

# News release

GREENPEACE

## **New report: Scientists alarmed by ‘seismic blasting’ for oil in the Arctic Ocean**

**24 August 2015 (Greenland Sea)** – The practice of firing seismic airguns to find new oil reserves beneath the Arctic Ocean is ‘alarming’ and could seriously injure whales and other marine life, according to [a new scientific review](#). The oil industry is increasingly looking towards the Arctic as our warming climate causes sea ice to melt, opening up these areas to dangerous oil drilling for the first time in history.

TGS-NOPEC, a Norwegian company operating off east Greenland, recently began firing airguns that emit 259 decibels towards the seabed in order to map possible oil reservoirs beneath it. Above water this sound intensity would be perceived as approximately 8 times louder than jet engine heard 50 meters away (1). TGS-NOPEC is one of the companies that is planning to conduct [seismic blasting](#) in the Canadian Eastern Arctic, despite stiff opposition from Inuit coastal communities.

Report author Dr. Oliver Boisseau, Senior Research Scientist at Marine Conservation Research said: “It is clear that noise from seismic activity has an impact on whales as it can damage their hearing, ability to communicate and also displace animals, affecting diving behavior, feeding and migration patterns. There are increasing indications that this could cause serious injury, and may also disrupt reproductive success and increase the risk of strandings and ice entrapments.”

Just last week, Canadian Federal Court of Appeal judges [dismissed Clyde River’s application for a judicial review](#) of a National Energy Board decision that allows for five years of seismic blasting in Baffin Bay in Davis Strait.

Mayor Jerry Natanine, who has been leading this fight on behalf of Baffin Island Inuit, said: “The same seismic companies that are searching for oil in North East Greenland right now could be blasting air cannons in Baffin Bay next summer. Inuit rely on healthy marine life for food and for our local economy. If the seismic companies start blasting in our waters, I’m worried it could decimate our way of life.”

Global oil companies including BP, Chevron and Royal Dutch Shell all own drilling rights in the Greenland Sea and are the likely customers for the data uncovered by the seismic testing company. Shell also owns leases in Canada’s Eastern Arctic just north of the area designated for oil exploration.

“One would hope for a limit on the greed of oil companies,” Natanine explained. “This new study shows how destructive seismic blasting can be for whales yet they continue with their pursuit for oil with no regard for environmental impacts and Inuit rights.”

The Greenpeace ship *Arctic Sunrise* is currently on its way to the Greenland Sea to document the seismic testing fleet. The seismic operation will take place adjacent to ‘closed areas’ and overlap with ‘areas of concern’ appointed by the Greenlandic authorities, designated for the protection of narwhal, walrus and a critically endangered population of bowhead whales.

“It is alarming to consider the vast amount of seismic activity being planned and conducted in the High Arctic, given the fragile nature of the ecosystem and the potential for disturbance and harm to whales. It seems justified to urge for extreme caution given both the lack of data and the limited understanding of the short and long term impact of seismic noise on sensitive Arctic species, especially the narwhal,” concluded report author Dr Oliver Boisseau.

-30-

**For more information:**

Diego Creimer, Communications officer, Greenpeace Canada 514-999-6743  
[dcreimer@greenpeace.org](mailto:dcreimer@greenpeace.org)

For interviews with Dr Oliver Boisseau, Senior Research Scientist at Marine Conservation Research, contact: Greenpeace Press Desk +31 (0)20 718 2470 or e-mail [pressdesk.int@greenpeace.org](mailto:pressdesk.int@greenpeace.org)

For information or interviews from the seismic blasting area, contact:  
Mads Fisker, on board the Arctic Sunrise, +31 20 712 26 16 / + 1 480 456 7628.  
[mads.fisker@greenpeace.org](mailto:mads.fisker@greenpeace.org)

**Notes for Editors:**

*A Review of the Impact of Seismic Survey Noise on Narwhal & other Arctic Cetaceans* can be downloaded [here](#). A four page media briefing summarizing the findings and recommendations in the report is available [here](#).

Photo and video will be made available here <http://photo.greenpeace.org/collection/27MZIFJ6ZPV1H>

(1) To a human, 197.5 dB (re. 20  $\mu$ Pa a 1 m distance) would be perceived as approx. 32 louder than jet plane heard 50 m away (140 dB). The human threshold of pain is 125 dB and eardrum rupture could happen around 140 dB-150 dB.