



October 16, 2009

Ms. Nancy Sutley
Chair of the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force
White House Council on Environmental Quality
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Nancy Sutley,

The Society of Conservation Biology has recently been made aware of a letter dated 7th October submitted to President Obama, as well as various senators, congressmen, secretaries and administrators, by participants of the Workshop on Cumulative Impacts/ Effects of Anthropogenic Stressors on Marine Mammals: From Ideas to Action, held in Monterey, California from 26th to 29th August, 2009. The Society concurs with the letter of the Workshop that oceanic noise pollution threatens many marine mammals and other marine species as well.

Like the participants of this workshop, the members of the Society of Conservation Biology are concerned that the recent interim report of the National Ocean Policy Task Force did not contain a single mention of underwater noise. Data on the long-term consequences on health of marine animals may be sparse, but we believe there is enough information to justify action. Identifying impacts of noise in creatures that spend a tiny fraction of their lives at the surface of the oceans is difficult, as the various long-term health consequences of exposure to high noise levels are difficult to unravel, measure, or detect, even in humans. Yet we accept that these detrimental consequences exist for humans and manage noise accordingly. These subtle and intangible effects of noise exposure are almost certainly compromising the ability of marine life to surmount other challenges to their survival, such as fisheries interactions and climate change, while also disrupting the complex social structure and reproductive potential of whales and dolphins that rely heavily on sound for communication.

We are not suggesting that underwater noise receive special treatment in the National Ocean Policy. However, we do believe that underwater noise should be given equal consideration with other forms of pollution, such as contaminants or marine debris. We agree with the workshop participants that federally mandated reductions will help fulfill agency obligations under various environmental statutes, as well as expedite the recovery of numerous endangered and threatened marine species.

Therefore we also urge you to include an element in the new National Oceans Policy that mandates, by 2020:



- 1) no net increase in ambient noise occurs in U. S. coastal waters; and
- 2) that a schedule be established to realize substantial reductions in ocean noise.

Additionally, we request that you establish a process that will regularly determine and require the use of the best available noise control and management technologies for ships, harbors, oil and gas exploration and all other significant ocean noise sources in U.S. waters, and by U.S. entities elsewhere in the world, in order to achieve as quickly as practicable noise levels that do not present significant risks of harm to affected species.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

E.C.M. Parsons
President
Marine Section
Society for Conservation Biology

cc: Gary Locke, Secretary of Commerce
Ken Salazar, Secretary of Interior
Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Undersecretary for Oceans and Atmosphere, NOAA Administrator
Lisa P. Jackson, Administrator of EPA
Sen. Maria Cantwell, Chair, Oceans Subcommittee, Senate Commerce Committee
Sen. Olympia Snowe, Ranking Member, Oceans Subcommittee, Senate Commerce Committee
Rep. Madeleine Bordallo, Chair, Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife Subcommittee, House Natural Resources Committee
Rep. Henry Brown, Jr., Ranking Member, Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife Subcommittee, House Natural Resources Committee