

Written Submission to the Second UN Oceans Conference: Recommendations for addressing Ocean Noise Pollution – prevention, reduction and mitigation

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[Interactive dialogue 1: Addressing marine pollution](#)

The ocean provides oxygen, food security and vital ecosystem services for humanity. However, its ability to do so is increasingly under threat as the ocean's health is deteriorating, caused by a wide range of marine pollutants, including plastic and underwater noise.

Underwater noise as serious form of transboundary pollution:

Noise emissions, -both 'continuous noise' which is typically a constant drone generated from shipping, and 'impulsive noise' generated by hydrocarbon exploration activities using, *inter alia*, airguns¹, as well as other industrial and military activities - pose a serious threat to marine wildlife, from large whales to small krill. Impacts include hearing damage, habitat displacement, lower reproduction rates, stress and in some cases, even death. The 19th United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea in 2018 dedicated a full week to the issue of "Anthropogenic Underwater Noise" and its harmful impacts.

The reduction of ocean noise emissions and their impacts requires a global effort through prevention, reduction and mitigation of activities that emit underwater noise. Addressing ocean noise at source-level has multi-environmental benefits.

- To combat the climate crisis and make the ocean more resilient, there should be an **immediate stop of hydrocarbon exploration** in the ocean, removing one of the loudest man-made sources of impulsive noise.
- **Slowing down vessels** is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to make ships reducing GHG emissions, as well as other air pollutants and underwater noise. It The IMO is currently revising the 2014 agreed underwater noise guidelines. This process will conclude in 2023, and to ensure that shipping becomes quieter, such new guidelines must become mandatory.

The absence of complete knowledge should not delay action:

Paragraph 25 of the Concept Paper on the *Interactive Dialogue 1: Addressing Marine Pollution* refers to the continuing knowledge gaps and lack of data on the impacts of ocean noise. While robust, independent and verified data are crucial, waiting for more scientific certainty should not lead to inaction or even postponing remedial measures, following the Precautionary Principle.

Underwater Noise and the SDGs:

Underwater noise pollution threatens marine biodiversity and jeopardises the ability to achieve a healthy and sustainable ocean, including restoring fish stocks, as prioritised through the 2030 Agenda and the

¹ common method used to detect oil and gas deposits under the sea floor, employ high-intensity sound pulses of up to 260 decibels every 10 to 15 seconds for weeks or even months at a time.

achievement of the SDGs. Considering the negative impacts of ocean noise on fish and fish stocks and livelihoods (SDG 1 and SDG 2), ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all (SDG7) and Life below Water (SDG 14) will be difficult to reach. Similarly, the continued exploration for (and subsequent exploitation of) new oil and gas deposits contribute to increased noise levels and undermines efforts to drastically reduce GHG emissions and to combat the climate crisis, as envisioned in SDG 13.

**There is a need for a global effort to prevent, reduce and mitigate ocean noise.
We call for:**

1. Explicit recognition of ocean noise as a **serious form of marine pollution** under SDG14.1.
2. Considering that **SDG14.4** demands that measures to **restore fish stocks** in the shortest time feasible, it is important to consider how ocean noise might weaken these efforts.
3. An immediate **ban on all new fossil fuel exploration and exploitation activities** and a binding phase-out plan for existing drilling operations.
4. The **ending of all harmful subsidies** for exploration and exploitation of fossil fuels, plastic production, and detrimental fishing practices.
5. Promotion of compulsory **speed reductions for shipping to reduce GHG emissions and ocean noise**, setting a level playing field for the private sector.
6. Recognition that remedial policy **action on ocean noise should not be delayed awaiting more science**. There is already sufficient scientific documentation that ocean noise pollution can severely impact marine life. In the rare cases where scientific evidence remains incomplete, the precautionary principle should be applied.
7. Acknowledgment that the over-reliance on promises of new technology delays immediate action and that a **cultural, social and political transformation is the most sustainable and precautionary response**.

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- BUND, Germany
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OceanCare has been committed to marine wildlife protection since 1989. We have witnessed dramatic developments – and have enforced concrete improvements.

Through research and conservation projects, campaigns, environmental education, and involvement in a range of international committees, **OceanCare** undertakes concrete steps to improve the situation for marine wildlife. In 2011, OceanCare was granted Special Consultative Status on marine issues with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. OceanCare has also been accredited as part of the Major Group 'Science & Technology' to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) in 2015.

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