



Ms. Isabel García Tejerina
Spanish Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Environment
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Madrid, September 1st, 2017

Protection of the Cetacean Migration Corridor in the Levantine-Balearic marine demarcation as a Specially Protected Area of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI) and effective protection ahead of the declaration

Dear Minister,

Alianza Mar Blava and the undersigned organisations and individuals seek your support to protect an ecologically important region ahead of the declaration of the Cetacean Migration Corridor in the Levantine-Balearic marine area as a Specially Protected Area of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI) at the Conference of the Parties to the Barcelona Convention.

The area we seek to address is between the Balearic Islands' coasts – including Formentera, Ibiza, Mallorca and Menorca – and those of Catalonia and the Valencia region. It is crucial to provide effective protection for the area, including measures to reduce marine noise.

The protection of this Cetacean Migration Corridor is robustly and scientifically justified.

1. The area is of great importance for primary productivity.
2. Several studies, including the "*Mediterranean Project to identify SPAMIs for Cetacean conservation in the Spanish Mediterranean*", a joint project between the Ministry of Environment, the University of Valencia, the University of Barcelona, and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, emphasise the need for protection of this Cetacean Migration Corridor, because it concentrates significant numbers of cetacean species, and has special relevance for the fin whale that uses it as a migratory route towards its breeding and feeding areas in the northern Mediterranean.
3. The Ligurian Sea has been declared a cetacean sanctuary (the Pelagos Sanctuary) and an international marine reserve. A SPAMI declaration would appropriately extend the protection to animals migrating into and out of the Pelagos Sanctuary.
4. Several studies indicate the presence of other cetaceans in the region, including long finned pilot whales, sperm whales, Cuvier's beaked whales, and Risso's, bottlenose and striped dolphins.
5. Fin whales, long finned pilot whales, sperm whales, Cuvier's beaked whales, and Risso's, bottlenose and striped dolphins are all included in Annex II to the Protocol to the Barcelona Convention concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean and in Annex IV to the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, which imply that Parties to the Convention and Member States of the European Union must establish strict measures to guarantee protection and conservation.



The Cetacean Migration Corridor has been identified as a *'black spot'* of marine noise in the scientific study *'Overview of the Noise Hotspots in the ACCOBAMS Area (Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area), Part I - Mediterranean Sea'*, January 2016.

The proposal to declare the Cetacean Migration Corridor as a SPAMI also has solid political and institutional support, including from the Balearic Parliament (Institutional Declaration unanimously passed in the plenary session of 16th February 2016), the Balearic Government (Government Council meeting of 27th May 2016), the Government of Catalonia (through the 19th July 2016 agreement), the Government of Valencia (agreement in process), the Island Councils of Mallorca, Menorca, Formentera and Ibiza, the Barcelona City Council (agreement of 22nd September 2016), more than ten local councils of the Balearic Islands, five major national Spanish conservation NGOs (WWF, SEO/BirdLife, Greenpeace, Ecologists in Action, and Friends of the Earth), and the undersigned organisations to this statement.

The European Commission has also given its explicit support, considering a Cetacean Migration Corridor SPAMI declaration of great importance both for the protection of marine species and to implement international commitments related to the protection of marine biodiversity.

We welcome the Spanish Government's commitment to formally propose the declaration of this Cetacean Migration Corridor as a SPAMI at the next Conference of the Parties to the Barcelona Convention, to be held in December 2017 in Tirana, Albania.

In the meantime, the Cetacean Migration Corridor is seriously threatened by a series of offshore hydrocarbon exploration proposals, including the proposed Spectrum Geo Limited *'2D seismic campaign in free areas of the Northwest Mediterranean-Balearic sea'* (currently under environmental impact assessment), and by the exploratory proposals in the Gulf of Lyon from *'Northeast 1'* to *'Northeast 12'* by Cairn Energy. The operational areas of these proposals overlap the northern area of the Cetacean Migration Corridor.

The science is well established that marine noise pollution generated by offshore hydrocarbon exploration (seismic surveys) threatens marine fauna populations, particularly cetaceans, impacting their communication and hunting and potentially damaging their physiology. If these hydrocarbon proposals proceed, they risk critical and irreversible environmental impact to the cetacean populations and other marine species in the region.

We urge the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Environment to immediately pass a Ministerial Order to establish and regulate, among other measures, a rigorous preventive protection regime, that prevents activities producing intense marine noise in the area. These measures should remain in force until a corresponding SPAMI management plan or instrument is implemented.

The declaration of the Cetacean Migration Corridor as a SPAMI is well justified by decades of scientific data and has wide and important political support.



We, the undersigned, seek your formal support for the declaration of the Cetacean Migration Corridor as a SPAMI, and a Ministerial Order of protection for the region until the SPAMI management plan or instrument is in place.

Signed by:

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On behalf of

Scientists

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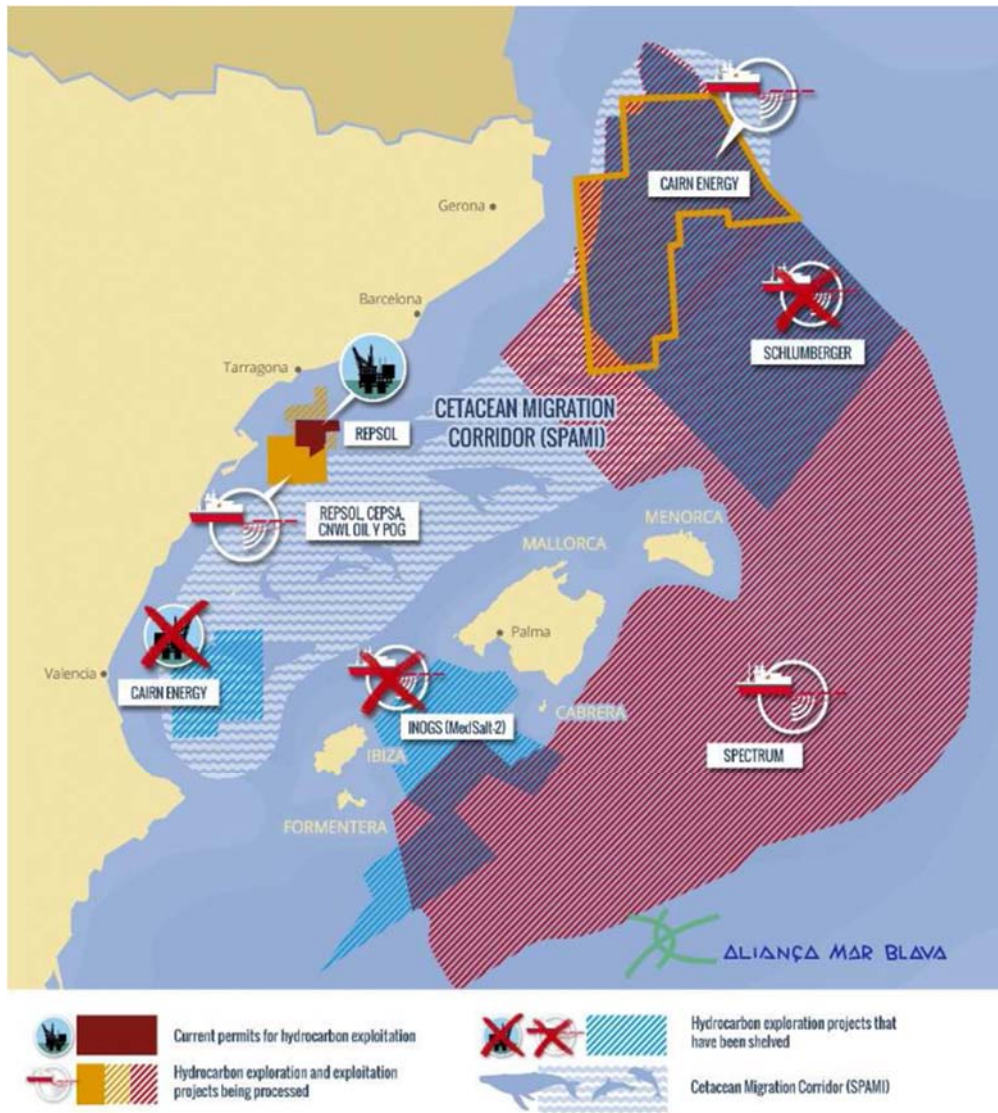
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Asociación Ondine, Spain
Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS), Australia
BlueVoice.org, USA
Born Free Foundation, UK
Centro de Conservación Cetacea, Chile
Cetacean Society International
ECCEA (Eastern Caribbean Coalition for Environmental Awareness), International
EMS Foundation, South Africa
Environmental Investigation Agency, International
Humane Society International
IFAW, Australia
IFAW European Region
Instituto de Conservación de Ballenas (ICB), Argentina
Legambiente, Italy
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
M.E.E.R. e.V., Germany
Mission Blue, International
Morigenos - Slovenian Marine Mammal Society, Slovenia
No Whales In Captivity, Vancouver Canada
NRDC, USA
Oceana, Europe
OceanCare, Switzerland
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Pelagos Cetacean Research Institute, Greece
Pro Wildlife e.V., Germany
Seas at Risk, Europe
Tethys Research Institute, Italy
VIVAMAR Society for the Sustainable Development for the Sea, Slovenia
Whale & Dolphin Conservation, International
Wild Migration, International

Annex I:

Illustration of overlap of the whale migration corridor and the offshore hydrocarbon exploration





Annex II

References relating to Whale migration

Notarbartolo di Sciara G., Birkun A., Jr. (2010). Conserving whales, dolphins and porpoises in the Mediterranean and Black Seas: an ACCOBAMS status report, 2010. ACCOBAMS, Monaco. 212 p.

Notarbartolo di Sciara G., Castellote M., Druon J.-N., Panigada S. (2016). Fin Whales, *Balaenoptera physalus*: At Home in a Changing Mediterranean Sea? In: *Advances in Marine Biology*, 75: 75-101.

Panigada S., Donovan G.P., Druon J.-N., Lauriano G., Pierantonio N., Pirotta E., Zanardelli M., Zerbini A.N., Notarbartolo di Sciara G. (2017). Satellite tagging of Mediterranean fin whales: working towards the identification of critical habitats and the focussing of mitigation measures. *Scientific Reports*, 7. Article number: 3365.