NEWS RELEASE

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Whale-Detection Technology Continues to Expand in Recreational Boating

Viking evaluates WhaleSpotter technology aboard its 70 Convertible demo boat.

NEW GRETNA, N.J. (Oct. 19, 2026) – Viking Yacht Company is expanding its evaluation of whale-detection technology with the demonstration of WhaleSpotter aboard its new Viking 70 Convertible demo boat. The system uses thermal imaging and artificial intelligence (AI) to detect whales ahead of moving vessels and alert captains, helping them avoid potential collisions.

The demonstration is another example of the growing availability of whale-avoidance technology for recreational boats. Since 2022, Viking has worked with marine technology partners, including Viam, to develop and evaluate technologies that reduce vessel-strike risk and demonstrate why the 2008 North Atlantic right whale vessel speed rule should be modernized.

“We’re seeing tremendous progress in whale-detection technology, and these systems are becoming more practical and accessible for recreational boats,” said John DePersenaire, Viking’s Director of Government Affairs and Sustainability. “The WhaleSpotter demonstration is another example of technology that’s available today and can help captains avoid whales. We want to demonstrate these capabilities in real-world boating conditions.”

Viking formed the Whale and Vessel Safety (WAVS) Taskforce with industry partners in late 2022 to advance technology-based solutions to vessel strikes, particularly those involving the endangered North Atlantic right whale. WAVS operates a 24-foot Contender research boat equipped with thermal imaging, radar and AI-based detection systems. The boat serves as a platform for evaluating equipment and collecting data on whale detection and avoidance.

The WAVS boat is wrapping up a productive season in Plymouth, Massachusetts. NOAA personnel, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation board members and marine electronics companies have been aboard to see the technology. The team also conducted maneuvers and examined NMEA (National Marine Electronics Association) vessel data to assess how responses to whale detections can be tracked. The team is developing plans to use the boat in the South Atlantic during the winter months.

The continued development and deployment of whale-avoidance technologies come as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) considers modernizing the 2008 vessel speed rule. The current regulation requires most vessels 65 feet or longer to operate at 10 knots or less in designated Seasonal Management Areas along the East Coast during certain times of the year.

President Donald Trump's Sept. 17 executive order directs NOAA to use advances in marine mammal avoidance technology and coordinate with the private sector. Viking has urged the agency to move forward with a proposed rule that accounts for the industry's progress in developing technology-based measures to reduce vessel-strike risk.

"The technology has advanced significantly since the 2008 rule was adopted," DePersenaire said. "Through WAVS, we've been working to demonstrate that these systems can detect whales and give captains the information they need to avoid them. WhaleSpotter illustrates the rapid pace at which whale-detection technologies are being commercialized and put into use."

WhaleSpotter is the latest technology Viking is evaluating through this effort. According to the company, the demonstration aboard the 70 Convertible is its first on a sportfishing yacht.

The system uses thermal cameras and AI software to distinguish whales from waves, spray and other activity on the water. Depending on camera height and whale size, WhaleSpotter reports reliable detection at distances of 2 to 3 nautical miles, day or night.

"Seeing a whale two or three miles ahead gives a captain time to make a small course correction to avoid it," said Shawn Henry, CEO of WhaleSpotter. "That's the value of long-range detection. Captains can identify a potential risk and respond well before the vessel gets close to the whale."

Atlantic Marine Electronics (AME), a Viking subsidiary, installed the system on the 70's tuna tower using a removable mount. The thermal camera and processing computer are housed in a single unit. A separate tablet at the helm displays thermal images and provides the estimated distance and bearing of detected whales. An audible alert notifies the captain when a whale is detected.

The system collected data during the 70's recent trip from New Jersey to Florida, although no whales were detected. It will remain aboard during regular demo boat operations. Viking will also showcase the system to interested visitors and members of the media at the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show, Oct. 28-Nov. 1.

WhaleSpotter grew out of more than a decade of research at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Co-founder Dr. Daniel Zitterbart helped develop the technology, which uses AI trained on extensive imagery of whales and ocean conditions. WhaleSpotter reports more than 70 systems deployed worldwide, including installations aboard commercial vessels and at shore-based monitoring sites.

"Our research covers different whale species under a wide range of conditions," Henry said. "We can often identify a North Atlantic right whale by the distinctive V shape of its blow. That allows us to distinguish it from a humpback whale, for example, and gives captains more information about what they're seeing."

Captions: WhaleSpotter system installed on the Viking 70, under the tuna tower helm station's control box.

Shawn Henry, CEO of WhaleSpotter, with John DePersenaire, Director of Government Affairs and Sustainability and Chairman of the WAVS Taskforce