



## PRESS RELEASE

### 80th meeting of IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee concludes

#### **MORE SHADOWS THAN LIGHTS AT CRUCIAL IMO MEETING ON DECARBONISATION OF SHIPPING AND PROTECTION OF GREAT WHALES FROM COLLISIONS**

- **Significant but insufficient improvement of the current IMO Decarbonisation Strategy which will make it very difficult for shipping to contribute to the Paris Agreement target of limiting the Earth's temperature increase to 1.5°C.**
- **New updated Guidelines for the reduction of underwater noise from maritime traffic adopted, but still only on a voluntary basis.**
- **The Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) in the north-western Mediterranean is approved but only with recommendations to voluntarily reduce the speed of vessels in the presence of sperm whales and fin whales.**
- **Despite plea from the shipping industry, complete failure to protect Indian Ocean blue whales in Sri Lankan waters from ship strikes due to resistance from Sri Lanka to act.**
- **Broad initial support for the proposed designation of an Emission Control Area in the Canadian Arctic.**

London, 7 July 2023. Despite some significant progress, the UN's International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) real commitment to decarbonising shipping and protecting great whales from ship strikes and underwater noise still casts too many shadows, according to marine protection organisation OceanCare, which attended the 80th meeting of its Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) in person.

*"The strong resistance that still persists within the IMO to a goal of absolute zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and intermediate reduction targets for 2030 and 2040 based on science-based recommendations makes it highly unlikely that shipping can make a significant contribution to limiting the Earth's temperature increase by 1.5°C,"* lamented Carlos Bravo, OceanCare's representative in Spain, who attended the 80th meeting of the IMO MEPC in London.

After many days of negotiations leading up to MEPC 80 and also during this meeting, the IMO's Strategy targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from shipping have been improved, albeit insufficiently and using deliberately ambiguous language.

On the one hand, it has moved from a target of a 50% reduction in GHG emissions from ships by 2050 to a "net zero" target for [2050] or [around mid-century]". *"It is unclear what the implications of "net zero" are, as it may leave the door open to undesirable practices such as offsetting or unviable carbon capture and storage measures"*, states Bravo.

On the other hand, instead of clear and precise targets for 2030 and 2040, there is talk of "indicative checkpoints" of "20%, striving for 30% by 2030" and "70%, striving for 80% by 2040.

Nor has it been accepted, due to opposition from China, Brazil, India, among others, to the Marshall Islands' proposal, supported by many countries, to approve a levy of \$100 per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted, to help accelerate the phase-out of fossil fuels and accelerate the deployment of zero-emission renewable fuels.

In comparison, the decarbonisation pathway for shipping compatible with the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) targets at least 36% GHG emission reductions from this sector by 2030 and at least 96% by 2040.

## **Blue whales at Dondra Head will continue to die from collisions with ships because of the Sri Lankan government's unreasonableness.**

"It has been particularly painful to witness the utter inability of the IMO to bring Sri Lanka to its senses so that, after 10 years of total inaction, it agreed to discuss the modification of the location of the Dondra Head Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) to prevent dozens of blue whale deaths annually, as requested by the major shipping industry associations, NGOs and a large majority of member countries", declared Nicolas Entrup, OceanCare's Director of International Relations.

The Sri Lankan government delegation, with the sole support of China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Algeria, strongly even opposed the consideration of the document presented jointly by the environmental organisation International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) together with the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and the main representative associations of the shipping industry such as the World Shipping Council (WSC), International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO), International Association of Independent Tanker Owners (INTERTANKO), International Association of Dry Cargo Shipowners (INTERCARGO), Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), International Parcel Tankers Association (IPTA).

This paper simply invited the MEPC to consider the information provided on the importance of establishing a new TSS south of Sri Lanka to address current environmental and safety concerns and to invite the IMO Secretary General to consider providing any technical cooperation necessary to facilitate the establishment of a new TSS 15 miles south of the current one to accommodate the significant East-West shipping traffic navigating these waters, through a coordinated process.

An estimated 30-60 blue whales have been killed annually by ship strikes off Sri Lanka in recent years. Ocean currents and winds in southern Sri Lanka mean that many whales killed by ship strikes are likely to drift offshore and sink, so that only a small proportion would be detected when they reach beaches. However, stranding rates are high, especially for blue whales along the southern coast of Sri Lanka; where the cause of death has been identified, it has been due to ship strikes.

### **Progress made**

On the positive side, it is worth highlighting:

**- The North-Western Mediterranean Marine Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) is approved but only with recommendations to voluntarily reduce the speed of vessels in the presence of sperm whales and fin whales.**

The area included in the PSSA comprises the waters between Valencia and Genoa, defined by cetacean researchers as critical habitat for fin and sperm whales, and includes areas of extreme environmental value. These include: the Mediterranean Cetacean Migration Corridor, located between the coast of Catalonia and Valencia and the Balearic Islands, the Pelagos Cetacean Sanctuary in the Ligurian Sea and the Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMA) called "Gulf of Lions Shelf" and "Slopes and Canyons System of the North-Western Mediterranean Sea".

The protective measures associated with the designation of the PSSA include the recommendation seafarers to "*exercise special caution within the North-Western Mediterranean PSSA, in areas where large and medium-sized cetaceans are detected or reported, and to reduce their speed to between 10 and 13 knots as a voluntary speed reduction (VSR)*".

Studies of speed reduction experiences carried out around the world to reduce collision deaths of whales have shown that only by adopting a mandatory vessel speed reduction measure can significant levels of protection of large whales be achieved. A mandatory measure would also create a level playing field for all shipping companies.

**- The adoption of the new updated Guidelines for the reduction of underwater noise from maritime traffic, but still only on a voluntary basis.**

The main factor causing underwater noise from ships is the cavitation phenomenon produced by propellers. In 2014, the IMO adopted Guidelines for the abatement of underwater noise that did not have any effect, as no government implemented them, mainly due to their voluntary nature. This failure led a group of countries, led by Canada, to propose in December 2019, during MEPC 75, to initiate a process to revise these guidelines.

One measure that should be included, on a mandatory basis, is a certain percentage reduction in ship speed, variable according to the type and category of ships. Scientific data show that a reduction of just 10% in ship speed across the world fleet could reduce shipping noise by 40% globally.

*“The adopted of revised guidelines and work plan to reduce underwater noise emissions from shipping is important and further recognition of ocean noise is a severe pollutant for marine wildlife. The core challenge is once more the implementation of proposed measures. Only then, it will have a positive effect to reduce the ecological footprint of shipping leading towards less noisy oceans”,* says Carlos Bravo.

**- Broad initial support for Canada's submission to the forthcoming MEPC meeting of a proposal for the designation of an Emission Control Area in the Canadian Arctic.**

Canada's proposal is underpinned by the undisputed need to prevent, reduce and control emissions of nitrogen oxides, sulphur oxides, particulate matter and black carbon from ships sailing in this environmentally valuable and highly vulnerable area.

**ENDS**

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