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Title: Navy sonar, cetaceans and the Supreme Court: Fairfax county public attitudes and potential ramifications.

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### **Abstract**

Ocean noise is particularly problematic in the Northern hemisphere. One source of anthropogenic noise currently impacting the marine environment and cetaceans is military sonar. As a result, environmental NGOs have pursued a series of legal battles to test how much leeway the Navy has concerning exemption from environmental laws. The legal battle made its way to the Supreme Court in the case *Winter v. Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)*. Ruling of the court suggests that the military is held to different standards when it comes to the implementation of federal environmental law. Public opinion on this issue has not been sought previously and since public opinion is a key force in the development and implementation of policy it could be a valuable asset to stakeholders to understand. In this study, I explore variables correlated with Fairfax County resident attitudes towards Navy exemption from marine mammal protection regulations in times of peace using Pearson's chi-square tests. I also explore descriptive information concerning: belief in sonar impact, attitudes towards mitigation measures, and knowledge surrounding the Supreme Court case *Winter v. NRDC*. I found that age, level of education, and ocean activity participation did not have a significant relationship with how respondents felt about Navy exemption. I also found, that individuals who were conservative, Republican, and have served in the military were more likely to believe the Navy should be exempt from marine mammal protection regulations. I found a majority of the sample believe that Navy sonar impacts marine mammals, that moderating sonar use would be an appropriate action to take if Navy sonar does impact marine mammals and have never heard about the case *Winter v. NRDC*. Expert interviews were also conducted to determine the potential ramifications of the Supreme Court case. A few noteworthy points found in the expert interviews include that the case exerts federal power over state power; its legal precedent sets limitations to the use of preliminary injunctions under NEPA; and that it is possible to reconcile national security efforts with environmental protection.