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WORK PROGRAMME OF THE COMMITTEE AND SUBSIDIARY BODIES

Comments on document MEPC 75/14 – Proposal for a new output on underwater noise

Submitted by the Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea (ACOPS)

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document provides comments on document MEPC 75/14. It primarily supports the proposal of the sponsors for a new high priority item to be added to the biennial agenda and work programme of MEPC. It also emphasizes the pressing nature of the issue and the ongoing work in other intergovernmental bodies that can be leveraged by this body.

*Strategic direction,
if applicable:* 4

Output: Not applicable

Action to be taken: Paragraph 5

Related documents: MEPC 75/14, MEPC 75/14/1, MEPC 75/14/2, MEPC 75/14/3 and MEPC 76/INF.17

Introduction

1 This document is submitted in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 6.12.5 of the document on *Organization and method of work of the Maritime Safety Committee and the Marine Environment Protection Committee and their subsidiary bodies* (MSC-MEPC.1/Circ.5/Rev.2). It provides comments on document MEPC 75/14 submitted by Australia, Canada and the United States.

2 ACOPS supports the proposal in document MEPC 75/14 for a new high priority item to be added to the biennial agenda and work programme of MEPC, and believes that this work should commence as soon as practical. In particular, ACOPS would like to reflect on paragraph 3, which recognizes that there has been growing international attention on the issue of underwater vessel noise within various scientific, political and public forums.

3 ACOPS would also like to highlight paragraphs 9 and 10 of document MEPC 75/14 which refer to the fact that an increasing number of studies have demonstrated that underwater noise emitted from commercial vessels is a stressor for marine species and ecosystems, including various marine mammals, fish and invertebrates, and notes that the noise emitted by commercial ships is higher in energy than recreational vessels and is generally below 1,000 Hertz (or 1 kHz) which is the same broadband low-frequency ranges identified as critically important for many whales and fish species. (see figure 1 below).

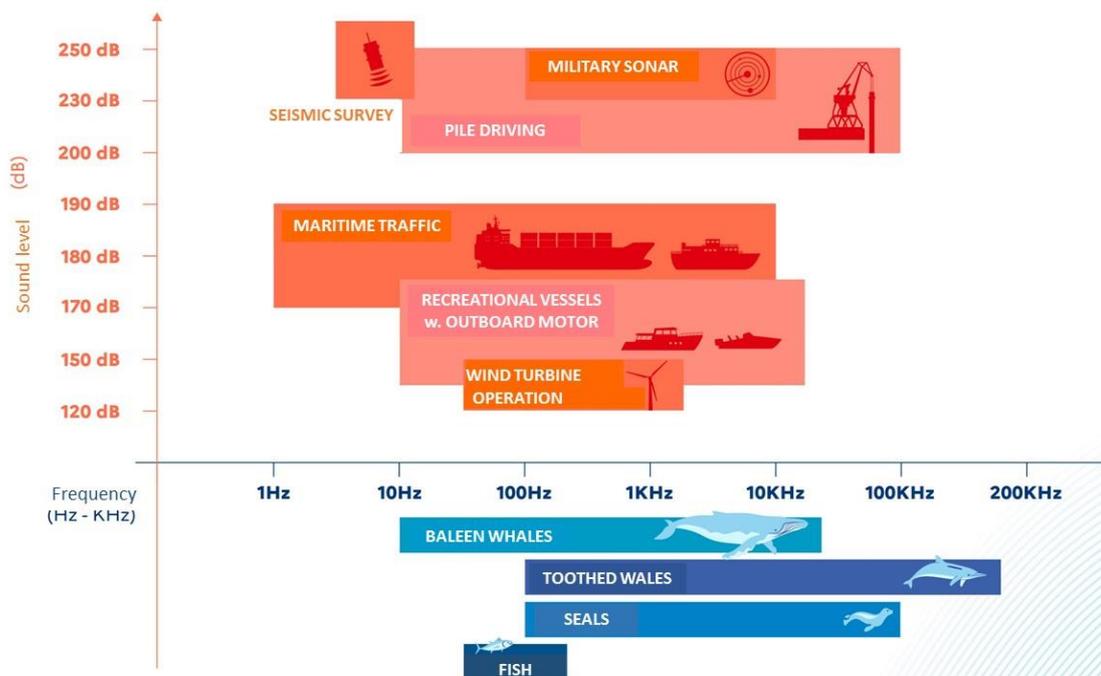


Figure 1 – Impact of anthropogenic underwater noise on marine macro-fauna, based on an Infographic published by the French Government with support from the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), the Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB) and the Armateurs de France. Available at:

<https://d1jyxxz9imt9yb.cloudfront.net/resource/833/attachment/original/bruit-sous-marin-page-de-garde-web.pdf>

4 Increasingly, underwater noise is recognized in international and regional frameworks as a significant threat to marine wildlife and the seas and oceans. Paragraph 13 of document MEPC 75/14 identifies a number of international and regional initiatives which are actively engaged in addressing underwater vessel noise. In the table set out in the annex, ACOPS provides high-level outlines of these and additional global and regional intergovernmental initiatives actively engaged in addressing underwater noise. This is not an exhaustive or comprehensive list and it therefore illustrates the widespread awareness of the issue. Importantly, several initiatives are also ongoing within the shipping industry, including with classification societies.

Action requested of the Committee

5 The Committee is invited to consider the information provided in paragraphs 2 to 4 and urged to support the proposal in document MEPC 75/14 for a new work output addressing underwater noise.

ANNEX

SELECTION OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL INITIATIVES

Intergovernmental body	Overall mandate and context of this work	Objective of noise-related effort	Underwater noise-focused measures or work
ACCOBAMS	Conservation of the cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area	Regulating underwater noise generation through an ecosystem-based approach, basin-wide monitoring of impulsive and ambient noise, identification of noise hotspots, etc.	Work started in the early 2000s. Last Resolution in 2019. Ongoing workshops, surveys and studies. Not focused on shipping but includes shipping
Arctic Council	Promotion of cooperation, coordination and interaction among Arctic states, peoples and other inhabitants on common Arctic issues	Overall mandate includes conservation and sustainable use of Arctic marine and coastal environment. Underwater noise is acknowledged as an issue.	Includes shipping and non-shipping related underwater noise. The Work Plan of PAME (Protection of the Marine Environment) includes the impact of underwater noise on marine species in the Arctic.
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	Global mandate to conserve and sustainably use biological diversity, including marine biodiversity	Improve understanding of impact (including cumulative impact) and identify response measures to protect marine biodiversity	Concern raised in 2010. Expert workshop on underwater noise in 2014. The COP acknowledged the issue.
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)	Includes the protection of marine migratory species	Initial focus on impact of underwater noise on whales and dolphins and their conservation. Underwater noise is now treated as having direct implications for human food security and livelihoods	First resolution adopted by the COP in 2008. Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities adopted in 2016. Includes shipping traffic as well as noise from other maritime activity

Intergovernmental body	Overall mandate and context of this work	Objective of noise-related effort	Underwater noise-focused measures or work
International Seabed Authority (ISA)	Organization and control of all mineral-related activities in the Area (seabed beyond national jurisdiction). Adoption of rules, regulations and procedures for the protection and preservation of the marine environment from these activities	Assess and control environmental implications of activities in the Area, including underwater noise generation and its impact.	Recommendations for the guidance of contractors for the assessment of the possible environmental impacts arising from the exploration for marine minerals in the Area. They include reporting on the levels of noise generation expected to result from mining activities in order to minimize impact to the marine environment. Work is ongoing on the development of regulations of environmental impacts from exploitation of minerals.
International Whaling Commission	Conservation of whale stocks. It includes acute and chronic anthropogenic underwater noise that are identified as stressors on cetaceans that depend on sound for their survival (e.g. foraging, migration and reproduction).	Improve knowledge and overall awareness of the issue given the rapid growth in man-made noise ocean noise from shipping, seismic exploration, drilling and construction and other offshore activities	Resolution 2018-14 positions underwater noise as a stressor that needs tackling to fulfil SDG 14.1 and emphasizes the need for a precautionary approach. Focus on ensuring adequate knowledge on the topic in all relevant fora and pursuing research
OSPAR	Protection of the marine environment in the North-East Atlantic	Propose common threshold level (indicator) to determine noise pollution from shipping	Reduce underwater anthropogenic ambient and impulsive noise with main focus on noise from shipping.
United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)	Purview includes the protection of the marine environment, which is addressed in particular in its annual resolutions on Oceans and the Law of the Sea	Awareness raising and concern has evolved to encouragement for research to more pressing language.	Concern for ocean noise acknowledged since the early 2000s and emphasized annually since for its potential significant adverse impacts on living marine resources. Push for action by states, independently and through the competent international organization