

Millions Voted to Study Whales and Sonar

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The U.S. House of Representatives has authorized \$72 million to test the effects of naval sonar on whales and dolphins, with the research to be done in Hawaii.

The appropriation, approved Thursday as part of a defense spending bill, was proposed by Rep. Neil Abercrombie, D-Hawaii. It also funds development of systems to detect the presence of whales and dolphins in naval training areas.

"Data produced by this program are essential to Navy environmental programs, the establishment of safe active sonar and the well-being of marine mammals," said Abercrombie, who chairs the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Air and Land Forces.

Paul Nachtigall of the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology in Kaneohe, already doing research on echolocation, is slated to get \$2.3 million of the funding.

"The development of more effective submarine detection systems for the Navy, commercial shipments, oceanographic research and energy exploration," Nachtigall said, "all utilize the introduction of acoustic energy into the oceans."

He said there is much concern but little hard information about sonar's effects on ocean life.

Environmental groups filed suit in Hawaii federal district court this week charging that the Navy plans to use sonar in several exercises in Hawaiian waters that will bombard whales and dolphins with pings up to 100,000 times louder than pings blamed for the stranding of whales in the Bahamas in 2000. A connection has not been definitively proven but environmentalists said the beached whales had evidence of bleeding ears.

Abercrombie also recommended \$4 million to advance development of marine mammal detection from Navy aircraft to help ships avoid dolphins and whales. BAE Systems in Hawaii wants to leverage work its parent company has done for Britain.

"We intend to test this new system capability here in Hawaii within the confines of the Pacific Missile Range Facility on Kauai," said Galen Ho, a BAE Systems consultant.