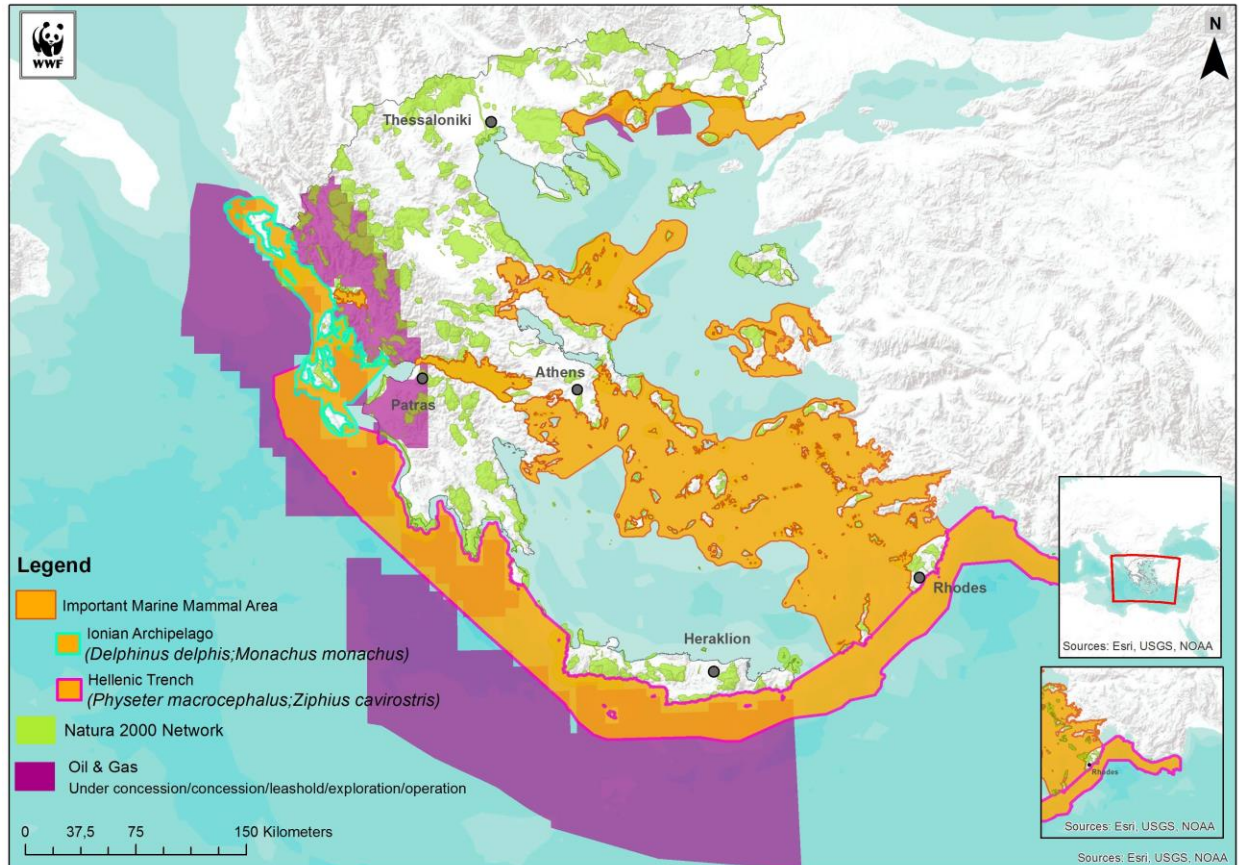


Call for Protection of the Hellenic Trench from hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation

To: The Prime Minister of Greece, Mr. Alexis Tsipras

The undersigned organizations and individuals call for immediate and effective protection of the Hellenic Trench from offshore hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation.



In recent years, a large offshore marine area (approximately 56,000 sq. km) has been granted as concessions to the oil and gas industry for hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation. This area extends from the north of Corfu to Southern Crete and largely overlaps with a large part of the west and south Hellenic Trench, a critical habitat and marine biodiversity hotspot of global ecological importance.

The Hellenic Trench is a core habitat for the endangered Mediterranean sperm whale's subpopulation. It is estimated that only 250 individuals live in the entire eastern Mediterranean basin and the Hellenic Trench constitutes their only known breeding area. The Hellenic Trench is also the largest among the five high-density areas for the vulnerable Cuvier's beaked whale in the Mediterranean. Fin whales, bottlenose, common, Risso's, striped and rough-toothed dolphins, Mediterranean monk seals, but also sea turtles are found in the Hellenic Trench. These species are included in Annex II to the Protocol of the Barcelona Convention concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean, and in Annex IV to the Habitats

Directive 92/43/EEC. Parties to the Convention and Member States of the European Union are required to establish strict measures to ensure their effective conservation.

The paramount ecological significance of the Hellenic Trench has been recognized by international agreements, such as the Agreement for the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS). In this context, two Important Marine Mammal Areas have been identified, whereas the wider Hellenic Trench has been proposed as a Marine Protected Area. However, to date only a very small proportion - mostly coastal - of the area has become part of the Natura 2000 Network in which cetaceans not only have limited presence, but are also inadequately protected.

Despite its global importance, cetaceans in the Hellenic Trench are already facing a series of direct and severe threats, such as anthropogenic noise, (studies in the area have demonstrated significant lethal impact of naval exercises to Cuvier beaked whales), ship strikes (severely threatening the survival of the sperm whale population), fisheries interactions, plastic pollution and climate change, that are already poorly addressed by national authorities and international agreements. Oil and gas exploration and exploitation projects as an additional, important threat to marine mammals in the Hellenic Trench, would become an important blow to their chances of survival. There is abundant scientific evidence that demonstrates that hydrocarbon development causes detrimental effects to marine mammals throughout their whole cycle by:

- Causing auditory - sometimes lethal - injuries to marine mammals from air-gun noise during exploration activities.
- Leading to marine mammals' displacement from their habitat, disrupting their behavior and causing stress, due to increased marine noise from exploration, extraction activities and marine traffic.
- Increasing air and marine pollution due to effluent discharges, marine traffic, operational and accidental spills.
- Posing a significant risk from ship collisions with cetaceans, due to increased marine traffic during infrastructure construction and fuel transportation.
- Causing physical damage to benthos and disturbing their marine mammal populations in coastal or remote marine areas during the construction phase of port facilities, rigs and pipelines.

In recent years, several governments in countries such as Italy, France, Spain and Portugal have made bold political and investment decisions to phase out or ban oil and gas exploration and production activities. These decisions are largely driven by the need to invest in a clean energy future and protect the marine environment, as a pillar of a thriving and sustainable, touristic economy.

Therefore, we express our grave concerns over these plans that place the Hellenic Trench's marine biodiversity under serious threat. To ensure a healthy and viable marine environment in Greece, we urge reconsideration of all licensing procedures for oil and gas drilling operations and call for the effective protection of the Hellenic Trench, towards a permanent ban in Greece.

ENTITIES SIGNING THE RESOLUTION TEXT

Organizations (Greek & international)

- 1.** AMBAR elkarte, Spain
- 2.** ANIMA- Wild Life Conservation Society
- 3.** Animal Welfare Institute of Washington DC
- 4.** ARCHELON- The Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece
- 5.** Arcturos
- 6.** ARION-Cetacean Rescue and Rehabilitation Research Centre
- 7.** Associació Cetàcea, Spain
- 8.** Callisto
- 9.** Coordinadora para o Estudo dos Mamíferos Mariños (CEMMA), Spain
- 10.** East Caribbean Coalition for Environmental Awareness (ECCEA)
- 11.** Ecological Recycling Society
- 12.** EcoOcéan Institut
- 13.** firmm, (Foundation for Information and Research on Marine Mammals), Spain
- 14.** Focus, Association for Sustainable Development, Slovenia
- 15.** Green Home
- 16.** Green Istria, Croatia, member of the One Adriatic Network
- 17.** Greenpeace
- 18.** Groupe d'Etude des Cétacés de Méditerranée (GECEM)
- 19.** Hellenic Ornithological Society
- 20.** Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature
- 21.** Instituto Baleia Jubarte, Brazil
- 22.** iSea
- 23.** LEGAMBIENTE, Italy
- 24.** M.E.E.R.e.V., Germany
- 25.** Medasset
- 26.** Mediterranean Centre for Environmental Monitoring (MedCEM), Montenegro
- 27.** MedSOS
- 28.** Morigenos - Slovenian Marine Mammal Society, Slovenia
- 29.** Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), USA
- 30.** Ocean Conservation Research, USA
- 31.** OceanCare, Switzerland
- 32.** Pelagos Cetacean Research Institute
- 33.** Pro Wildlife e.V., Germany
- 34.** PROMAR (Asociación en Defensa de la Fauna Marina), Spain
- 35.** Salviateam EU, Spain
- 36.** Turkish Marine Research Foundation, TUDAV, Turkey
- 37.** VIVAMAR Society for the Sustainable Development of the Sea, Slovenia
- 38.** World Cetacean Alliance
- 39.** WWF Greece

Scientists (Greek & foreign)

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- 4. Alice Eymard-Duvernay**
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- 5. Alikì Panagopoulou, Ph.D.**
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- 26. Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara**
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- 39. Marine Roul**
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Fundación Cethus, Argentina
- 44. Mike Styllas**
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Cape Eleuthera Institute, Cape Eleuthera Island School, Eleuthera, The Bahamas
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OceanCare
NRDC (National Resources Defence Council) *
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