

Raise your voice for the Ocean: IFAW's contribution for the Nice UN Conference

Contributing to the following themes covered in the *Let's be Nice to the Ocean* e-book:

- ☑ The Protection Principle
- ☑ Zero discharge targets
- ☑ Reformed governance of migratory & straddling biodiversity
- ☑ Deep Sea protection and conservation
- ☑ Modernized Mediterranean protection regime for the 21st century

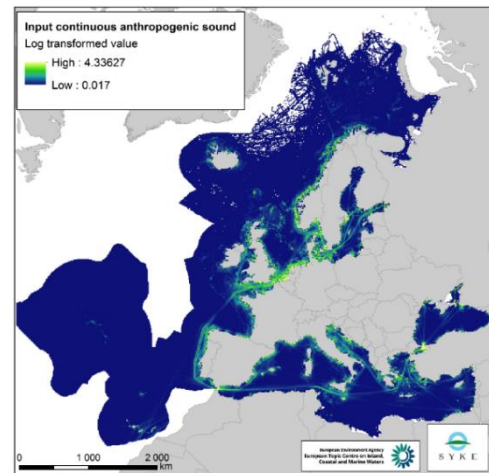
► Underwater noise is a source of pollution

In recent decades, the world has seen a dramatic expansion of human activities above and below the sea surface, changing the soundscape of the ocean. Today, the ocean is noisy because of anthropogenic underwater noise emissions, half of which is generated by commercial shipping¹.

This has a negative impact on marine life and habitats. Sound is the primary cue upon which a wide range of marine animals rely, from the largest whales to tiniest plankton. It is essential to communicate with one another, find food, navigate and avoid predators. Scientific studies undeniably show that underwater noise pollution is detrimental to marine species both temporarily and in the long-term, particularly marine mammals but also fish, crustaceans and invertebrates^{2 3}.

It is estimated that “around 9% of European seas are exposed to high density maritime traffic and that only 1% of the surface area of the Mediterranean Sea is not exposed to any traffic”⁴.

Shipping contributes to both greenhouse gas emissions and underwater noise pollution. Additionally, the number of vessels and their size and speeds have increased over the past twenty years, leading to an increased risk of collisions with cetaceans. These collisions are fatal in the majority of cases, but they often go unnoticed. Research also indicates that for every fatally injured whale recorded, 20 others suffer the same fate without being detected⁵.



[Input of continuous anthropogenic sound in Europe seas, 2020 \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

¹ Seas at Risk (2023), The State of Shipping and Ocean Report.

² Weilgart, L. (2018). The Impact of Ocean Noise Pollution on Fish and Invertebrates. Report by OceanCare.

³ Erbe et al. (2019). The Effects of Ship Noise on Marine Mammals - A Review. *Front. Mar. Sci.*, 11.

⁴ Korpinen, S., Klančnik, K., et al. (2019), Multiple pressures and their combined effects in Europe's seas.

⁵ R. Schoeman, Patterson-Abrolat C. and Plön S. (2020), A Global Review of Vessel Collisions With Marine Animals

It is essential to protect whales as they play a key role in maintaining healthy marine ecosystems. They help cycle nutrients in the ocean and their excrement supports phytoplankton, which play a critical role in the absorption of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Whales capture large amounts of carbon over their lifetimes and sequester it when they die and sink to the ocean floor, preventing it from returning to the atmosphere and providing valuable ecosystem services.

There are several technical and operational solutions to reduce underwater noise produced by maritime transport. Among these, **ship speed reduction** would have a positive impact on biodiversity and the climate in the short term, while being economically viable for the maritime industry. A 10% reduction in speed of the entire global fleet would reduce noise energy from shipping by around 40%, while lowering the associated risk of collision with whales by 50%⁶. Such a reduction would also reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions from commercial shipping by around 13%⁷. It would result in significant economic and environmental gains for the maritime sector and society as a whole: in Europe, these are estimated to be between 3.4 and 4.5 billion euros per year depending on fuel price⁸.

Our proposal for the Nice Conference

IFAW calls on States to adopt supplementary legislation for the implementation of a mandatory 10% speed reduction as a condition for entry into national ports by commercial ships to reduce underwater radiated noise, ship strike risk and GHG emissions.

This would help honour international obligations as laid out in UNCLOS for the protection of the ocean, in line with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) *Guidelines for the Reduction of Underwater Noise from Commercial Shipping to Address Adverse Impacts on Marine Life*, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 8, 9, 12, 13 and 14⁹.

Now is the right time to choose the right pace to make a real impact – such an initiative can make shipping more fuel efficient, the air cleaner for citizens, and the ocean safer for marine life.

⁶ Leaper R. (2019), *The Role of Slower Vessel Speeds in Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Underwater Noise and Collision Risk to Whales*

⁷ Faber, J., Huigen, T., and Nelissen, D. (2017). *Regulating speed: a Short-term Measure to Reduce Maritime GHG Emissions*. Netherlands: CE Delft publication.

⁸ CE Delft (2022), *Blue Speeds for shipping: Economic analysis and legal framework to achieve environmental benefits*.

⁹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>