



SIERRA CLUB

MARYLAND CHAPTER

Sierra Club Maryland Chapter

P.O. Box 278

Riverdale, MD 20738

(301) 277-7111

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*Transmitted by email to josh.kurtz@maryland.gov and
boatingregspubcomment.dnr@maryland.gov*

Josh Kurtz, Secretary
Maryland Department of Natural Resources
580 Taylor Avenue
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Maryland Sierra Club Comments on Proposed 2026 Changes to Boating Regulations

Dear Secretary Kurtz and Maryland Department of Natural Resources,

The Sierra Club Maryland Chapter supports the proposed changes to the regulations reducing boat speed and increasing wake zone protections, which will make boating recreation safer for boaters and other recreational users of our waterways and reduce harm to wildlife who depend on our waters for habitat. Our comments apply to the following proposed rules:

- ★ Anne Arundel County – Browns Cove – Mill Creek – Whitehall Bay
- ★ Anne Arundel County – Glebe Creek – South River
- ★ Anne Arundel County – Route 2 Bridge Area – South River
- ★ Anne Arundel County – Selby Bay – South River
- ★ Baltimore County – Bullneck Creek – Bear Creek – Patapsco River
- ★ Baltimore County – Holly Beach – Middle River
- ★ Baltimore County – Schoolhouse Cove – Bear Creek – Patapsco River
- ★ Cecil County – Rogue's Harbor – Elk River
- ★ Kent County – Long Cove – Langford Creek – Chester River
- ★ Talbot County – San Domingo Creek – Choptank River
- ★ Talbot County – Tar Creek – Tred Avon River

As discussed in the Department's rationale for these speed reductions, boats traveling at high speeds can create safety risks for other recreational users of these waterways, including swimmers, small boats, kayaks, canoes, paddleboarders, anglers and others. Further, the powerful wakes can cause significant property damage to docks, marinas and the shoreline.

Boat wakes cause significant erosion of shorelines and riverbanks, particularly in areas with unstable soil or sensitive vegetation. This erosion can lead to habitat loss, increased

turbidity of the water, and damage to infrastructure. The resuspension of the sediment can include pollutants and excess nutrients that may be harmful to aquatic life and the ecosystem. Increased turbidity from suspended sediments can also reduce light penetration, impacting photosynthesis of submerged aquatic vegetation.

High boat speeds have numerous additional impacts to our wildlife. Boat traffic can disturb wildlife, particularly nesting birds, marine mammals, and turtles, leading to stress, displacement, and reduced breeding success. Some slow moving animals may not be able to avoid impact and may be injured or killed by boats.

Further, faster boats generate more noise from engines and propellers both underwater and in the air. This can disrupt the communication, foraging, and navigation of marine mammals, fish, and other aquatic species leading to stress, displacement, and reduced reproductive success.¹ A meta-analysis of over 100 species studied found that noise adversely affects the great majority of species studied and noticeably affects many species of amphibians, arthropods, birds, fish mammals, mollusks, and reptilians.^{2,3} Refer to Figure 1 and 2.⁴ One noteworthy study has found that recurring exposure to noise even changes the telomeres in birds indicating a shorter lifespan.⁵

According to the World Health Organization, noise is one of the most hazardous forms of pollution and has become omnipresent in aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Noise is also destructive to human health and, in addition to causing hearing damage, creates sleep disruption, harms cognitive ability, increases depression, anxiety, and risk of strokes and heart attacks and can increase risk of dementia.

For these reasons, we support the efforts to reduce boat speeds and increase wake zone protections and commend the Department of Natural Resources for working on this important regulatory change that will improve recreational safety and the environment.

Sincerely,

Marie LaPorte
Biodiversity and Natural Places Chair
marielaporte@verizon.net

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
josh.tulkin@mdsierra.org

¹ Senzaki M, Kdoya T, Francis CD. Direct and indirect effects of noise pollution alter biological communities in and near noise-exposed environments. *Proc Biol Sci.* 2020;287(1923):2020017.

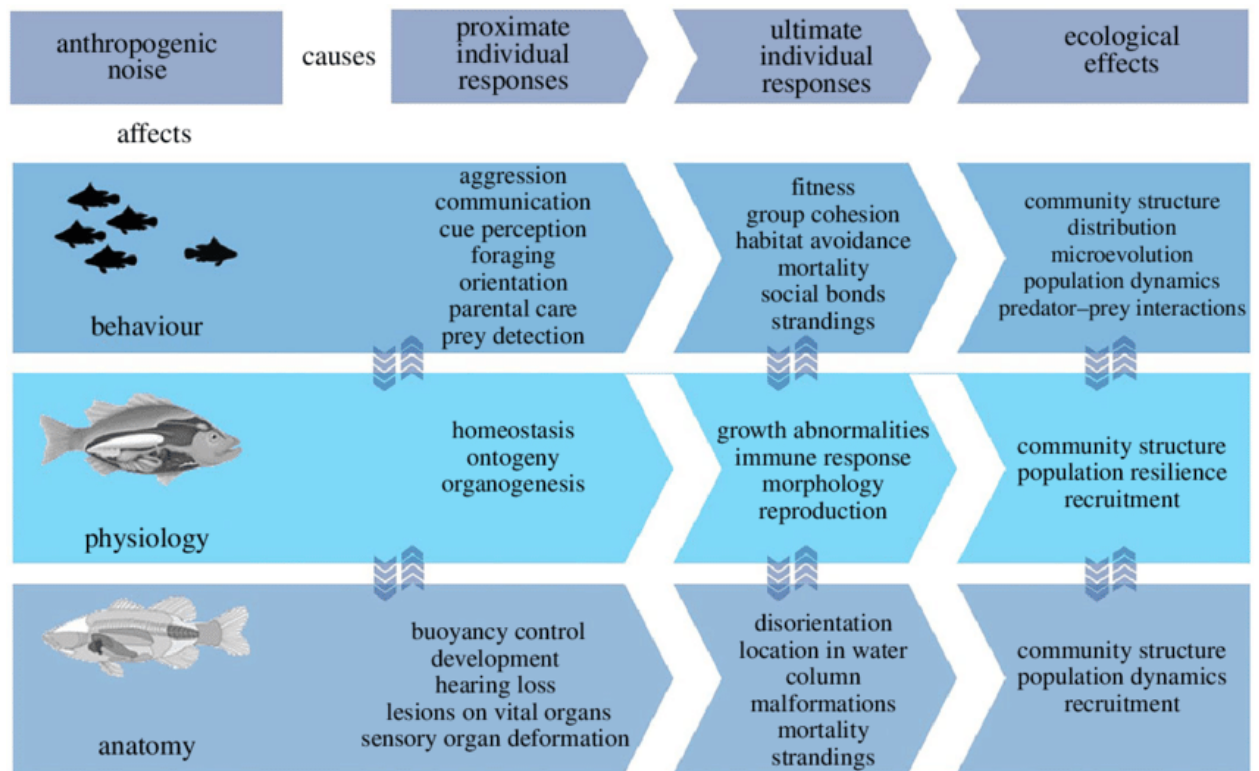
² Kunc HP, Schmidt R. The effects of anthropogenic noise on animals: a meta-analysis. *Biol Lett.* 2019 Nov 29;15(11):20190649. doi: 10.1098/rsbl.2019.064. Epub 2019 Nov 20. PMID: 31744413.

³ Kunc, Hansjoerg & McLaughlin, Kirsty & Schmidt, Rouven. (2016). Aquatic noise pollution: implications for individuals, populations, and ecosystems. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences.* 283. 10.1098/rspb.2016.0839. DOI:[10.1098/rspb.2016.0839](https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2016.0839).

⁴ Ibid. See the figures on the subsequent pages of this letter.

⁵ Dorrado-Correa et al., "[Timing Matters: Traffic Noise Accelerates Telomere Loss Rate Differently Across Developmental Stages](#)," *Frontiers in Zoology*, 15:20 (2018).

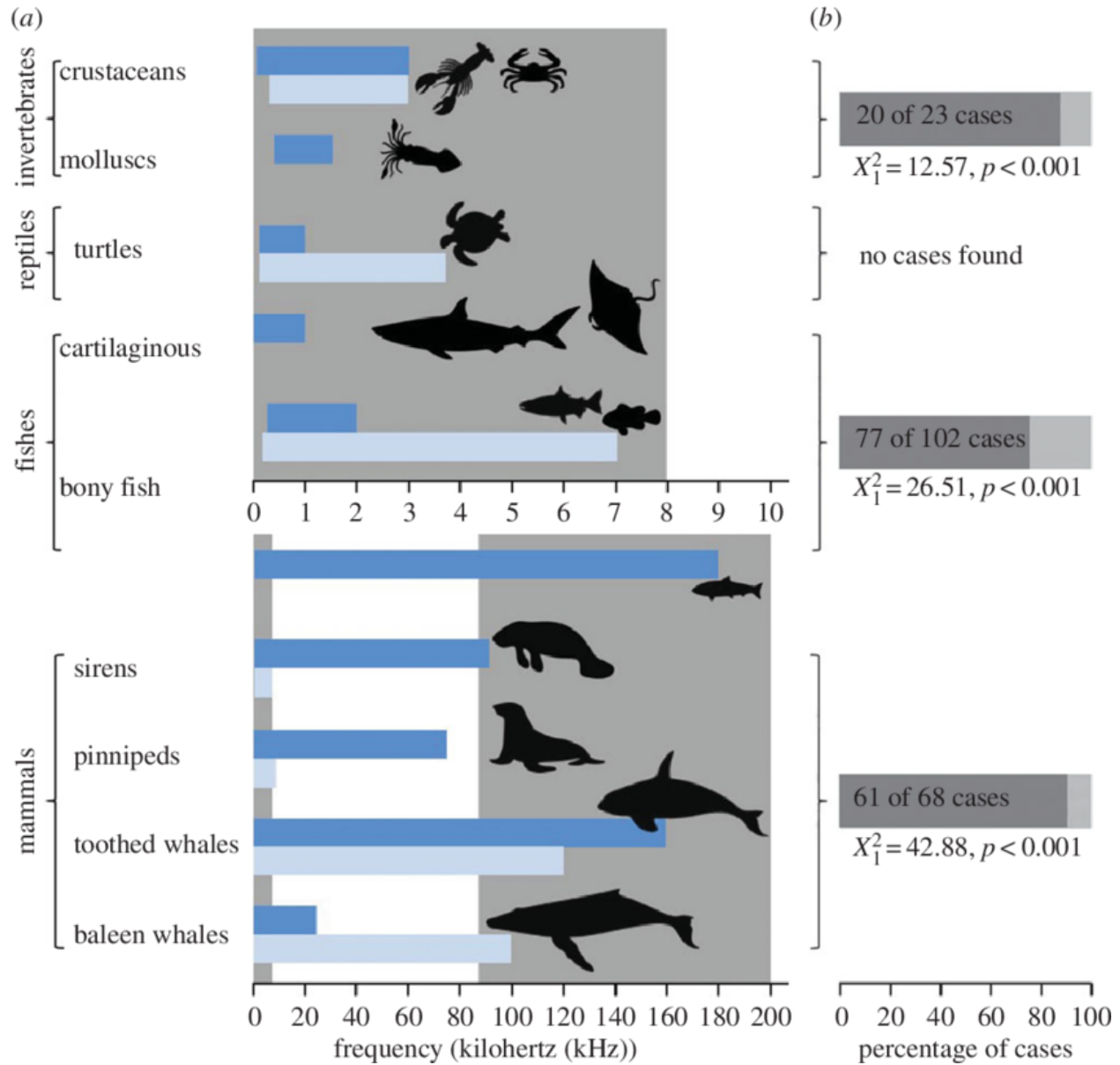
Figure 1



Source: The Royal Society Publishing, Aquatic noise pollution: implications for individuals, populations, and ecosystems.

“The effects of anthropogenic noise on individuals’ anatomy, physiology, and/or behaviour. Changes in the acoustic environment through increasing noise levels can lead to immediate proximate responses, resulting in a variety of emergent responses. Anthropogenic noise can have non-mutually exclusive interrelated effects on proximate and ultimate individual responses leading to large-scale ecological effects.”

Figure 2



Source: The Royal Society Publishing, Aquatic noise pollution: implications for individuals, populations, and ecosystems.

“The effect of noise pollution across taxa. The majority of studies published found a significant relationship with noise. Dark grey bars indicate the number of cases that did find a significant effect and light grey bars those that did not.”