

## **Setting course for a quieter and healthy ocean: Speed up slowing down**

**(Brussels, Hamburg, Zurich – 30 March 2021)** – Reduced ship speeds decrease CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, underwater noise from shipping and other pollutants like black carbon - these are the conclusions of two studies commissioned by the Belgian Ministry for Environment and reviewed by [IFAW](#) and [OceanCare](#) experts, which will be presented during a webinar on 30<sup>th</sup> March.

The studies conducted by the independent TNO Research group analysed various scenarios based on real shipping traffic in the North Sea. The main findings show that limiting speeds to 75% of ship design speed results in a 10% reduction in the emission of the main pollutant gases like CO<sub>2</sub>, SO<sub>x</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub> and black carbon, and in a meaningful reduction of underwater noise. For regulators, the option of limiting ships to 75% of their design speed is easy to apply and monitor. It also creates ‘a level playing field’, in which all ship types from different sectors would apply the same measures and no one would be unduly penalised.

“Swift action is needed for a healthy ocean. Slowing down commercial ships is a cost-effective solution that can be implemented immediately and has many co-benefits for the ocean, climate, and for whales and other marine life, that rely on sound for their survival. Industry, regulators and governments need to act now,” says Sharon Livermore, Director of Marine Conservation for the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).

“This initiative of the Belgian government comes at a crucial time and demonstrates how a modest speed reduction can have multi-environmental benefits,” adds Carlos Bravo, spokesperson of OceanCare. “We need similar ambitious activities and trials in the Mediterranean, one of the seas with the highest intensity of maritime traffic in the world. A set of binding measures combined with incentives should support the shipping industry to transition to more environmentally friendly operations”.

The findings of these studies are very timely, given the recent and alarming results from the EU funded project JOMOPANS (Joint Monitoring Programme for Ambient Noise North Sea), which highlighted just how much the North Sea soundscape is dominated by noise from shipping. IFAW and OceanCare also encourage governments and the EU to make use of the studies’ results for the future management of shipping globally.

“These two small studies provide a good indication of how ships slowing down will bring about several environmental wins. Slowing down also reduces the number of whales killed in collisions, and brings additional benefits to the shipping industry in fuel savings and increased efficiency. Urgent action is now needed by governments to support regulations and incentives that set a course for a quieter, healthier ocean” adds Livermore.

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**Images are available on request.**

#### **Notes to Editors:**

**Effects of underwater noise on marine life:** Underwater noise is a pervasive problem for marine life. Cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) depend on sound to find food, to communicate with one another and to navigate. Underwater noise, created by humans, can result in increased stress and reduced reproductive success, drive whales and dolphins out of critical habitats and in extreme cases, cause them to strand on beaches. Shipping is responsible for much increased background noise in the ocean, creating a continuous din that masks the communication of fish, whales and other marine life and reduces the space over which they can communicate. Most of the underwater noise from shipping comes from the propellers. Slowing down and making the propeller work less hard reduces the noise produced.

**Shipping industry and GHG emissions:** According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) (Fourth IMO GHG Study 2020), the share of shipping greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in global anthropogenic emissions has increased from 2.76% in 2012 to 2.89% in 2018. The GHG emissions of total shipping (international, domestic and fishing) have increased from 977 million tons in 2012 to 1,076 million tons in 2018, which is a 9.6% increase of emissions. GHG include carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O); the latter two are expressed in CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalents. In 2012, the pure CO<sub>2</sub> emissions amounted to 962 million tons; in 2018, the emissions grew by 9.3% to 1,056 million tons. Due to mostly low quality and cheap fuel (heavy fuel oil remains the dominant fuel in international shipping), other pollutant gases also get emitted, especially sulphur-oxides and nitrogen-oxides.

**About the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) -** The International Fund for Animal Welfare is a global non-profit helping animals and people thrive together. We are experts and everyday people, working across seas, oceans and in more than 40 countries around the world. We rescue, rehabilitate and release animals, and we restore and protect their natural habitats. The problems we're up against are urgent and complicated. To solve them, we match fresh thinking with bold action. We partner with local communities, governments, non-governmental organisations and businesses. Together, we pioneer new and innovative ways to help all species flourish. See how at [ifaw.org](http://ifaw.org)

## Press release

**About OceanCare** - OceanCare is a Swiss non-profit organisation. It was founded in 1989 and has a strong commitment to realistic and cooperative initiatives. The organisation works at national and international level in the areas of marine pollution, environmental changes, fisheries, whaling, sealing, captivity of marine mammals and public education. OceanCare holds Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and is a partner of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and the UNEP/CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), as well as UNEP/MAP. OceanCare has also been accredited as a Major Group to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), which is the governing body of UNEP and is a part of the UNEP Global Partnership on Marine Litter.  
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