



TURN DOWN THE VOLUME

IT'S TIME TO SET LIMITS ON UNDERWATER NOISE FROM SHIPS

There are more than 100,000 commercial ships traversing the world's ocean, carrying out the important job of moving more than 80% of global trade by volume.¹ An unintended consequence of all these ships is growing underwater noise pollution.

A cargo vessel underway can often be heard from hundreds of kilometers away.² Scientists measuring ocean noise have found that noise from shipping has been doubling each decade, with significant negative impacts on many forms of marine life.³

It's time for the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the global body that regulates international shipping, with support from Member States,⁴ to set limits on underwater noise pollution from shipping. The solutions are available, but regulations are needed to ensure these solutions are adopted by ship owners and operators around the world.

What are the implications of all this ship noise?



Marine animals (whales to fish to invertebrates) use sound to communicate, find food, avoid predators, reproduce, and navigate.⁵ Ship noise can overwhelm or “mask” these natural sounds, which negatively impacts important behaviors such as singing to mates, foraging for food, and nursing calves.⁶



Ship noise can also elevate stress levels, which reduces the resiliency of marine animals that already face challenges related to water pollution, climate change, and habitat/food loss.⁷

Can anything be done to make ships quieter?



Yes! Both design and operational solutions exist that can effectively quiet ships. Unfortunately, what is lacking is a policy driver to ensure ships adopt these measures. In 2014, the IMO adopted voluntary guidelines that describe these solutions so that shipowners and operators could make use of them.⁸ However, the guidelines have been largely ignored by the shipping industry. Making noise-abatement measures mandatory is the only way to effectively reduce underwater noise pollution from shipping.

What can countries do to quiet ships?

Develop strong domestic thresholds and limits for underwater noise pollution and adopt management measures that achieve quantifiable noise reductions.



In 2022, the European Union (EU) adopted regulatory thresholds - or limits - for underwater noise.



EU Member States must now develop rules for shipping (and other sectors) that will ensure compliance with these thresholds.

While this momentum is positive, global regulation issued by the IMO is needed. IMO regulations would provide a much needed baseline of protection for the global ocean as well as provide a degree of certainty for international shipping. Now is the time for action!

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