



## Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust speaks out against military threat to whales

Local environmentalists on the west coast of Scotland have voiced concerns that recent military exercises in Hebridean waters could have caused problems for wildlife in the area.

Operation Joint Warrior, a large international NATO marine training exercise which was carried out over two weeks at the end of April 2008, involved land forces, warships, submarines and aircraft in the offshore and coastal waters to the north east, north and west of Scotland. Countries taking part included the UK, Germany, France, Turkey, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Poland and the USA.

Complaints about the exercise from local people have ranged from the effects of the noise of Joint Warrior on lambing and seabird breeding, to the fact that several explosions were registered by the British Geological Survey at magnitudes up to 1.9 ML. What particularly worried local people involved in marine wildlife research was the military's use of active sonar in this training exercise.

Susannah Calderan, Biodiversity Officer for the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, a research and education charity based in Tobermory, Isle of Mull, said:

“The west coast of Scotland is an area of particularly high biodiversity, and a very important habitat for many marine species, including whales and dolphins. The wellbeing of west coast communities is also strongly tied to the area's wildlife, in industries such as tourism.”

Susannah Calderan continued:

“The sonar used by the military makes extremely loud underwater noise which can travel for many miles. It has been linked in the past with multiple strandings of whales. Earlier this year, unprecedented numbers of deep-diving whales such as Cuvier's beaked whales and pilot whales stranded on the west coasts of the UK and Ireland. We don't know whether this was linked to sonar use, but it's possible. We have just returned from a survey looking for whales and dolphins which coincided with two days of the military exercise. On both of these days we detected sonar, which could be clearly heard over several miles for some hours.”

Fort William resident Russell Leaper has twenty years of experience studying whales while working for the International Fund for Animal Welfare. He also sails widely around the area with his family. He commented:

“Both the Royal Navy and the US Navy acknowledge that active sonar poses a serious threat to marine mammals. However, although the Royal Navy claim that they use a set of 'robust' mitigation measures to reduce the risk of harming whales and dolphins, scientific studies suggest that these measures may be totally inadequate.”

Susannah Calderan urged:

“The military should take more consideration of the sensitivity of the habitats they use for their training exercises. It is essential that the environmental consequences of military exercises be taken seriously when such operations are being planned. It cannot be right that the UK is inviting forces from all over the world to use their weapons in such an important and sensitive area for so many marine species.”

## END ##