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His Excellency Antonio Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations

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Subject: Anthropogenic underwater noise

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

On behalf of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the United Nations Open-Ended Informal Consultative Process on the Oceans and the Law of the Sea with the particular 2018 thematic focus on "Anthropogenic underwater noise".

Our contribution is the following (a list of references is provided below):

Challenges posed by anthropogenic underwater noise: Anthropogenic underwater noise is globally altering marine soundscapes and can negatively impact individual animals and marine ecosystems (Hildebrand 2009, Ellison et al. 2016, Estabrook et al. 2016, Hatch et al. 2016, Shannon et al. 2016, Southall, 2017). For many marine animals, sound is their primary sensory modality, essential for communication, orientation, and foraging, and thus is of vital biological importance (Nowacek et al. 2007, Videsen et al. 2017). Human noise pollution in the ocean has been generally increasing since the advent of powered marine transportation and exploration (Hildebrand 2009).

Actions and activities, including research activities that have been undertaken at the national, regional and global levels with regard to anthropogenic underwater noise: As part of the of the Informal Consultative Process, we wish to provide some recent context and initiatives on the topic of anthropogenic underwater noise that were undertaken by the IUCN and key partners, including the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Southall Environmental Associates, and Dr. Doug Nowacek. These engagements have occurred with the United Nations, through IUCN initiatives, and/or have contributed to or been referenced by the specialized agency of the United Nations system covering maritime issues, the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and other IGOs (e.g., IWC and CMS). We understand the International Whaling Commission (IWC) will also be submitting some important comments that have been generated via the annual meetings of their Scientific Committee.

During the preparatory meeting for the June 2017 United Nations Ocean Conference to discuss implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14: "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development"), the IUCN, WCS and the Government of France hosted a side event to raise awareness among United Nations member states and other stakeholders about global shipping and impacts on whales from noise and ship strikes. The event's specific focus was reviewing the current state of knowledge regarding the issues of ship strikes and ocean noise, as well as the best practices in aligning shipping and whale conservation objectives. Beyond raising awareness in the lead-up to the June 2017 United Nations Ocean Conference, the specific goal of this event was to bring together key stakeholders to explore actions that could align conservation, industry, regulatory, and United Nations member states' perspectives toward the Call for Action being developed for adoption during the Conference in June 2017. A complete recording of the meeting and all documents related to outcomes and recommendations related to anthropogenic

underwater noise can be found at: <https://sdg14.wcs.org/Events/Global-Shipping-and-Whale-Conservation>. Specific mention was subsequently made by member states of ocean noise and ship strikes in the final Call for Action.

This initiated a collaborative effort that led to the formulation and registration of United Nations voluntary commitment #OceanAction18553, entitled “A commitment to reduce Ocean Noise Pollution.” (<https://sdg14.wcs.org/Events/Global-Shipping-and-Whale-Conservation>). We would like to bring this to the attention of UNCLOS, as it is of particular relevance. We may be able to provide additional input and progress toward the Voluntary Commitment by Spring 2018.

Several recent publications (e.g., Nowacek et al. 2015; Nowacek and Southall 2016; Hatch et al., 2016; Prideaux et al. 2016) make specific recommendations along these lines that should be considered by UNCLOS as potential starting points in considering this issue. For example, Nowacek et al. (2015) state, “a responsible path forward should focus on the creation of legally binding international commitments” to reduce the impacts of anthropogenic noise on marine life. They developed five measures that provide an initial framework for a “new conversation” regarding ocean noise.

Suggestions for further action to address the adverse impacts of anthropogenic underwater noise:

A number of recent measures to mitigate these effects have already been put in place, including voluntary vessel-quieting guidelines adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and speed control initiatives (MEPC IMO, 2014). However, additional and sustained international collaboration, partnerships, and specific actions addressing a broad range of human industrial sources are needed to ensure long-term, sustained reduction of human noise impacts on marine life. Mitigation actions that governments and industry could implement in order to minimize ocean noise emissions include: technologies, operational management measures, area- and species-specific measures.

Given the cross-sectoral and global nature of these issues, collaboration and constructive dialogue among diverse industry, scientific, government and non-governmental organizations will continue to be critical, as clearly demonstrated by the IMO vessel-quieting guideline development. The organizations and individuals named here commit to continuing to work together, with UNCLOS, and with all stakeholders in moving constructively forward.

We hope that these suggestions will be taken into consideration in the preparation of Part I of the Secretary-General’s Report. We stand ready to provide additional input if needed.

Kind regards,

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cc: Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs Miguel de Serpa Soares

ANNEX: References:

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UN related Links

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/12977ConceptNote.pdf> and <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/12971Summary.pdf>

<https://sdg14.wcs.org/Events/Global-Shipping-and-Whale-Conservation>

Voluntary commitment link: <https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/?id=18553>