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 elkartea, 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. EcoOcean 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)

1. **Aimée Leslie**  
   Marine Programme Director, WWF-Perú

2. **Aimilia Drougas, Biologist, Geologist-Oceanographer, Ph.D.**  
   Hellenic Ministry of Rural Development and Food-Directorate of Land Development, Water and Soil Resources  
   Co-founder & Secretary General of ARION-Cetacean Rescue and Rehabilitation Research Centre (Academy of Athens Award 2017)

3. **Ailan Rees, Ph.D.**  
   ARCHELON

4. **Alice Eymard-Duvernay**  
   WWF-Switzerland

5. **Alkis Panagopoulos, Ph.D.**  
   Conservation Scientist, The Leatherback Trust Inc., (Fort Wayne, Indiana)

6. **Anastasia Komnenou, DVM, Ph.D.**  
   Professor of SURGERY-Exotic and Wildlife Medicine  
   Faculty of Health Sciences -School of Veterinary Medicine (EAEVE Approved)  
   Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, AUTH  
   Co-founder and President of ARION-Cetacean Rescue and Rehabilitation Research Centre (Academy of Athens Award 2017)

7. **Antonio Jesús Fernandez Rodríguez**  
   Veterinary Pathology Professor, DVM, Ph.D, DipECZM (WPH), European Veterinary Specialist in Veterinary Pathology, University Las Palmas, Gran Canaria

8. **Ashleigh Kitchiner**  
   Marine Mammal Observer, Chester, UK

9. **Ayaka Amaha Öztürk, Ph.D.**  
   Marine Biology, Turkey

10. **Dan H. Kerem, Ph.D.**  
    President of IMMRAC, IUCN-SSC Cetacean Specialist Group, Member

11. **Demetres Karavellas**  
    CEO, WWF Greece

12. **Dipl. Biol. Sven Koschinski**  
    Marina Mammal Biologist  
    Nature Conservation Management, Meereszoologie

13. **Dr. Alexandros Frantzis**  
    Biologist-Oceanographer

14. **Dr. Denise L Herzing**  
    Research Director, Wild Dolphin Project  
    Affiliate Assistant Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton FL, 33431 USA

15. **Dr. Guido Pietroluongo**  
    Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation

16. **Dr. Jeffrey Seminoff**  
    Marine Biologist, USA

17. **Dr. Léa David**  
    EcoOcéan Institut, France

18. **Dr. Nathalie Di-Meglio**  
    EcoOcéan Institut, France

19. **Dr. Putu Liza Mustika**  
    Cetacean Sirenian Indonesia

20. **Dr. Susan S. Kilham**  
    Professor, Drexel University, Department of Biodiversity, Earth, and Environmental Science
21. **Emily Chou, M.A.**  
Research Assistant, Ocean Giants Program, Wildlife Conservation Society

22. **Erich Hoyt**  
Research Fellow, Whale and Dolphin Conservation  
Co-chair, IUCN SSC-WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force

23. **Fabian Ritter**  
Marine Biologist, Germany

24. **Giovanni Bearzi, Ph.D.**  
President, Dolphin Biology and Conservation  
Pew Marine Conservation Fellow

25. **Giuseppe Di Carlo**  
Leader, WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative

26. **Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciaara**  
Co-chair IUCN MMPA Task Force

27. **Heike Vesper**  
Marine Director, WWF-Deutschland

28. **Ilias Foskolos**  
MSc, Department of Bioscience, Aarhus University, Denmark

29. **James R. Spotila**  
Professor, Drexel University, Department of Biodiversity, Earth and Environmental Science

30. **Joan Conzalvo, Ph.D.**  
Marine biology and conservation, Spain

31. **Kaloust Paragamian**  
Managing Director, Hellenic Institute of Speleological Research

32. **Katherina Audley**  
Founder and Director, Whales of Guerrero, Mexico

33. **Kristine Funk**  
Assistant Curator of Sea Lions and Birds, Coral World Ocean Park

34. **Lindy Weilgart, Ph.D.**  
Marine Biology, Dalhousie University, Canada  
Adjunct, Department of Biology, Dalhousie University

35. **mag. DARJA RIBARIČ**  
Mphil in Biological Sciences

36. **Maria del Pilar Santidrián Tomillo**  
Science Director, The Leatherback Trust

37. **Maria Salomidi, Ph.D., Marine Ecology**  
Environmentalist  
Hellenic Centre for Marine Research

38. **Marina Sequeira**  
Biologist, Portugal

39. **Marine Roul**  
EcoOcéan Institut, France

40. **Mark J. Spalding**  
President, The Ocean Foundation

41. **Mauricio Cantor**  
Departamento de Ecologia e Zoologia, Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina, Brazil  
Department of Collective Behaviour, Max Planck Institute for Ornithology, Germany

42. **Melanie Lancaster**  
WWF- Arctic Programme, Canada

43. **Miguel Iñíguez Bessega**  
Fundación Cethus, Argentina

44. **Mike Styllas**  
Geology Research, Federal University of Lausanne
45. **Nathan J. Robinson, Ph.D**  
Director, Cape Eleuthera Institute  
Cape Eleuthera Institute, Cape Eleuthera Island School, Eleuthera, The Bahamas

46. **Nicolas Entrup, Ocean Policy Consultant**  
OceanCare  
NRDC (National Resources Defence Council) *

47. **Patrick R. Ramage**  
Director, Marine Conservation  
International Fund for Animal Welfare

48. **Pedro Jiménez**  
President of the Ecuadorian Foundation for the study of Marine Mammals (FEMM, Ecuador)

49. **Rachel Doyle**  
Elasmobranch Conservation Group, Sharklab- Malta

50. **Richard Reina, Ph.D., Australia**

51. **Russell Leaper, IFAW**

52. **Sean McQuilken**  
Marine Biologist  
Marine Mammal and Protected Species Observer, Charleston, SC, United States

53. **Sharon Livermore**  
Programme Officer, Marine Conservation  
International Fund for Animal Welfare

54. **Sigrid Lüber**  
President, OceanCare

55. **Silvia Frey, PhD.**  
Marine biology and environmental science, Switzerland

56. **Simone Panigada**  
President of Tethys Research Institution

57. **Stephanie Verbeek**  
Head Oceans Unit, WWF-Netherlands

58. **Tanzer John**  
Leader, WWF Ocean Practice

59. **Théa Jacob**  
WWF-France

60. **Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D**  
U.S. Marine Mammal Commission (retired)

61. **Vincent S. Saba, Ph.D.**  
Princeton University