Resolution on the environmental effects of high-intensity active naval sonars

2004/2566(RSP) - 28/10/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution by 441 votes in favour, 15 against with 14 abstentions, calling on Member States to adopt a moratorium on the deployment of high-intensity active naval sonars until a global assessment of their cumulative environmental impact on marine mammals, fish and other marine life has been completed. It also wants the Commission to conduct a study and to provide an assessment of the impact of current practices in European waters.

Parliament pointed out that there is a growing body of research confirming that the very loud sounds produced by high-intensity active naval sonars pose a significant threat to marine mammals, fish and other ocean wildlife. In addition, the International Whaling Commission identified anthropogenic noise as a priority topic for investigation within its Scientific Committee, which concluded that there is now compelling evidence implicating military sonars as having a direct impact on whales, in particular on beaked whales. The Scientific Committee also agreed that evidence of increased sounds from other sources, including ships and seismic activities, was cause for serious concern. The EU is committed to halting biodiversity loss by its internal policies and commitment to many Conventions. With a view to effective compliance with these obligations, the nature of the risks involved requires that the precautionary approach, as enshrined in the EC Treaty, be applied, i.e. if scientific doubts exist, action which might harm biodiversity and wildlife must be avoided.

Parliament called on Member States to do the following:

- actively pursue, in the framework of NATO and other international organisations, the adoption of moratoriums and restrictions on the use of high-intensity active sonars in naval operations and the development of alternative technologies;

- immediately restrict the use of high-intensity active naval sonars in waters falling under their jurisdiction;

- investigate in a transparent manner mass strandings and deaths of marine mammals in EU waters which are associated with the use of intense anthropogenic noise;

- set up a Multinational Task Force to develop international agreements regulating noise levels in the world's oceans, with a view to regulating and limiting the adverse impact of anthropogenic sonars on marine mammals and fish.

Parliament considered that any measures to introduce common standards and cooperation in the defence industry field must exclude and actively seek alternatives to technologies which are likely to cause unnecessary and serious damage to the environment and other Community interests.