



President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin
Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Gordeyev
Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov
23, Ulitsa Ilyinka, 103132, Moscow, Russia

His Excellency Yuriy Filatov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
of the Russian Federation to Ireland
Embassy of the Russian Federation to Ireland
184-186 Orwell Road, Rathgar, Dublin 14, D14 X6R3
russianembassydublin@mid.ru

Re Irish Wildlife Trust call to cancel and or at least significantly curtail military exercises in international waters given associated fatal impacts to whales and damage to marine ecosystems and climate.

Dear President Putin, Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Gordeyev, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Your Excellency Mr Filatov,

I am writing on behalf of the Irish Wildlife Trust who wish to urgently call on the Russian Federation to **cancel the military exercises of the Russian Federation in international waters close to Ireland, the activities for which have already commenced, or at the very least - significantly curtail their duration, and significantly increase their distance from whale sensitive waters in the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).** This is given that the sonar activity associated with these exercises, and all the associated activities of multiple navies, will travel hundreds of miles, and will pass the invisible boundary of the Irish EEZ into Irish waters which are very important for whales, and waters proximate to the boundaries of the Irish EEZ. It is expected to cause significant whale fatalities, with significant knock on impacts on marine life and the carbon sequestration potential from whales in our waters and blue carbon.

We wish to be very clear, we very much welcome the decision of the Russian Federation to move the exercises outside the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone, (EEZ), and away from an area which was particularly sensitive for whales and other marine species. But even where they are situated now in international waters these exercises will still have very significant negative environmental, climate change and economic impacts, particularly through their fatal consequences for whales in Irish waters still. When the bodies wash up on Irish shores there will be huge concern, and invariably criticism of those responsible for triggering the catastrophic fatalities.

President Putin, Prime Minister Gordeyev, we are conscious of your great personal focus and interest in the recent release of beluga whales and orcas¹ in the Russian Federation, and hope you will appreciate our focus here, and our desire to protect these species in their own right as well as given their wider contribution. In the attached Annex we set out further details and references for

¹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/russia-moves-orcas-and-belugas-from-whale-jail>



your consideration on the significance of their contribution and on the effects of sonar on them, and the wider impacts on marine ecosystems and climate sequestration.

We are also deeply conscious of Ambassador Fillatiov's comments on Wednesday evening before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, (JCFAD), an Irish Parliamentary Committee which he graciously agreed to appear before. The Ambassador reflected on the humanitarian motivation behind the Russian Federation's decision to relocate the exercises outside of the Irish EEZ. We hope this letter will serve to assist further reconsideration of the impacts which will still occur and the humanitarian and ecological ramifications of them.

Whales play a fundamental role in marine ecosystems. The loss of significant numbers of whales which will result from these activities will cause serious degradation in marine life. This will impact on those dependent on the health of the marine for their livelihoods, including the Irish Fishermen with whom the Russian Federation has shown such welcome empathy for. Downstream there will be climate impacts consequent on the loss of the carbon sequestration potential of these whales, the reduction in potential for regeneration and future populations, and an overall reduction in the potential of our seas here in Ireland to assist in climate change. Ireland may be a small country, but its marine territory is huge, and this carries with it huge responsibility to protect in the interests of not just of its marine species, but their wider contribution to life on earth.

Therefore we ask the Russian Federation to cancel the ongoing exercises, or at the very least decide to curtail their duration significantly, and communicate that clearly, and significantly increase their distance from whale sensitive waters. The Russian Federation is uniquely positioned to show major leadership here, and to influence the cumulative effects of the sonar from these activities, and thus to influence the level of problematic sonar activities emanating from other navies in the air monitoring the exercises of the Russian Federation.

Finally, we are of course aware of the complex political issues in play here, but these do not fall within the remit of our organisation[s], and our focus is to advocate for the voiceless environment, and to protect the interests of humankind which is so dependent on the health of our environment.

Should you wish to clarify or discuss this matter further we would be most happy to do so and to assist in any way we can to ensure the safety of these wonderful creatures, and the preservation of their important contribution to life on earth, and to the economic well-being and livelihoods of people in Ireland to whom you have shown you are well disposed to.

Yours most sincerely etc.

Regina Classen

Marine Policy and Research Officer, Irish Wildlife Trust

Annex 1 attached



Annex I Whales and their contribution to life on earth and climate change.

There is an increasing appreciation of the fundamental role whales play in the marine ecosystem, and of their key contribution to our atmosphere and thus life on earth. They also have a major role in carbon sequestration, with a [paper](#)² from a senior economist in the International Monetary Fund and other academics stating: “Our conservative estimates put the value of the average great whale, based on its various activities, at more than \$2 million” .

Whales have a key role in the context of climate change and its effect. The role of whales in maintenance of marine ecosystems is being increasingly acknowledged. Deep-diving whales species feeding at depths, come to the surface to defecate, thereby releasing faecal plumes at the surface and facilitating nutrient transfer from depth and promote phytoplankton blooms at the surface. They contribute to the enhanced productivity of the marine environment with increased Iron and Nitrogen promoting the growth of phytoplankton. Roman et al (2014)³ points to the loss of whales precipitating declines in marine fauna, kelp, birds of prey and fish, and referred to them as “Marine Ecosystems Engineers” .

In addition to contributing to the marine food chain, their role in phytoplankton blooms is also critically important to oxygen in our atmosphere, and the air we all breathe.

More recent studies and papers are highlighting the significant underestimation in the volumes and impacts previously considered on their contributions⁴.

Fatal effects on whales from sonar

The issue of whale fatalities and sonar is well documented^{5,6} These highly intelligent and social giants of the sea, use their acoustic facilities to navigate and find food and communicate in highly complex social structures, and are very sensitive to anthropogenic sound in the marine environment.

2018 saw significant volumes of whale carcasses wash up on Irish and Scottish Shores. Recent admissions from the UK naval service indicate they were in the area in pursuit of a Russian submarine at the time⁷. Data presented by Dr Andrew Brownlow at the WMMC 2019 in Barcelona, highlights that one species was particularly impacted in this event, with over 60 Cuvier’s beaked whale stranded in multiple locations in Scotland and Ireland.

The source of the dead animals was shown by Dr Brownlow to be likely North West off the Irish coast within the Irish EEZ in early to mid-July, 2018 (see Figure 1).

² <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2019/12/natures-solution-to-climate-change-chami.htm>

³ Roman, J., Estes, J. A., Morissette, L., Smith, C., Costa, D., McCarthy, J., Nation, J.B., Nicol, S., Pershing, A., Smetacek, V., (2014). Whales as Marine Ecosystems Engineers. *Front Ecol Environ*; doi:10.1890/130220fse

⁴ <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2021/11/whaling-whales-food-krill-iron/620604/>
<https://www.popsci.com/science/biologists-underestimated-whales-poop/>

⁵ <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rspb.2018.2533>
<https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2018.2533>

⁶ <https://www.livescience.com/64635-sonar-beaked-whales-deaths.html>

⁷ <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-scottish-mail-on-sunday/20210926/282003265574720>

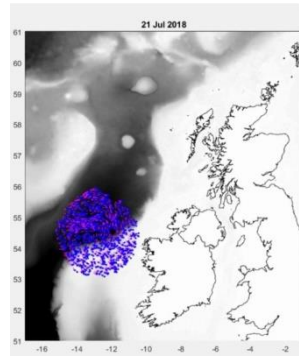


Figure 1: Likely source of stranded animals 2018 (Modeled by Dr Andrew Dale Scottish Assoc. of Marine Science).

This compares with an area with some of the largest number of sightings of Cuvier's in the Observe programme run by the Irish State (Rogan et al 2018)⁸. If we take the findings of Peltier et al (2012)⁹ that only 8% of animals that die at sea, end up being found stranded on the shore, then the death of some 60+ Cuvier's beaked whales represents the death in reality of probably some 750+ animals from the Irish population. Reports produced by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, a Government body concerned with nature protection here in Ireland, previously indicated we have a **maximum** population of 1,221 Cuvier's beaked whales in Irish waters. So, losing over 750 represents a population loss of over 60%. This was therefore **a population significant event for this species.**

That 'population significant event' is the likely result of small submarine incident in 2018¹⁰

The scale of the exercises proposed by the Russian Federation today and over the coming days, (5 in total as I understand), and the associated operations invariably proposed by various navies in response to the proposed exercise, and the extent and impact of the consequential volumes of sonar emanating, has to be considered as a major environmental impact, on a scale much greater than the catastrophe in 2018. The sonar will travel into and permeate Irish waters and is likely to lead to major fatalities of whales in Irish waters and the waters adjacent to the Irish EEZ.

Such a loss in population is of concern to environmental groups in its own right, but it would have serious knock on impacts on the health of the marine environment, and consequently on the livelihoods of fisherman and all those dependent on a healthy marine environment for their livelihoods.

Given the loss in carbon sequestration services of these whales and the diminished potential from future populations given the overall reduction in numbers, it will have impacts on climate change in

⁸ Rogan, E., Breen, P., Mackey, M., Cañadas, A., Scheidat, M., Geelhoed, S. & Jessopp, M. (2018). Aerial surveys of cetaceans and seabirds in Irish waters: Occurrence, distribution and abundance in 2015-2017. Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Department of Culture, Heritage

⁹ Peltier H., Dabin W., Daniel P., Van Canneyt O., Dore'mus G., Huon M. and Ridoux V. (2012) The significance of stranding data as indicators of cetacean populations at sea: modelling the drift of cetacean carcasses. *Ecological Indicators* 18, 278–290.

¹⁰ <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-scottish-mail-on-sunday/20210926/282003265574720>



a context where every contribution on climate matters now significant and this is not a negligible effect. While difficult to quantify exactly, is thus likely to contribute to climate change and an decreased ability to deal with it, occasioning increased hardship for those less able to deal with the consequences of climate change. At a time of a climate emergency, every effect needs to be considered and every negative effect avoided where possible.