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Sonar — Balancing Environmental Stewardship & National Defense

“The Navy will continue to fund research and use mitigation measures to minimize the potential effects of sonar on marine mammals, but cannot put the lives of its Sailors at risk or fail to remain prepared to defend our nation by eliminating active sonar use.”

-- RDML Larry Rice, Director, Environmental Readiness Division, N45

The Navy remains in litigation over the use of Mid-Frequency Active (MFA) sonar. This litigation has the potential to negatively impact MFA sonar training and exercises, limiting the Navy’s ability to carry out its Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) mission. This would place the lives of Sailors and Marines at risk from undersea threats.

Sonar training critical in protecting national interests and our Sailors and Marines

- Forty-one countries, including China, North Korea, and Iran have modern submarines. Of the 380 submarines operated worldwide, more than 300 are extremely quiet diesel-electric submarines.
- It is crucial that U.S. Navy ships and submarines continue realistic training with active sonar in order to protect U.S. national interests and our Sailors and Marines from the growing threat of quiet diesel-electric submarines, particularly in the littorals.

Responsible use of sonar

- The Navy goes to great lengths to minimize potential effects on marine life through the use of protective measures and is committed to realistic sonar training.
- Ships typically employ active sonar less than five percent of the total time they spend underway in a given year.

Protective measures are in place

- The Navy coordinated with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to develop 29 protective measures to minimize potential effects of MFA sonar on marine life. These measures allow the Navy to train realistically, and with respect for the ocean environment. **These measures are being used right now!**
- Navy makes every effort to safeguard marine mammals when exercises are conducted.
- The following measures must be implemented by ALL personnel, aircraft and ships during major training exercises or within established ranges or operating areas:
 - Stationing trained lookouts
 - Listening passively for marine mammals
 - Employing night vision and thermal imaging equipment
 - Safety zones around ships
 - Taking appropriate action when marine mammals are spotted
 - Extra precautions during chokepoint exercises

Navy... A world leader in marine mammal research

- Navy is a world leader in marine mammal research, dedicating approximately \$14 million in FY07 alone.
- In addition to the significant work in sonar-related behavior, researchers working with the Navy’s Marine Mammal Program have made significant advances in the care, diagnosis, and treatment of marine mammal diseases.
- While the Navy recognizes that under certain circumstances and conditions the exposure to active sonar may cause a startle response in certain marine species, the exact mechanism is unknown. The Navy’s efforts in marine mammal research are dedicated to finding an answer to this complex question.

Navy has a long-term environmental compliance plan... Working with the NMFS to execute that plan

- The Navy is preparing environmental documents for the majority of its sonar operating areas, including training areas near Hawaii and on the East and West Coasts.
- These documents are a vital part of a long-term plan for environmental compliance and are a clear demonstration of the Navy’s dedication to preserving and protecting the ocean environment.

“Sonar operations and stewardship of the marine environment are not mutually exclusive goals. The Navy must, and will continue, to operate sonar in a manner that is supportive of our mission to defend the U.S. and protective of marine life.”

— Mr. Donald Schregardus Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Environment)