NOAA Commissions Research Ship Bell M. Shimada

US Federal officials have commissioned NOAA Ship Bell M. Shimada, a research vessel that will study a wide range of marine life and ocean conditions along the West Coast. This ship will enable researchers to collect data on sea life and habitats with a higher accuracy than before. Bell M. Shimada's design allows for quieter operation and movement of the vessel through the water, giving scientists the ability to study fish and marine mammals without significantly altering their behaviour.

The vessel is the fourth of a new class of ships designed to meet the NOAA Marine Fisheries Service's specific data collection requirements and the International Council for Exploration of the Seas' standards for a low acoustic signature. The ship's capabilities include a sonar system and equipment for deploying buoys and sensor-packed underwater vehicles. In addition to studying fish and marine mammals, researchers will also use the ship to observe marine bird populations.

Bell M. Shimada was named by a team of students from Marina High School in Monterey, CA, who won a regional NOAA contest to name the vessel. The ship's namesake served with the Bureau of Fisheries and Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, and was known for his contributions to the study of tropical Pacific tuna stocks, which were important to the development of West Coast commercial fisheries following World War II. Bell M. Shimada's son, Allen, is a fisheries scientist with NOAA's Fisheries Service.

Launched in September 2008, the 208-ft. *Bell M. Shimada* was built for NOAA by VT Halter Marine Inc., in Moss Point, Miss., as part of the NOAA's fleet replacement strategy to provide world-class platforms for US scientists. The ship will operate primarily in US waters from Washington state to southern California.