

# Letters

## Deep-sea mining synonymous with wildlife destruction

The US National Oceans and Atmospheric Administration's infantile comment (*Oryx*, October 1981, just arrived) on deep-sea mining, that there will be 'little or no potentially harmful effects that must be closely monitored' should be energetically condemned. Deep-sea mining is synonymous with wildlife destruction on a grand scale, and will leave the world with oceans and seas of almost empty water. Mining in the Pacific will swiftly spread to other oceans where the work of stirring up the mud for an unspecified number of years will be devastating for all. Millions of tons of freezing sediment withdrawn from the bed of the sea and dumped back again will hang in suspension for centuries. It will become a steadily increasing ingredient of ocean rivers and currents, and be deposited far and wide in a cloud of death wherever there is sea water, smothering life in abyssal troughs and trenches and turning the continental shelves into a vast submarine Pompeii.

To drum up acceptance of the idea it has been cunningly postulated that sediment returned to the sea at the end of a tube reaching half-way down will make deep-sea mining harmless. Cubic miles of sedimentary waste poured back half-way down are no less deadly than when poured back at the top or at the bottom. Marine life exists at all levels, the half-way down zone being richly endowed with non-migratory as well as migratory species travelling in clouds to the surface and back every twenty-four hours.

Are we to suppose that nodules occur only on the surface of the sea-floor and not at various levels in the sediment (often thousands of feet thick) prompting ever deeper dredging to procure them? In what quantities if any will deadly hydrogen sulphide be released by dredging? How will increasing amounts of sediment swallowed with every mouthful of krill affect the baleen whales for the rest of their lives? Will the growing accumulation of sediment abruptly alter the pH over vast areas of the sea? Might some sediments prove to be poisonous to marine organisms? The almost endless list of questions without answers should be seen as a strong deterrent to stirring up the mud.

104

The fate of the sea lies with the western nations. It is both sad and criminal that today's scientists seduced by the lure of transitory riches and contemptuous of past errors are again mobilising their treachery to destroy permanently the last and perhaps most beautiful of the world's habitats. The safety of the sea and of the world of tomorrow would be better served by the total rejection of sea mining in favour of an exhaustive and honest study of the abyssal regions first.

Ignorant tampering with the delicate balance established by millions of centuries between the sea's many subhabitats and the single homogeneous mass of shifting sea water covering 70 per cent or 140 million sq miles of the global surface is to defy good sense and embrace danger in its deadliest form.

*John Boursot,  
12 Calle Poniente No. 1633,  
Flor Blanca, San Salvador, El Salvador, CA*

## IWC and horse-trading

I read with interest the Note on the IWC decision to phase out commercial whaling (Whales: is it victory at last?, *Oryx*, October 1982). Since then some of the whaling countries have lodged formal objections to that decision and they are no doubt now trying to persuade the others to do so. This was not unexpected and, indeed, the writer is correct in saying that increasing vigilance is necessary. Since the objections were not unexpected by governments seeking to conserve whales it is also evident that they would not in the circumstances have 'given away' large numbers of whales as part of a deal to get the requisite votes for the phase-out. They also are well aware that whether or not the phase-out decision 'sticks' they will have to fight hard for low quotas every year for at least three more years.

It is therefore not helpful to give your readers the impression that there was a massive and cynical trade-off agreed as part of the usual horse-trading in which the IWC engages. Your report is a distortion of what went on in Brighton last July; the facts can speak for themselves, but as a member of the delegation for the Seychelles which was in

*Oryx Vol 17 No 2*