



## **EU governments set to fail on reaching their own objectives to protect marine wildlife from harmful ocean noise pollution**

*Brussels, 24<sup>th</sup> January 2019* - Member States of the European Union are set to fail to protect marine wildlife from the impacts of intense underwater noise levels by 2020, despite a requirement to do so under EU marine law.

This is the conclusion of a report reviewing the programmes put in place by European countries to tackle the main threats to our seas and ocean, including underwater noise pollution. The report was undertaken by a group of specialised civil society organisations - OceanCare, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Seas at Risk and Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), who are extremely concerned over the lack of action.

Under the 2008 European legislation of the Marine Directive, European governments are required to take action in several areas, to make our seas clean and healthy again by 2020. One of these areas is underwater noise, which should be reduced to levels that do not adversely affect the marine environment.

“Concrete measures to reduce underwater noise are well-known and can already be adopted to ease the life of European marine mammals and other marine species. The only thing required to make this happen, is our leaders’ political willingness,” says Alice Belin, Marine Policy Officer at Seas At Risk.

Despite the bleak picture portrayed by the report, the imposition of ship speed limits and the development of quieter technology could actually reverse the current trend, if Member States immediately commit to these measures.

The report raises concerns that despite evidence that noise sources are harmful to various marine species, from large whales to small zooplankton, some governments continue to call for further research instead of taking action now.

“Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence of impacts. Nothing shall prevent Member States from taking immediate action and the list of such actions to be taken is long. Very long,” says Nicolas Entrup, spokesperson for OceanCare and NRDC.

Sound levels in the ocean are constantly rising, due to a variety of human causes, such as the oil and gas industry, shipping traffic and military activity. Loud sound can cause irreversible damage to marine wildlife, including stress, deafness, habitat displacement, reduced

reproduction and feeding opportunities and even death. Noise emissions have been linked to the fatal stranding of whales and dolphins on beaches, which is just the tip of the iceberg; they have also been linked to high rates of mortality in krill, which are vital to the marine food web, as well as falling catch-rates of commercial fish species. One of the noisiest activities, shipping, is also a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions. The conservation groups stress that taking measures to reduce noise levels would also contribute to mitigating climate change as well as preventing fatal whale ship strikes.

“Ten years have passed since the Marine Directive has been adopted. It seems most States have just talked the talk rather than implementing precise conservation action to reduce noise levels in our oceans,” says Eleonora Panella, campaigner for IFAW.

Indeed, the European Commission declared in August 2018 that European countries are likely to fail their legally binding commitment to adequately tackle human threats to the marine environment by 2020. For noise pollution, there is no doubt that the ‘business-as-usual’ attitude adopted by many EU countries will lead to further deterioration in the living conditions of marine wildlife.

However, EU governments have failed to impose a reduction on the speed of ships, the most efficient and cost-effective action to address these cumulative impacts of shipping. But there is some hope. The renewable energy sector, with support from some EU governments, is at the forefront of the fight against noise pollution by using innovative technologies to reduce noise levels caused by pile driving, a practice applied during offshore windfarm construction.

We need a clear strategy on phasing out seismic activities which are undertaken to search for new oil and gas resources within the seabed. Until then, less noisy technologies should be employed.

OceanCare, IFAW, Seas at Risk and NRDC ask governments to:

1. Impose ship speed reductions to reduce noise pollution, ship strikes with whales and greenhouse gas emissions and start the process of developing binding rules for the quieting of ships, based on the existing guidelines of the International Maritime Organization (IMO).
2. Require the development and use of quieter technological alternatives and best available technologies for pile driving and seismic surveying.
3. Require robust, comprehensive and transparent Environmental Impact Assessments for all noise-generating activities at sea, drawing on the already adopted guidelines of the Convention on Migratory Species<sup>1</sup>.
4. Identify and set noise exclusion zones and alternative shipping routes, including the designation of noise buffer zones around sensitive habitat;

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<sup>1</sup>Link to CMS Guidelines- [https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/cms\\_cop12\\_res.12.14\\_marine-noise\\_e.pdf](https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/cms_cop12_res.12.14_marine-noise_e.pdf)

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