**Exploring How Underwater Noise Dropped During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Human activity slowed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Environmental researchers have taken this opportunity to investigate how ecosystems respond to a decrease in human-related stressors.

One human-related stressor is shipping, which can impact ocean ecosystems by creating intense underwater sounds.

Fritjof Basan and his colleagues at the Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency of Germany set out to determine whether reduced shipping activity in 2020 significantly affected the underwater soundscape.

First, the team analysed data showing that there were far fewer ships travelling in the German Baltic Sea in 2020 compared to pre-pandemic years. Their results show significant dips in shipping activity during April, May, June and July, compared to the same months during previous years.

Next, Basan and his colleagues analysed data from two acoustic monitoring stations in the German Baltic Sea. They compared pre-pandemic acoustic measurements to data from 2020 to determine whether the reduced shipping activity significantly affected the underwater soundscape.

The measurements were collected by vertical hydrophones positioned three meters above the seafloor.

In particular, the researchers found that low-pitched sounds reached a minimum in 2020, 13% less than in pre-pandemic times.

The results definitively confirm that shipping significantly affects the marine soundscape. The next step will be to study how marine life responded to their quieter environment.

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