



Summary of Recent International Actions on Ocean Noise Pollution

1. International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee agrees intense noise threatens marine mammals

In the summer of 2004, and following a scientific workshop dedicated to examining the impacts of ocean noise on cetaceans, a working group of the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission issued a strong statement of concern regarding intense underwater noise. The group detailed their “alarming concerns” over harm from noise, and unanimously agreed that there is now “compelling evidence implicating anthropogenic sound as a potential threat to marine mammals,” a threat manifested “at both regional and ocean-scale levels that could impact populations of animals.” The scientists expressed particular concern about intense underwater noise from military sonar and from air guns used for oil and gas exploration.

The Scientific Committee, reviewing this data, agreed that the increase in ocean noise was cause for “serious concern,” and called for, among other things, the inclusion of noise exposure standards in national and international ocean conservation plans.

The Scientific Committee continued to call attention to ocean noise in its 2005 session, with particular focus on several additional mass strandings coincident with noise events, a call on noise producers to share information regarding noise source characteristics, the creation of a workshop to address impacts from seismic noise and a suggestion that noise may be impacting more species than previously thought.

The Scientific Committee report from 2004, along with the working group’s findings reported at Annex K, may be downloaded at:

http://www.iwcoffice.org/documents/sci_com/SCRepFiles2004/56SCrep.pdf

2. ACCOBAMS recognizes noise as pollution and calls for guidelines to reduce sounds harmful to cetaceans

In November 2004, the parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) adopted a resolution on undersea noise that, *inter alia*,:

Recognizes anthropogenic ocean noise as a form of pollution, comprised of energy, that can have adverse effects on marine life ranging from disturbance to injury and mortality;

Urges Parties and non Parties to, if appropriate, “avoid any use of man made noise in habitat of vulnerable species and in areas where marine mammals or endangered species may be concentrated ...within the ACCOBAMS area”; and

Calls for the development of a common set of guidelines on conducting activities known to produce underwater sound with the potential to cause adverse effects on cetaceans.

The ACCOBAMS resolution on ocean noise may be downloaded at:

http://www.accobams.org./index_science.htm

3. IUCN recognizes noise as pollution and urges governments to work through the U.N. to control undersea noise

Also in November 2004, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) passed a resolution, entitled “Underwater Noise Pollution,” that, *inter alia*,:

Recognizes that “anthropogenic underwater noise, depending on source and intensity, is a form of pollution, comprised of energy, that can degrade habitat and have adverse effects on marine life ranging from disturbance to injury and mortality”;

Notes that certain sources of intense noise are not presently subject to mitigation and that few protected areas are managed for noise impacts;

Entreats member governments, through mechanisms available under domestic and international law, to require the use of mitigation measures in reducing the impacts from individual noise sources; and

Urges member governments that are parties to the UN to work through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to develop mechanisms for the control of undersea noise.

The IUCN resolution on ocean noise may be downloaded at:

<http://www.awionline.org/whales/news/IUCN%20RES053.pdf>

4. European Parliament recognizes noise as pollution and calls on States to limit deployment of high intensity active naval sonars

In October 2004, the European Parliament approved a resolution acknowledging the threat to marine mammals and other ocean wildlife posed by high intensity active sonars. The resolution:

Recognizes that certain intense sounds “pose a significant threat to marine mammals” and “may have a negative impact on commercial fishing and the already depleted fish stocks throughout the world’s oceans;”

States that underwater noise is a form of pollution of the marine environment under the Law of the Sea; and

Calls on the EU Commission and Member States to develop international agreements regulating noise levels in the world’s oceans, with a view to regulating and limiting the adverse impact of anthropogenic sonars on marine mammals and fish.

The European Parliament resolution on ocean noise may be downloaded at:

<http://www.europarl.eu.int/omk/sipade3?PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+MOTION+B6-2004-0089+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&L=EN&LEVEL=2&NAV=S&LSTDOC=Y>

The International Ocean Noise Coalition consists of over 140 environmental NGOs working to reduce noise pollution in the world’s oceans.