

Leslie Moonves
Office of the President
CBS Entertainment
7800 Beverly Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90036

November 20, 2003

Re: NCIS "Navy Criminal Investigation Service" program

Dear Sir,

Many of our constituents have alerted us to a recent episode of the CBS program "NCIS," (Tuesday Nov. 18) wherein the protagonist was a "Whale hugging enviro-terrorist." Apparently in this lurid program, an environmental activist was portrayed as a murderer whose zeal in "whale hugging" caused him to murder and dispose of a U.S. Navy submarine crew member – with the objective of replacing him on the submarine and poisoning the crew with Sarin gas.

Misrepresenting the players in current environmental concerns is not uncommon, but I feel that in this instance, CBS was reckless in their portrayal of people in my line of work as being dangerous – both in terms of human life, and in the context of national security.

If you evaluate the record, you will find that this portrayal is very far from the truth, in as much as there is no instance where any conservationist ever took the life of another human being in the course of their work. Conversely, there are many instances where conservationists have been murdered by thugs and corporate goons who believed that environmental advocacy was an impediment to their own mission. Karen Silkwood, Diane Fossey, and Judi Bari (with Earth First, victim of an FBI pipe bomb attack) – all come to mind. I'm sure you are aware of many others.

Meanwhile, the concern for the US Navy endangering and killing whales and other sea life is quite real. The new, high powered Navy Active Sonar systems have been implicated in many whale deaths (Nature Journal issues 415:106,¹ 425:575²), and scientists are also finding that these loud noises are also damaging fish,³ so the "whale hugging" sentiments of the program's protagonists are not entirely "off base".

(over)→

I am a bio-acoustician and conservationist who has been working on Ocean Noise for over a decade, particularly ocean noise generated by the US Navy and the petrochemical industries. My concern is that by recklessly portraying conservationists as murderers, you not only make my job more difficult, you also arouse potentially dangerous behaviors in your viewers, who will see me not as a scientist, but as an “enviro-terrorist.”

Please remember that while conservationists have been continually maligned and marginalized, their work has proven indispensable for the quality of life that we do enjoy. Without their work we would have no Bald Eagles, no Pelicans or Peregrine Falcons. There would be no ancient redwoods. Yellowstone and Yosemite would be developed as ranch lands. The Grand Canyon would be just another big lake in the desert.

Without our efforts, we may soon find that the ocean will be devoid of whales and dolphins, and perhaps more crucial for our own survival, it will be devoid of fish.

If you insist on arousing anger in your viewers by lurid portrayals, please take care to do so in light of the historical and scientific record.

Sincerely,

Michael Stocker
Science Advisor
Seaflo, Inc.

¹ Mark Schrope “Whale deaths caused by US Navy's sonar” Jan 10, 2002 Nature Journal

² P. D. Jepson, M. Arbelo, R. Deaville et. al. “Gas-bubble lesions in stranded cetaceans” Oct. 9 2003 Nature Journal

³, Robert D, McCauley, Jane Fewtrell and Arthur Popper “High intensity anthropogenic sound damages fish ears” Jan. 2003 J. America Acoustical Society. 113:1 p.638.