

ECS RESOLUTION ON THE NEED TO REGULATE SONAR MITIGATION

Adopted in Istanbul, Turkey on 4th March 2009

There is sufficient evidence that active sonar exposure even at relatively low levels can have significant impacts on some cetacean species.

Beaked whales in particular are vulnerable to serious impacts including mortality from exposure to mid-frequency active sonar (1-10 kHz). Here we reaffirm the ECS 2003 Statement of Concern on Marine Mammals and Sound.

The development of knowledge since this ECS 2003 resolution was adopted underscores the need for urgent action on sonar mitigation. Current mitigation efforts are generally untested and insufficient for beaked whales. Recently available data includes further evidence on the causal link between sonar and beaked whale mass-strandings. This includes spatio-temporal coincidence between naval exercises and mortalities and a consistent pathology on necropsied whales, pointing to an acoustic source as primary cause of death/stranding. In addition, abundance estimations of local populations of beaked whales indicate that populations are small and that the reproductive rate of some beaked whales may be low. Small, sometimes isolated, populations with reduced recruitment rate are vulnerable to human impacts as they may have a limited capability to recover after trauma.

This means that there is the potential for unsustainable impacts on beaked whales to occur in relatively short time periods. The advances in our understanding of behavioural reactions of beaked whales to sonar indicate that required mitigation ranges are larger than practical mitigation ranges in many cases.

In consequence, regulation of standardised mitigation protocols, including practical measures recently available, becomes a priority. Mitigation should be applied by all countries using military sonar in the three stages of sonar exercises: before (the planning phase), during and after sonar use. As sonar may have transboundary effects, mitigation procedures need regulatory support at both international and national levels.

Thus, the European Cetacean Society requests competent authorities to urgently adopt and enforce regulations for effective mitigation.

The Workshop organisers propose to set up a small Working Group of relevant experts to produce a technical document providing practical effective techniques to apply mitigation in order to reduce impact of active sonar on cetaceans.