

## **JONES URGES NAVY TO EXTEND COMMENT PERIOD ON ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW OF PROPOSED SONAR RANGE**

Washington, D.C.- In a letter today to the Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Third District Representative Walter B. Jones requested a 60-day extension of the public comment period for the Navy's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on the proposed Undersea Warfare Training Range (USWTR) off the coast of North Carolina.

The public comment period is scheduled to close December 28th, 2005. Congressman Jones asserted that a 60-day extension would allow fishing families, local community members, scientific experts and other interested parties additional time to provide their input on the Navy's proposal.

Congressman Jones previously expressed his concern about the impact of sonar use by the Navy in a December 9th letter to Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr. of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Jones requested that NOAA provide written verification that the Navy's proposed USWTR site and operation is in compliance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act, an act that prohibits the harassment or endangering of marine mammals in U.S. waters. Jones also requested information on how the agency plans to mitigate possible harm that may come to the marine resources that so many in Eastern North Carolina depend upon.

In today's letter to the Navy, Congressman Mike McIntyre (NC-7) joined Congressman Jones (NC-3) in citing two important reasons for a 60-day extension of public comment.

"First, since the Training Range has the potential to affect the marine resources our coastal economies depend on, we must ensure that those who may be impacted have ample time to fully understand and comment on the proposal," they wrote. "Second, it would be premature to close the comment period before the public has the opportunity to review the latest scientific findings regarding the impacts of sound, including military sonar, on the whales and dolphins at the Navy's proposed training sites. Early next year, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and three North Carolina universities plan to release a report on their cooperative investigation of the stranding of 37 whales that died on the Outer Banks within 24 hours of a Navy sonar training exercise off our coast. The investigation will include necropsies, histopathologies, and other forensic work on the whales. A second scientific report from the Marine Mammal Commission's Advisory Committee on Acoustic Impacts on Marine Mammals is also expected to be completed by early next year."

"We believe it is important that all applicable information be reviewed before making a decision of this magnitude," concluded Jones and McIntyre.

For additional information or to schedule an interview with Congressman Walter B. Jones please contact Kathleen Joyce at (202) 225-3415.