

Department of Commerce · National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration · National Marine Fisheries Service

<b><i>NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE POLICY DIRECTIVE 02-309</i></b> November 15, 2016	
Protected Resources Management Ocean Noise 02-309	
Ocean Noise Policy	
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<b><i>SUMMARY OF REVISIONS:</i></b>	

## I. Introduction

Increasing human activity is contributing to rising levels of underwater noise. Due to the efficiency with which sound travels underwater, aquatic animals have evolved to use acoustic cues in a wide variety of contexts that support their survival and reproductive success, including to select mates, find food, maintain group structure and relationships, avoid predators and navigate. Increasing noise levels can impact the animals and ecosystems that inhabit these places including through acute, chronic, and cumulative effects. Loud underwater noise events can cause physical injuries and adverse behavioral responses; pervasive noise creating activities can accumulate, reducing the ability of animals over large areas to detect and interpret critical environmental cues.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) holds responsibilities under a variety of legal mandates to protect aquatic animals and their habitats in U.S. waters. NMFS is committed to developing an approach to managing the impacts of underwater noise that considers not only its effects on populations and species in its trust, but also the importance of natural sounds in the places where those animals live. Crafting and implementing new management approaches that balance the needs of coastal and ocean resource users while sustaining fisheries and protecting species and areas of national value from harmful noise effects will present NMFS with significant challenges in the coming decade.

To meet these challenges, NMFS collaborated with offices across NOAA to develop an agency-wide Ocean Noise Strategy Roadmap (Strategy Roadmap). The Strategy Roadmap seeks to ensure that NOAA is more comprehensively addressing noise

impacts to species and their habitat over the next 10 years.

## II. Objective

NMFS recognizes that introduced noise from human activities can impact both aquatic animals and the ecosystems they inhabit through acute, chronic, and cumulative impacts. NMFS will work to improve scientific understanding of ocean noise and its impacts; integrate its management actions to effectively reduce ocean noise impacts; support the creation and improvement of decision support tools; and assist in public awareness and education efforts regarding the potential impacts of introduced underwater noise on marine life, and the importance of acoustic habitat to animals and the ecosystems they live within.

## III. Authorities and Responsibilities

This policy directive establishes the following authorities and responsibilities: NMFS' headquarters directorate and office directors, regional leadership (Regional Administrators and Science Directors) are responsible for NMFS-wide implementation of this policy.

## IV. Measuring Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the Policy Directive can be measured by assessing the degree to which NMFS has met the following objectives in addressing Ocean Noise through improvements in Science and Monitoring, Management, Decision Support Tools, and Outreach activities.

**SCIENCE:** NMFS and cross-agency and external partners are filling shared critical knowledge gaps and building understanding of noise impacts over ecologically-relevant scales

**MANAGEMENT<sup>1</sup>:** NMFS' actions are integrated across program offices and are minimizing the acute, chronic and cumulative effects of noise on marine species and their habitat


**DECISION SUPPORT TOOLS:** NMFS is developing publically available tools for assessment, planning and mitigation of noise-making activities over ecologically-relevant scales

**OUTREACH:** NMFS is educating the public on noise impacts, engaging with stakeholders & coordinating with related efforts internationally

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<sup>1</sup> The term "management" refers here to all NMFS actions that seek to reduce or eliminate impacts to trust resources. Such actions include a variety of methods by which individual NOAA programs implement their long-term strategic plans, including, but not limited to, activity-specific regulation of impacts to individual species, prioritization of internal capacities, providing regional, national and international leadership or coordination of protective actions, and providing recommendations or guidance to other federal and state agencies.

Approval signature

Signed 

11/15/16

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Eileen Sobeck  
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

Date

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***NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE PROCEDURAL INSTRUCTION 02-309-01***  
November 15, 2016

Protected Resources Management  
Ocean Noise Policy 02-309  
Ocean Noise Procedure 02-309-01

Ocean Noise Procedure

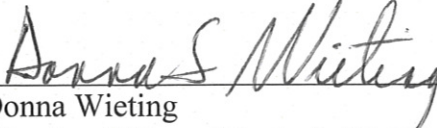
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***SUMMARY OF REVISIONS:***

Signed  11/21/16  
Donna Wieting Date  
Director, Office of Protected Resources

**Introduction**

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has diverse roles to play in implementing the Ocean Noise Policy (Policy). Since 2012, NMFS offices, including science centers and regional offices, have been working to articulate those roles and identify both current activities and recommendations for future activities that would support NMFS' achievement of its Ocean Noise Policy goals.

The Ocean Noise Strategy Roadmap (Roadmap) is designed to serve as a resource for planning and tracking implementation of the Policy. The Roadmap contains both a synthesis of scientific support for the goals articulated for the Strategy and the Policy, and high-level recommendations that NOAA programs could effect to move towards these goals.

**Objectives**

NMFS Offices should actively consider how their individual actions and decisions contribute to our Ocean Noise Policy goals. This Procedural Directive directs relevant NMFS offices, including science centers and regional offices, to contribute to biennial work plans to implement the Ocean Noise Policy. Offices should use the Ocean Noise Strategy Roadmap as a reference and guide when identifying their contributions.

### **Structural Guidance**

Contributions to implementation work plans will be drafted under the direction of relevant NMFS headquarters office directors and regional leadership (Regional Administrators and Science Directors). Collaboration among NMFS programs in the development of contributed projects is encouraged. Guidance and support for contributing to work plans will be provided by Ocean Noise Strategy leads within NMFS' Offices of Protected Resources, Science and Technology and the National Ocean Service's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.

### **Timeline and Reporting**

Offices must submit their contributions to the first biennial work plan within six (6) months of the issuance of this Procedure to the Strategy leads. Strategy leads in conjunction with the Office of Protected Resources will compile the information and present the work plan to the Chief Scientist and Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs.

Programs must contribute to annual work plan progress reports to be compiled by Strategy leads. The Strategy leads in conjunction with the Office of Protected Resources, will present work plan progress reports to the Chief Scientist and Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs on an annual basis.