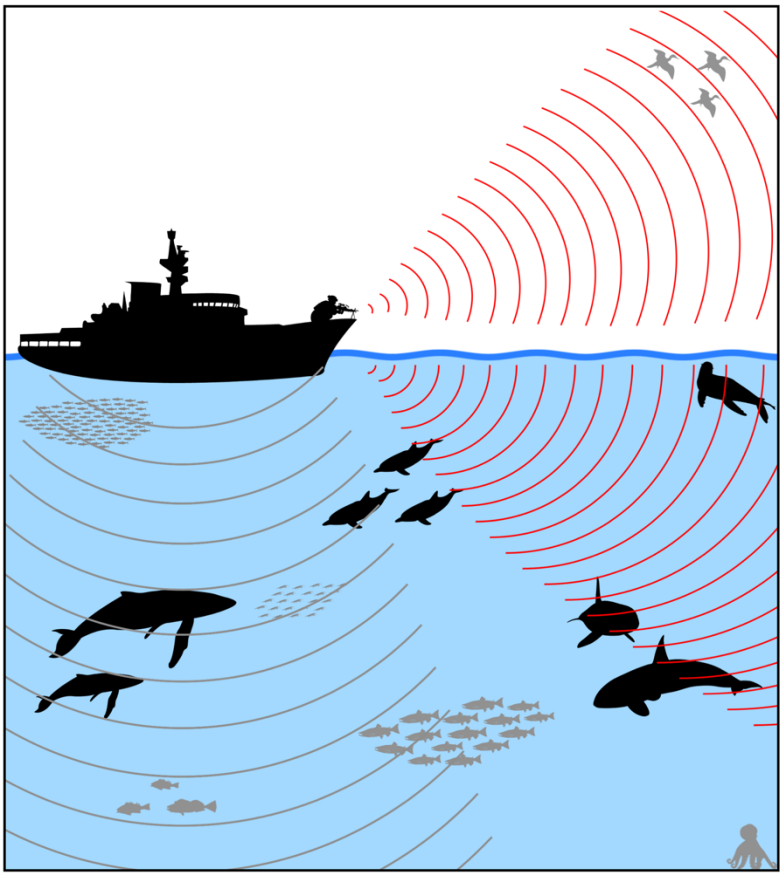
Briefing Note

Military Training in the Canadian Pacific: Taking Aim at Critical Habitat or Sufficient Mitigation of Noise Pollution Impacts?

Summary

- Military activities will resume in the critical habitat of endangered marine mammals.
- Mitigation focuses on the acoustic impact of munitions but omits vessel noise.
- The effects of noise on fishes and invertebrates are overlooked.
- This framework can be adapted for future industrial activities.



Conservation Challenge

The Canadian Department of National Defence has approved the resumption of military activities within a 330 km^2 area in the Strait of Juan de Fuca that overlaps the critical habitat of endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales. The renewal of small-arms training follows a three-year self-imposed cessation to allow a third party to investigate the risk in-air and underwater training noises pose to marine mammals.

Research Objectives

We summarize the findings and limitations of the report and discuss the implications for mitigating aquatic noise pollution.

Research Findings

- The narrow scope of the commissioned report prevented the investigation of the potential effects on non-mammalian taxa and the inclusion of vessel noise generated during training.
- DND's use of several components of the precautionary principle, commissioning a third-party investigation, and implementing mitigation strategies, represents a framework rarely applied when evaluating the impacts of pollutants.
- The importance of this framework is magnified given the absence of noise regulations and the pending development of Canada's Ocean Noise Strategy.

Recommendations

While the conclusion that mitigation measures can limit impacts is potentially contentious among stakeholders, the approach employed to examine this issue is rarely applied when assessing a pollutant's impacts on Canadian's aquatic species. This framework could be improved upon and used when examining future military and industrial activities, particularly when policies are lacking. Subsequent examinations would benefit from integrating evaluations of vessel-generated underwater noise and the inclusion of non-mammalian taxa, especially those that sustain marine mammal populations.

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