

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party
for the South East of England

Commissioner Dimas
DG Environment
The European Commission
200 Rue de la Loi
B1049 Brussels
Belgium

November 16th 2009

Dear Commissioner,

I would like to make you aware of my concerns about the Ministry of Defence's activities in the Moray Firth. This stretch of the North Sea is home to around 130 bottlenose dolphins. It is the only protected area in Scotland for any whale or dolphin species and a Special Area of Conservation under EU law, intended to provide sanctuary for the bottlenose dolphin. The regular and wide-scale use of military sonar in such waters is completely unacceptable.

As you may recall, back in 2003 the European Parliament backed my resolution calling for a ban on the use of military sonar until the full environmental effects of the devices are understood. There can be little doubt that these sonar devices are responsible for the deaths of thousands of marine mammals, some of them endangered and protected species. It has been argued that their use is threatening entire whale populations with extinction. The devices threaten the biodiversity of our seas and already-depleted fish stocks - according to the fishing industry itself.

In expanding Europe's largest military exercise into the Moray Firth, the Ministry of Defence is showing scant regard for the welfare of endangered dolphin species in the area and posing a wider risk to the North Sea's marine wildlife. The employment of mitigation measures and monitoring programmes are all very well but in such instances the precautionary principle needs to be applied. These dolphin species are incredibly vulnerable and monitoring the damage caused by military sonar does not constitute adequate protection. Moreover, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society have conducted research that indicates mitigation measures undertaken on board warship are unreliable as a means of protecting marine species from sonar.

I believe that the UK authorities are failing to uphold their responsibilities under the Habitats Directive in the Moray Firth and must be held to full account. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.

cc Secretary of State for Defence, Rt Hon Bob Ainsworth MP.