

Petition to NATO for Action on the Use of High-Intensity Active Sonar

THIS PETITION seeking action on the military use of high-intensity active sonar is hereby submitted on behalf of the European Coalition for Silent Oceans with forty member organizations representing over 500,000 European citizens and on behalf of twenty-nine U.S., Canadian and international conservation and animal welfare organizations representing over 7,800,000 citizens.

REASONS FOR ACTION

We are deeply concerned about the growing use of intense active sonar in the marine environment. While passive sonar is designed to detect the sounds that other vessels produce, active systems generate their own sound waves and then decipher the echo they receive from distant targets. There is grave concern that proliferation of this technology poses a significant threat to marine mammals, fish and other ocean wildlife.

Scientists agree, and a growing body of research confirms, that the intense sound produced by these technologies can induce a range of adverse effects in marine mammals. These effects include death and serious injury caused by lung hemorrhage or tissue trauma; strandings and beachings; temporary and permanent hearing loss or impairment; and disruption of feeding, breeding, nursing, communication and sensing, and other behaviors vital to the survival of these species. Similar concerns exist for potential impacts on other marine populations, especially species of fish.

As stated most recently by the Cetacean Specialist Group of the IUCN-World Conservation Union: “Military operations involving the use of high-intensity sonar, explosive devices, and other intense noise sources pose both lethal and sub-lethal threats to cetaceans.” Of particular concern is “the development by several navies of very low-frequency sonars, known as ‘LFA’ in the United States, with detection ranges, and thus potential effect ranges, of several hundred kilometers.”

Public and scientific concern has grown, over the last decade, in the wake of a series of mass mortalities of cetaceans associated with the use of mid-frequency active sonar in coastal environments. The best-documented cases, where stranded animals were recovered in time for necropsy, occurred in the Bahamas (2000), Madeira (2000), and the Canary Islands (2002). Other cases have occurred in Greece (1996), the U.S. Virgin Islands (1998, 1999), the Canary Islands (1985, 1986, 1989), and, most recently, the Northwest coast of the United States (2003). However, the magnitude of the problem is not known as several recent lines of evidence indicate whales may die at sea where carcasses sink and are almost impossible to detect.

High-intensity sound has been shown to have adverse impacts on other marine species as well. While research in this area is rudimentary, it has been demonstrated that some sources of sound have the potential to injure and kill and to significantly reduce catch rates

of certain fish species at substantial distances. The proliferation of active sonar poses a threat to already depleted fish stocks throughout the world's oceans.

It is clear that the use of active sonar technology is expanding. Low-frequency active systems are in development by the U.S. navy and by member states of the European Union such as France, Germany, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. A number of other systems, including the mid-frequency system that has been implicated in several mass stranding events, are being deployed, tested, or reconditioned for use in coastal waters, which contain critical habitat for marine mammals and other ocean life. Along with the scientific community, we are deeply concerned about the cumulative and synergistic environmental impacts that all of these systems, operating independently, might have.

ACTION REQUESTED

We call upon NATO and its organs and committees to take the following actions:

- 1) We request that the Secretary General use his power and influence to urge member states to effectively and rapidly mitigate their use of high-intensity active sonar.
- 2) Observing that the deployment of low-frequency active sonar by some nations may be in breach of Articles 204-206 of the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS), which requires States to assess the potential effects of their activities on the marine environment, we request that the North Atlantic Council adopt a moratorium on the deployment of new low-frequency systems, whether by NATO or by its member states, until a global assessment of their cumulative environmental impacts can be prepared.
- 3) Noting that Article 194 of UNCLOS requires States to take all measures "necessary to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment from any source," we request that the Secretary General conduct a review of alternative surveillance technologies and their potential to reduce reliance on active acoustics in anti-submarine warfare.
- 4) We request that NATO discuss the impact of high intensity active sonars on the marine environment at the next meeting of the North Atlantic Council and in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.
- 5) Acknowledging that the development of active sonar is driven in part by the proliferation of "quiet" submarine technology, we request that the North Atlantic Council, through its Political Committee or Policy Coordination Group, consider limits on the transfer of quiet diesel-electric and nuclear submarines to nations outside the NATO Alliance.
- 6) Finally, we request that the North Atlantic Council commit itself to work with the EU and its member states to initiate the formation of a Multinational Task Force with the goal of developing international agreements regulating noise levels in the world's oceans.

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Members of the European Coalition for Silent Oceans

Animalisti Italiani, Italy (www.animalisti.it)

ASMS(Swiss Marine Mammal Protection) (www.asms-swiss.org)

Aargauer Tierschutz, Switzerland

Daupin Libres et Captifs, Belgium (www.dauphinlibre.be)

DELPHIN INSTITUT FREIBURG, Germany (www.delphin-institut.de)

DELPHIS Mediterranean Dolphin Conservation, Italy (www.delphismdc.org)

Die Welt der Wale und Delfine, Germany (www.cetaceen.de)

Finns for the Whales Society, Finland (<http://members.seurfeu.fi/whale>)

FIRMM, Switzerland and Spain (www.firrm.org)

Gesellschaft zur Rettung der Delphine, Deutschland (www.delphinschutz.org)

Hai Stiftung, Switzerland (www.hai.ch)

IMMRAC (Israeli Marine Mammal Research and Assistance Center), Israel

(<http://maritime.haifa.ac.il/cms/immrac/immrac.htm>)

Institut für Aquatische Körperarbeit, Switzerland (www.aquatischekoerperarbeit.ch)

Korte PHI, Germany (www.KortePHI.com)

La Baleine Libre, Belgium (http://users.swing.be/baleine_libre/)

Liquid Sound, Germany (www.liquidsound.com)

Marine Connection, England (www.marineconnection.org)

M.E.E.R, Germany and Spain (www.m-e-e-r.de)

Morigenos - marine mammal research and conservation society, Slovenia (www.morigenos.org)

Natur im Bild, Germany (www.naturimbild.de)

PADI PROJECT AWARE, Europe (www.projectaware.org)

PROWILDLIFE, Germany (www.prowildlife.de)

Réseau-Cétacés, France (www.reseaucetaces.org)

Schweizer Tierschutz, Switzerland (www.tierschutz.com)

Schweizer Wal-Gesellschaft, Switzerland (www.isuisse.com/cetaces)

Shark Info, Switzerland (www.sharkinfo.ch)

SHARKPROJECT, Deutschland (www.sharkproject.com)

Swiss Cetacean Society, Switzerland (www.oenology.ch/scs)

Swiss Coalition for the Protection of Whales (SCPW), Switzerland > (www.swisswhales.org)

SOS Grand Bleu, France (www.sosgrandbleu.asso.fr)

Stiftung Caretakers, Switzerland (caretakers.deployzone.net)

Tethys, Italy (www.tethys.org)

Tierschutz Bund, Switzerland (www.tierschutzbund-zuerich.ch)

Tortugas, Switzerland (www.tortugas.ch)

Vier Pfoten, Österreich (www.vier-pfoten.at)

Vier Pfoten, Switzerland (www.vier-pfoten.ch)

Vier Pfoten, Deutschland (www.vier-pfoten.de)

Vier Pfoten, Rumänien (www.vier-pfoten.ro)

Vier Pfoten, Bulgarien (www.vier-pfoten.bg)

WWF Schweiz (www.wwf.ch)

United States, Canadian and International Organizations

American Cetacean Society

Americans for a Safe Future

Animal Welfare Institute

Captive Dolphin Awareness Foundation

Cetacean Society International

Chico Organization for Cetaceans

Defenders of Wildlife

Earth Island Institute

Eco-Link

Environmental Defense Center

Environmental Health Coalition
Greenpeace International
Hawai'i Wildlife Fund
Humane Society of Canada
Humane Society of the United States
International Fund for Animal Welfare
International Wildlife Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
Oceanic Society
Ocean Mammal Institute
Orca Conservancy
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
Sea Sanctuary, Inc.
Seaflow
Sierra Club
Stop LFAS Worldwide Network
Surfrider Foundation
Voice for Animals Society, Canada
Whaleman Foundation