

March 12, 2009

Protect Whales During Navy Training Exercises

Deadline April 3, 2009

Dear Colleague:

Please join us in sending the attached letter to Jane Lubchenco, Undersecretary for Oceans and Atmosphere for the Department of Commerce, expressing support for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's review of measures that could reduce harm to whales and other marine mammals from the Navy's use of mid-range sonar.

The Navy estimates that its sonar training activities will "take" marine mammals more than 11.7 million times over the course of a five-year permit. The scale of these exercises and the vulnerability of protected species to sonar make it imperative that NOAA prescribe mitigation measures that will best protect marine mammals while still allowing the Navy to train effectively.

For more information, or to co-sign the letter, please contact Jeb Berman (Rep. Thompson, 53311) or Rob Cobbs (Rep. Waxman, 54407).

Sincerely,

MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress

HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress

March 12, 2009

Dr. Jane Lubchenco
Undersecretary for Oceans and Atmosphere
Department of Commerce
14th and Constitution Avenue, N.W., Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Undersecretary Lubchenco:

On January 23, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced that it would conduct a comprehensive, 120-day review of measures to reduce environmental harm from the Navy's use of mid-frequency sonar in training exercises and then report the results to the Council on Environmental Quality. We are writing to encourage and express our strong support for this review process.

The sonar exercises at issue would take place off the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, Hawaii, Alaska and in the Gulf of Mexico – affecting literally every coastal state. In many regions, the Navy plans to increase the number of training exercises or expand the areas in which they may occur. Of particular concern are biologically sensitive marine habitats off our coasts, such as National Marine Sanctuaries and breeding habitat for the endangered North Atlantic right whale. In all, the Navy anticipates that its sonar exercises will “take” marine mammals more than 2.3 million times per year, or 11.7 million times over the course of a 5-year permit.

Under these circumstances, it is essential that NOAA prescribe mitigation measures that substantially reduce impacts on marine wildlife and habitat while allowing the Navy to train effectively.

We are confident that NOAA's review will identify the mitigation measures necessary to minimize environmental impacts and improve monitoring of affected populations, including the establishment of seasonal or geographic sonar exclusion areas that scientists have identified as the most effective available means of protecting vulnerable species and habitat.

We appreciate your consideration of this important matter, and your efforts to improve the health of our oceans.

Sincerely,

MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress

HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress