

# City of Alameda puts a stop to the University of Washington's Marine Cloud Brightening experiment

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Guest article by California residents **Gary Hughes**, Biofuelwatch/Geoengineering Monitor, and **Eesha Rangani**, HOME! Alliance Marine Geoengineering Working Group coordinator

In the early hours of this morning, City of Alameda City Council members voted unanimously to call off the University of Washington's Marine Cloud Brightening Project (MCBP), which had been conducting a geoengineering experiment off the coast of California. The city council had halted the tests a few weeks ago following the revelation that they were being carried out without public notice or any sort of review by the council. This morning's decision to deny consent to the experiment puts a stop to it in that location for good.

The marathon meeting in the City Council chambers eventually tackled the MCBP after midnight, but the late hour was no deterrent to a skeptical City Council that ultimately found the lack of transparency and disrespect that the experiment's proponents had shown for due process to be a sufficient red flag. This, argued the council members, warranted the City pulling the plug on the entire scheme. Strong interventions from numerous organisations including the Indigenous Environment Network, Friends of the Earth USA, Biofuelwatch, the Centre for International Environmental Law and Ocean Care also made sure that civil society voices counterbalanced those of the project's backers.

The MCBP was conducting the initial phase of an open-ocean Solar Radiation Modification (SRM) experiment involving spraying a fine seawater mist from a decommissioned US aircraft carrier in order to create an aerosol. The theory is that this technique will brighten clouds and reflect more of the sun's energy back into space, thereby helping to cool the climate. However, geoengineering experiments such as this one should be prohibited under a number of international agreements, which have put in place a *de facto* moratorium on this kind of research.

In response to a proliferation of open-ocean geoengineering experiments and commercial-scale projects in recent years, last week over 70 civil society and Indigenous Peoples' organisations signed a statement calling on decision-makers world-wide to put a stop to outdoor marine geoengineering experiments, and to develop strong precautionary regulatory controls over key geoengineering techniques such as Marine Cloud Brightening (MCB). The Hands Off Mother Earth (HOME!) Alliance and many of its members also appealed to the City of Alameda directly, calling on it to shut down the MCBP's experiments within their jurisdiction permanently.

A letter from HOME! Alliance member Indigenous Environmental Network had a particularly significant impact on council members. It highlighted the project's disregard for the climate justice fundamentals of inclusive and transparent decision making, and the clear failure of the project's proponents to even attempt to respect the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent for Indigenous Peoples.

Whilst the experiment being conducted by the MCBP off the coast of California might seem harmless, these initial tests were the first step down a slippery slope to large-scale deployment. Deploying Marine Cloud Brightening at scale would be a different matter entirely, and modelling results have predicted that this could have considerably varied and detrimental impacts in different parts of the world, including changes to weather and rainfall patterns with potentially calamitous ecological impacts on entire regions.

Also of concern is where the MCBP's funding is coming from, and the agenda behind it. SilverLining, a key funder of the MCBP, is known for promoting SRM technologies and is backed by tech billionaires and venture capitalists. Links between the MCBP and SilverLining run deep, with SilverLining CEO Kelly Wanser—who was present at the council meeting last night—a former MCBP executive director and still on the MCBP leadership team. One of SilverLining's main funders currently is the Quadrature Climate Foundation, which The Guardian revealed last year to be *"run by billionaires whose fund has stakes worth \$170m in fossil fuel firms."*

The end of the MCBP's experiment in California follows hot on the heels of the cancellation of the SCoPEX research programme earlier this year, which aimed to test a different form of SRM. Both of these projects have been met with firm and effective opposition from civil society and Indigenous Peoples' organisations, and this shows that the growing global movement against geoengineering research and its eventual large-scale deployment is gaining serious momentum. Alameda City Council's decision not only halts the MCBP, but also signals growing resistance to geoengineering projects globally.