29 Resident Orcas,

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31 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Environment and Climate Caucus of the Washington
32 State Democratic Party asks legislators to adopt and enforce legislation in 2025 and beyond
33 that recognizes and enforces the ‘inherent rights’ of the Southern Resident Orcas including, but
34 not limited to, the right to life, liberty, autonomy, free and safe passage, adequate food supply
35 from naturally occurring sources, and freedom from conditions that cause orcas physical,
36 emotional, or mental harm, and

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38 **THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that this resolution shall be forwarded to the
39 Washington State Governor, all Washington State House and Senate Democrats and the House
40 Civil Rights and Judiciary Committee.

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43 **References:**

44 1. Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians of the United States Resolution #18-32: "TOKITAE, THE
45 SOUTHERN RESIDENT KILLER WHALE POPULATION, AND THE SALISH SEA: OUR
46 SACRED OBLIGATION" <https://juustwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ATNI-Res-18-32.pdf>

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48 2. 2024 Marine Mammal Commission Southern - Resident Killer Whale,
49 <https://www.mmc.gov/priority-topics/species-of-concern/southern-resident-killer-whale/>

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51 3. Williams, R., Lacy, R.C., Ashe, E. *et al.* Warning sign of an accelerating decline in
52 critically endangered killer whales (*Orcinus orca*). *Communications Earth &*
53 *Environment* volume 5, Article number: 173 (2024) 5, 173 (2024).

54 <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-024-01327-5>

55 4. Ecologist, October 23, 2014, San Francisco declares: every whale and dolphin has
56 the right to be free, by Laura Bridgeman- [https://theecologist.org/2014/oct/23/san-](https://theecologist.org/2014/oct/23/san-francisco-declares-every-whale-and-dolphin-has-right-be-free)

57 [francisco-declares-every-whale-and-dolphin-has-right-be-free](https://theecologist.org/2014/oct/23/san-francisco-declares-every-whale-and-dolphin-has-right-be-free)

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59 ADOPTED by ECC at its 2024 June 22 general meeting in Bellevue WA