

WHALES: Enviros sue to bar Navy sonar drills in Hawaii

A coalition of environmental groups sued the Navy in federal court yesterday in a bid to stop it from using high-volume sonar in Hawaiian waters.

Filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Hawaii, the suit says 12 planned sonar tests have the potential to harm several endangered species, including Hawaiian monk seals and whales. The lawsuit seeks to "stop the Navy from doing its sonar exercises until it complies with environmental laws they are violating," said Paul Achitoff, the Earthjustice attorney representing the groups.

The proposed tests would occur within or near both the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary and the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, according to Achitoff.

Hawaiian Environmental Alliance Organizations participating in the suit are the Ocean Mammal Institute, the Animal Welfare Institute, the Surfrider Foundation, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Hawaiian Environmental Alliance.

The Navy claims its sonar tests do not affect marine life. "The Navy takes its environmental responsibilities very seriously. We live on the world's oceans and have high regard for that precious resource. The Navy also has a responsibility to train the sons and daughters of America who may be called upon to go in harm's way," said Jon Yoshishige, a Navy public affairs officer (Jan TenBruggencate, [Honolulu Advertiser](#), May 17).

But a National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration study said the Navy's use of sonar contributed to the beaching of 16 whales and two dolphins in the Bahamas in 2000 (Diana Leone, [Honolulu Star-Bulletin](#), May 17).

Scientists say sonar may obscure the echoes some whales and dolphins use to locate food. It may also startle some species, causing them to rush to the ocean surface and experience decompression sickness from rising too quickly.

The Navy has said it will post more lookouts on ships to watch for marine mammals and will turn off its sonar when they get too close. An official said the Navy sometimes uses airplanes for the same purpose.

The lawsuit also names the National Marine Fisheries Service, which awards permits to the Navy to carry out underwater exercises (Audrey McAvoy, AP/[San Francisco Chronicle online](#), May 16). -- **KB**