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NOAA Initiates First Step Toward Amending 2008 Vessel Speed Rule

Advance notice of rulemaking begins the information-gathering process.

Miami, Florida (February 2026) – Officials from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced at the Miami International Boat Show that the agency will initiate the first formal step in a review process related to the 2008 vessel speed rule, which established a 10-knot speed limit for vessels 65 feet and larger along portions of the U.S. East Coast.

NOAA will launch an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) – an information-gathering process designed to solicit public input before any regulatory decisions are made. The process will include a public comment period and a series of questions focused on operational realities, economic impacts and alternatives to speed-based mitigation measures.

The announcement follows months of engagement between NOAA, Viking Yachts and the National Marine Manufacturers Association, as well as broader discussions with marine industry stakeholders.

“This is an important and appropriate first step,” said John DePersenaire, Viking’s Director of Government Affairs and Sustainability. “An ANPRM allows NOAA to gather facts, data and real-world operational insight before determining next steps related to the 2008 rule.”

DePersenaire said advances in vessel technology over the past 16 years have fundamentally changed how recreational boats operate, reducing risk in ways that were not available when the rule was adopted. He noted that modern detection, awareness and avoidance systems provide tools beyond speed alone, particularly for recreational vessels, and should be considered as part of any future regulatory evaluation.

The 2008 regulation established seasonal 10-knot speed limits in designated areas to reduce the risk of vessel strikes on North Atlantic right whales. While intended to address conservation concerns, the rule has raised longstanding questions about its application to recreational vessels, vessel maneuverability, enforcement practicality and economic impact.

The ANPRM is expected to seek public input on several broad areas related to the existing rule, including alternatives to speed-only mitigation strategies, economic and operational impacts of the rule, practical considerations related to compliance and enforcement, differences in vessel size, design and operating profiles, technological advancements since 2008 that may affect risk mitigation and the existing safety deviation provision.

Many of these technologies were demonstrated over the past year and most recently at the Miami International Boat Show aboard the Whale and Vessel Safety (WAVS) Taskforce's 24-foot Contender research vessel, which served as an on-water platform showcasing real-time whale detection, situational awareness and risk-mitigation tools. NOAA officials and other industry representatives observed the systems during the show, providing firsthand exposure to technologies already being deployed on recreational vessels.

Viking has been actively involved in advancing whale conservation technology through WAVS, which focuses on real-time detection, predictive risk mapping and onboard alert systems designed to reduce the risk of vessel strikes while maintaining navigational safety.

"We've consistently said that conservation and safe vessel operation are not mutually exclusive," DePersenaire said. "This process allows for a data-driven discussion that reflects how boats are built, equipped, and operated today and how technology can be leveraged to meet conservation objectives for the species."

The Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking is currently under review by the Office of Management and Budget and will be published in the Federal Register after that review is complete, which will officially open the public comment period.

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