

Mediterranean deep-sea region threatened by oil exploration

Wädenswil, 13 May 2019. In a joint statement to Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, dozens of scientists, environmental and species conservation organisations express their concern about planned oil developments off Greece. The reason: the allocation of drilling licences and authorisations for oil exploration using sonic cannons in the deep-sea region of the Hellenic Trench and the Ionian Islands, one of the core areas of Greek summer tourism.

The international marine conservation organisation OceanCare, which has been active for years in numerous fora for the protection of species-rich regions in the Mediterranean and for the reduction of underwater noise, supports the appeal launched by WWF Greece and Greek scientists. The region is an important habitat for a wide range of highly endangered and acoustically sensitive species, including small and therefore endangered populations of sperm whales, deep-diving beaked whales and (Common) dolphins. Oil exploitation is planned in much deeper waters here than in the Gulf of Mexico, where the Deepwater Horizon oil platform disaster occurred nine years ago.

“Searching for oil at such depths is irresponsibly playing with fire, as cases of emergency may result in a catastrophe of unimaginable dimensions. The use of sonic cannons is not only an enormous threat to sperm whales and beaked whales, but also to other species,” explains Nicolas Entrup, Ocean Policy expert at OceanCare.

“From the Paris Agreement, we expect intensive efforts to bring about the energy transition and not to open up highly sensitive habitats to potential oil development. The Hellenic Trench must be designated a protected area,” says Sigrid Lüber, president of OceanCare. She calls on the Greek government to change course.

For years, scientists and international fora like the Scientific Committee of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black and Mediterranean Seas (ACCOBAMS) have been demanding to put the up to 5,000 meters deep Hellenic Trench under protection.

Media contact

Nicolas Entrup, Ocean Policy Expert OceanCare: M: (+43) 660 211 9963, nentrup@oceancare.org

Further links and information:

- Joint appeal to Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras: http://www.oceancare.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Resolution-text_ENG.pdf
- The Guardian podcast series on underwater noise (Interview with Nicolas Entrup of OceanCare: from 00:20:30 to 00:27:40): <https://www.theguardian.com/science/audio/2019/may/03/oceans-of-noise-episode-three-science-weekly-podcast>
- <https://www.oceancare.org/en/our-work/ocean-conservation/underwater-noise/underwater-noise-consequences/>
- Image: whale wearing hearing protection (©)OceanCare. Further images available on request.

About OceanCare

OceanCare has been working for the protection of marine mammals and oceans since 1989 and has initiated the campaign “Silent Oceans”. With research and conservation projects, environmental campaigns and intense contributions to a range of international committees, OceanCare has undertaken concrete steps worldwide to improve living conditions in the world’s oceans. Since July 2011, OceanCare has been recognised by the United Nations as a special advisor on marine conservation issues. Since 2004, OceanCare is an official partner of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS). www.oceancare.org/en, www.silentoceans.com