



# CALIFORNIA GRAY WHALE COALITION

PROTECTING THE MOST ANCIENT BALEEN WHALE ALIVE TODAY

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## A REALLY SERIOUS THREAT TO GRAY WHALES.

*The Coalition has been contacted by some of our Mexican colleagues to alert everyone involved with the Gray Whales, particularly whale watching companies, of an impending holocaust to the migratory route of the Grays.*

Not only Gray Whales but Humpbacks and Blues will be impacted as will the fishing industry and co-ops.

A UK based company, Oceanic Explorations Ltd., a subsidiary of the Tampa, Florida based Odyssey Marine Exploration, seeks approval or has approval or is operating without approval ( it's very difficult to get this information) to dredge marine phosphate.

According to the information the Coalition has received, the company's goal is for the dredging project to remove 7 million tonnes of phosphate sand per year, for the next 50 years to produce 350 million tonnes of phosphatic sands.

The dredging and pumping equipment to the barge will be ongoing, 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year.

The Mexican or Baja government has granted a concession over almost 35,000 hectares for an incredibly paltry \$54,456 US dollars according to the information the Coalition has received.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF MARINE PHOSPHATE ?

According to the flimsy Mexican information, the marine phosphate would be used for agriculture. The Coalition has been told by experts that marine phosphate contains uranium which can be separated from the phosphate and used for weapon production.

Marine phosphate is also the basis for organophosphates, which are toxic poisons. For many years phosphorus transformed into white phosphorus has been used as an additive to napalm.

The ramifications of this massive project with virtually zero information need in depth research which the Coalition will be focused on in the coming months.

### DEEP SEA BED MINING IS A DISASTER FOR THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

When two Australian companies attempted to start a similar operation mining phosphate in Namibia, the dangers of deep seabed mining were highlighted. They include:-

- Noise and hazardous waste pollution will directly affect and potentially damage marine mammals irreversibly.
- Gray Whales, Blues and Humpbacks who migrate in this area will be at significant risk as underwater noise disrupts communication, especially communication between calves and cows. Underwater noise can force whales to migrate much further offshore putting them at risk from ship collision and shark attacks; noise can disrupt reproduction and create major stress.
- Underwater noise can cause permanent and temporary



deafness. At certain levels, noise can make lungs and air sacs explode from the pressure levels.

- Dredging of 3 m of the sea floor will cause direct destruction to the building blocks of the marine ecosystem (benthos layer) as well as certain fish stocks;
- Dr Richard Steiner – an expert on the impacts of deep seabed mining writes:- the sediment plume that would be created by seabed dredging... would clearly create significant impacts to the pelagic ecosystem for a very wide area.
- Direct harm to hatcheries for fish;
- Potential effects on spawning;
- Effect of disturbed ecosystem (turbidity) on marine predators;
- The release of hazardous substances including radioactive materials, methane gas, and hydrogen sulphide will directly kill wildlife and cause many

commercial fish stocks contamination;

- Plumes will negatively affect zoo-plankton, one of the building blocks of the marine ecosystem;
- Soluble phosphate entering the water and acting like a fertilizer will increase algal blooms and harm shellfish and other species;
- Change in the nutrient balance in upwelling
- Increase in phosphate nutrients will increase algae and bacteria in the water .

Jakob von Uexkull, Founder of the World Future Council strongly warned against potential hazards of mining phosphate in Namibia. Von Uexkull said:

*"The risks of the project are incalculable and potentially devastating, as it is the first time phosphate would be mined at sea anywhere in the world. Application of the precautionary principle is critical in this instance if we are to protect our oceans."*

Exactly the same focus must apply in Mexico. To allow this project to go ahead – the first time phosphate would be mined at sea anywhere in the world – given that Namibia has refused to allow the project to go ahead, is madness.

Given the miserable \$54,456 US dollars charged by the Mexican government, there would appear to be a good case for legal action in Mexico and potentially in the US. The amount of money charged and the dirty business which has facilitated this project stinks of corruption.

However, any US company involved in the destruction of the environment of other countries can be charged with violations of a US investment Act. Given that endangered species will be impacted, there is potential for legal challenges under the US Endangered Species Act.

The Coalition is aware that the Mexican legal system is very complex and does not function in the public interest. We're also aware the local fishing industry is in the process of uniting as their livelihoods are at real risk.

Deep Seabed mining is up there with climate change and ocean acidification in terms of major and potentially deadly threats to the marine environment. Mining companies interested in the new resource money bag are conducting all kinds of backroom deals with third world countries. The threats posed by this destructive form of mining are massive but the powers that be are doing their best to ensure the issues remain in a dark dungeon.

## WHAT CAN COALITION MEMBERS DO ?

*The Coalition is in contact with one of the major US public interest law firms as we investigate the possibility of a legal challenge.*

We have tried to contact NRDC and other major US conservation groups and our suggestion at this stage is simple. If you're a member of any of these organisations, please get in touch with key people and ask what they're doing about the phosphate mining project in the Gulf of Ulloa.

If you're in Mexico, the Coalition realises options are limited. It may be possible to join with the fishermen in a major community based coalition to oppose this project. We will keep you updated.

**Sue Arnold - CEO - California Gray Whale Coalition**

## AN OVERDUE UPDATE

*The lack of newsletters from the Coalition is unacceptable!~ But this has been a frantic year with many issues and never enough hours in the day.*

Baja suffered a heap of damage from Hurricane Odile which was devastating to so many, the people who lost their houses and businesses, the resorts on which Mexico relies for big tourism dollars, San Ignacio and Loreto did not escape the damage.

Unfortunately the damage at San Ignacio Laguna was also severe and the road which of late has been a joy to drive on with many tarred miles, has been badly damaged and locals say it now takes a long time to get out to the Laguna. Many of the operators at the camp are flying people in and out this season.

As you will have read, the last season produced an encouraging count of cows and calves, the population looks like its in good shape. But... population dynamics of the Eastern Gray Whale go up and down – from one extreme to another – and in apparently short spaces of time.

Without any data on the extent of orca predation in Russian waters, we continue to have no end migration population figures. We have no idea how many calves were taken by orcas nor whether the kill rate has increased as the disappearance of sea ice greatly facilitates the ability of the transient orcas to move much further into Gray Whale habitat.

This season's count will give us a good indication of whether the population is stable. The Coalition relies on the community counts as National Marine & Fisheries (NMFS) are constantly changing their methodology or with-holding population estimates.

## Gray Whales Communication.



Image: Chug Von Rospach

***A fascinating study by scientists at the University of Baja California has revealed some of the communication skills of the whales. Seems they purr !***

A paper was presented to the 2nd Pan American/Iberian meeting on Acoustics, at Cancun, Mexico in November.

*"The gray whale uses sounds to obtain information about its environment and to communicate with other gray whales. Two different demographic groups of gray whales visit San Ignacio Lagoon: mothers who give birth to and raise their calves, and singles, who come here to mate. Since 2005 a group of scientist has been studying their vocalizations to learn, among other things, if mothers with calves produce the same calls than the singles whales. A second question we seek to answer is at what lagoon depths these vocalizations are produced.*

*To investigate these questions , we deployed sound-recording tags on gray whales in San Ignacio Lagoon by attaching them onto the animal's skin with suction cups. We recorded 5 types of calls, labeled "conga", "quejido", "croac", "purr" and "ronroneo". Results show that mothers mainly use the "conga" and the "quejido" type calls while the single whales produced primarily the "ronroneo" and the "croac". However, the "purr" call was produced about as frequently by mothers and singles whales alike. With regards to where in the water column these calls are made, it seems that mothers have a preferred depth for calling: 79% of their vocalizations were made at the surface, compared to single whales calling at the surface only 21% of the time. Conversely while sitting at the bottom, singles whales produced 84% of their calls while mothers only use this depth to produce 16% of their vocalizations."*

***Oh, so little we know about the way non humans communicate and what they say !***

## CALIFORNIA'S WARM OCEANS WITH POTENTIALLY SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES

***Scientists report warm water species appearing off the West Coast of California, including Hawaiian ono, giant Sunfish and a green sea turtle. More than 100 common dolphins have been seen off the Farallon Islands in the past two months, normally seen hundreds of miles away.***

The temperatures off the coast are currently 5-6 degrees F. warmer than historic averages for this time of the year. Seawater temperature is currently measuring 71 degrees!

According to the experts, its not El Nino or climate change but the failure of winds that normally blow from the north, trapping warm water closer to the equator.

This wind allows the warm water to move north, pushing ocean surface waters, churning up the cold water from the deep, creating an upwelling. If the wind doesn't blow, there's no cooling off of the water and no upwelling.

The warm temperature has affected birds and fish. Zeke Grader from the Pacific Federation of Fishermen's Associations in San Francisco says there's almost nothing to fish.

Ocean changes have impacted birds with less krill and



other food. Humpback and Blue whales are absent.

Researchers are in the dark over this one. They have no way of knowing why the winds slacked off – or when they may start again.

Meantime, many marine creatures relying on krill and the upwelling nutrients will die of starvation.

## FUKUSHIMA RADIATION IMPACTING WEST COAST WHALES?

***THE PACIFIC OCEAN IS AWASH WITH RADIOISOTOPES ACCORDING TO SCIENTIFIC EXPERTS.***

Whale watchers fear visiting whales will face radiation dangers as both gray and humpback whales migrate up and down the West Coast.

Central Oregon coast's whale-watching volunteers have been trained in the dangers of radiation relating to human and whale health.

There's been a rash of dead humpback whales washing-up along central Oregon coast beaches in the wake of the entire West Coast of North America being hit by radioisotopes from the damaged nuclear reactors at Fukushima, Japan.

Experts say the radioactive materials are still being dumped into the Pacific Ocean.

Center for Marine and Environmental Radioactivity (CMER).scientists said they are "deeply concerned"

about the unabated release of radioactive contaminants from the crippled Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant.

CMER and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution scientists claim there is "an ongoing spread of radiation across the Pacific" that is "evolving into something horrible."

The radiation is seriously impacting both the Pacific Ocean, and all people who live near it, say experts and locals.

While government officials say the radiation found up and down the West Coast of North America is "only as toxic as a dental X-ray," whale watching volunteers are deeply concerned for the Grays and Humpbacks which will be migrating through the contaminated waters.

Nearby Oregon State University Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport is being asked to "do whatever they can to educate coastal residents and visitors about the radioactive dangers washing up from Japan."

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