

Dust-up on seismic surveys in Juan de Fuca

Dear OCR Community and Friends,

EcoJustice is asking for hearings about a proposed geological survey of the Endeavour Hydrothermal Vents Marine Protected Area. There is some irony in conducting seismic surveys in marine protected areas, particularly an area that has been recognized as a habitat for “12 species of marine life that do not exist anywhere else.”

Sabine Jessen from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society pointedly comments "If marine animals can't find safety in the few areas set aside for them, where will they find it?"

The article from the Canadian Times Colonists was sent to us by a colleague at NSF and can be found [here](#).

Perhaps as informative about the issue are the comments by the mostly Canadian citizens following the article. Equal parts bluster and concern, it illustrates the need for more public understanding about the impacts of seismic surveys on marine life.

There seems to be a divide between those who believe that there is no evidence that seismic surveys harm marine animals, and those who may not have the evidence but instinctively believe that repetitive seismic impulses are inherently bad for marine life.

Many comments are in the tradition of ad-homonym attacks (which I find surprising for Canadians). The comments also do not consider the new data substantiating that seismic surveys do have biological impacts on marine mammal foraging behavior at distances greater than 10 km (Jochens, et al, 2008, Southall et. al. 2007), and have been correlated with a cessation in traditional migratory behavior at distances greater than 100km in Mediterranean Sei whales (Castellote, 2009). And of course there is the well established evidence that seismic surveys compromise fisheries.

This particular scrap is a little uncommon because the antagonists are scientists, not the usual fossil fuel industries or the military. It also illustrates the priority rift between geophysical sciences and biological sciences – and the inherent problem with scientific specialization.

The geophysicists want to know more about tectonics in this lively area full of hydrothermal vents. The area is host to unique species, perhaps because of the hydrothermal activity. Should we compromise the unique life here to find out about its tectonic structure? Or should we take a broader and longer view of the area as a unique global habitat?

Of course all of the scientific data is “important,” but if it is not considered in a larger systematic context it loses relevance.

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