



March 10, 2007

Karen F. Grimmer
Acting Superintendent
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
299 Foam Street, Monterey, California 93940

Dear Superintendent Grimmer,

At this time, there is no protection for marine life from the impacts of increasing shipping traffic, oil and gas seismic surveying, and the use of military and commercial active sonars within and in proximity to Cordell Bank, Monterey Bay and Gulf of Farallones National Marine Sanctuaries. Cordell Bank SAC showed interest and leadership when it engaged Dr. John Hildebrand to make a presentation on this issue at the last SAC meeting.

Seaflow, the only non-profit environmental group in this country solely focused on ocean noise pollution issues, proposes to help address the growing problem of ocean noise within the three Northern California contiguous sanctuaries.

High intensity active sonars have caused mass strandings and the death of whales and dolphins around the world. Even low levels are associated with harmful impacts on marine life. There is also growing evidence that fisheries are adversely impacted by ocean noise, including airgun blasts, which are used to locate offshore oil and gas deposits. Shipping traffic contributes to increasing underwater “acoustic smog” that can impact hearing in marine mammals and other marine life, mask communications, and alter normal behaviors critical to survival.

The emerging threat of acoustic disturbance to our nation’s National Marine Sanctuaries should be considered a top management priority for the following reasons:

- The continued growth of international trade, specifically between Asia and the United States, will necessitate an increase in the traffic from large vessels transiting the sanctuaries. Large vessel traffic has already been identified as “the primary acoustic threat to the Sanctuary resources.”
- The U.S. Navy is seeking to increase its use of high-intensity active sonar systems and to establish undersea warfare training ranges to test active sonar technologies. Given the trans-boundary nature of human-generated noise, as well as a military operations area within their boundaries, the sanctuaries could face a marked increase in noise pollution from this source.

- An Act of Congress in 2005 opened up the entire continental shelf to offshore oil and gas exploration. This includes the near-shore coastal waters of Northern California, including the Gulf of the Farallones, Monterey Bay, and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries. Exploration necessitates the use of damaging high-intensity seismic airgun surveys, known to cause mass strandings of marine mammals and permanent damage to fish.

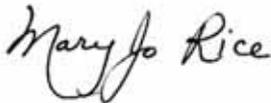
Implementing regulations on the discharge or generation of noise pollution from within or entering the Sanctuaries would have a direct beneficial impact on biological resources. There is currently no language in the Sanctuary regulations that addresses underwater noise pollution. When the sanctuaries were established, little was known about the significant threats posed by ocean noise in the marine environment. Now is the time to be proactive to establish lasting protections through a collaborative process.

Seaflow co-sponsored Making Waves events and contributed input to the Joint Management Plan Review in 2006. We are now excited to help facilitate a group process to proactively establish regulations, research priorities, and education programs about ocean noise in our own National Marine Sanctuaries, that may be used as a model throughout the National Marine Sanctuary Program nationwide.

We are excited that Richard Charter, who holds the conservation seat on the Gulf of the Farallones SAC and is a member of our North American Ocean Noise Coalition, has offered to work with Seaflow to facilitate a working group of National Marine Sanctuaries Program representatives, stakeholders, and the general public to develop ways to reduce the impacts of ocean noise on marine life in our rich, protected offshore areas.

Seaflow is in the preliminary planning stage of informing the sanctuaries and other interested parties to help move this process forward. Please let me know if you would like to be included in future communications regarding this effort. Your involvement and support would be greatly appreciated.

With gratitude for your stewardship,



Mary Jo Rice, Executive Director



Ingrid Overgard, Program Director

*cc: Superintendent Dan Howard
Superintendent Maria Brown*