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RECENT INFORMATION RELEVANT TO RESOLUTION 11.22 (REV.COP12)
LIVE CAPTURE OF CETACEANS FROM THE WILD FOR COMMERCIAL PURPOSES

Recent and ongoing captures – an update from WDC, October 2017 to June 2021

Drive hunts, Taiji, Japan

Drive hunts carried out each year between September and March in the town of Taiji, Japan continue to capture and kill small cetaceans found in coastal waters. In the 2017/18 season, from a quota set at 2,178 individuals, 926 small cetaceans from seven different species[1] were caught and driven into Taiji's cove where they were later killed, live-captured or released. 613 of these were killed, 107 were live-captured and 206 were released[2]. In the 2018/19 season, from a quota set at 2,047 individuals, 1,162 small cetaceans from seven different species[3] were caught and driven into the cove where they were later killed, live-captured or released. 545 of these were killed, 241 were live-captured and 376 were released[4]. In the 2019/20 season, from a quota set at 1,749 individuals, 921 small cetaceans from eight different species[5] were caught and driven into the cove where they were later killed, live-captured or released. 560 of these were killed, 180 were live-captured and 181 were released[6]. In the 2020/21 season, from a quota set at 1,749 individuals, 687 small cetaceans from six different species[7] were caught and driven into the cove. 547 of these were killed and 140 live-captured[8]. Figures of released individuals are not yet available.

In 2017, two new species, rough-toothed dolphins and melon-headed whales were added to the annual quota set by the Fisheries Agency in Japan[9]. Individuals from these species are now subject to both slaughter and live capture in the annual Taiji drive hunts.

According to the CITES trade database, in 2017, Japan exported 154 wild-caught bottlenose dolphins to China (the vast majority), South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam for "zoos" and "commercial purposes". It also exported 17 wild-caught Pacific white-sided dolphins to Chinese zoos. In 2018, Japan reported exports of 52 wild-caught bottlenose and 18 Pacific white-sided dolphins to China and Russia for "zoos" and 24 wild-caught Risso's, nine rough-toothed and four Pantropical spotted dolphins and one wild-caught melon-headed whale to China for "zoos". In 2019, Japan reported exports of 127 wild-caught bottlenose dolphins to China and Vietnam for "zoos" and "commercial purposes" and 34 wild-caught Risso's, 15 rough-toothed dolphins, 12 Pantropical spotted and 11

[1] Pacific white-sided dolphins, striped dolphins, bottlenose dolphins, Risso's dolphins, short-finned pilot whales, rough-toothed dolphins, melon-headed whales and pygmy killer whales. Pantropical spotted dolphins and false killer whales are also included in the quota but none were captured in the 2017/18 season.
[2] http://www.cetabase.org/taiji/drive-results/
[3] Pacific white-sided, striped, bottlenose, Pantropical spotted, Risso's and rough-toothed dolphins and melon-headed whales. Short-finned pilot and false killer whales were also included in the quota but none were captured in the 2018/19 season.
[4] http://www.cetabase.org/taiji/drive-results/
[5] Pacific white-sided, striped, bottlenose, Pantropical spotted, Risso's and rough-toothed dolphins and short-finned pilot and melon-headed whales. False killer whales were also included in the quota but none were captured in the 2019/20 season.
[6] https://www.dolphinproject.com/campaigns/save-japan-dolphins/statisticaldata/
[7] Pacific white-sided, striped, bottlenose, Pantropical spotted and Risso's dolphins and melon-headed whales. Rough-toothed dolphins and short-finned pilot whales and false killer whales were also included in the quota but none were captured in the 2020/21 season.
[8] https://www.dolphinproject.com/campaigns/save-japan-dolphins/statisticaldata/
[9] http://www.kinan-newspaper.jp/?p=9453

Pacific white-sided dolphins and nine wild-caught short-finned pilot whales to China for “zoos”. 2020 data is not yet available.

Live captures in Russian waters

Belugas[10] and orcas[11]

In the Russian Far East, belugas are captured in the Sakhalin–Amur region in the Sea of Okhotsk under a quota set by the Russian government (Shpak and Glazov 2013), from a population estimated at just under 4,000 individuals (Shpak and Glazov 2014). NAMMCO’s 2017 global review of monodontids reports that until 2012 annual live-capture removals from the Sakhalin-Amur population were reportedly less than 40 but that this rose to over 100 between 2012 and 2015. There were no live captures in 2016 and, from 2017, the Russian Federal Fisheries Agency recommended that annual live-captures in the Sakhalin-Amur area be limited to 40 or fewer individuals (NAMMCO 2018).

Orcas are also captured in the Sea Of Okhotsk under a quota set by the Russian government, which is usually up to 10 per annum but was increased to 13 in 2018 (Goleva and Lisitsyna 2019). Captures are permitted for cultural and educational purposes (Goleva and Lisitsyna 2019), but this has provided a loophole for obtaining individuals for display in aquaria in Russia and overseas.

According to the CITES trade database, in 2018, Russia reported the export of 18 wild-caught belugas to China for “zoos” and “commercial purposes”. There are thought to be over 200 belugas in captivity in China (China Cetacean Alliance, 2019), the vast majority wild-caught in Russian waters. 15 wild-caught orcas from Russia are known to be held in captivity in China[12].

The captures are increasingly controversial in both Russia and overseas. Following an application by US captive facilities to import wild-caught belugas from Russia in 2012, which was denied by the US Government’s National Marine Fisheries Service, for conservation and welfare reasons (NOAA Fisheries 2015), the Sakhalin–Amur population of belugas was included in the US Marine Mammal Protection Act as a “depleted” population, now well below 60% of its historic abundance, which means imports into the US are prohibited[13].

In October 2018, the Russian Far Eastern mammal-eating population of orcas was included in the ‘Red Book’ for Kamchatka (Goleva and Lisitsyna 2019), a list of species that should benefit from protection from human-induced threats in the region. Not only should this listing offer protection to this population from captures, but it is finally official recognition of the existence of separate fish and mammal-eating populations of orcas in Russian waters, who should not all be considered as one inter-breeding population when considerations about human impacts on them like live captures are being considered by Russian officials (Shpak et al 2016).

Despite this, between July and October 2018, at least 90 belugas and 11 orcas were captured and held in appalling conditions in holding pens in Srednyaya Bay in Russia's Far East. Dubbed a “whale jail”, by international media, this brought worldwide attention to the impact of the captures and the burgeoning growth of the dolphinarium industry in China, where it was assumed many of the captured individuals were destined[14].

[10] Belugas, *Delphinapterus leucas*, are listed on CMS’ Appendix II
[11] Orcas, *Orcinus orca*, are listed on CMS’ Appendix II
[12] https://uk.whales.org/our-4-goals/end-captivity/orca-captivity/
[13] https://uk.whales.org/2016/10/27/nmfs-designation-of-russian-beluga-whales-as-depleted-makes-their-import-into-us-illegal/
[14] https://uk.whales.org/2019/01/29/orcas-held-in-russian-whale-jail-face-threat-from-ice/

The Russian authorities set a zero quota for the live capture of orcas and belugas for 2019[15] and prohibited the exports of orcas and belugas captured in Russian waters, perhaps permanently.

In December 2018, after three of the belugas had disappeared and were widely assumed to have died, the Governor of the Primorsky Region, Oleg Kozhemyako, was asked by the Russian authorities to address the problem and the Prosecutor General's Office began an investigation into "the illicit extraction of aquatic biological resources" and into criminal "cruelty to animals."[16] At least one of the companies involved in the captures has been fined for breaking "fishing rules".[17]

In June 2019, President Putin announced that Russia was beginning the process of returning the whales to the ocean. Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Gordeyev also announced that the government would change the law in order to ban hunting whales for "educational and cultural purposes", a loophole in Russian law used to capture whales.[18] All surviving orcas and belugas were returned to the wild but many were released far from their home waters and/or following long journeys by truck and boat and with little effort made to rehabilitate them prior to their release. The fate of many is unknown. In 2021, the Russian Federal Agency for Fishery extended the ban on the capture of wild orcas and belugas in Russian waters until 2023[19].

Black Sea bottlenose dolphins[20]

The Black Sea bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus ponticus*) is listed on CITES Appendix II, but with a zero quota for trade in wild-caught individuals for commercial purposes[21]. It is also classified as "endangered" on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species[22]. The CITES zero quota appears to have had a significant impact in terms of reducing the trade in live individuals which previously threatened the conservation of the population, despite its protection under the ACCOBAMS agreement[23].

Parties to ACCOBAMS have noted, however, that live removals in the Agreement area have continued, as have trade activities and that dolphins involved in international trade have often been classified as captive-bred while such individuals are replaced with wild-caught individuals[24], although claims about whether the individuals are of captive origin or whether they have been replaced by wild-caught animals have been difficult to verify. At its 17th Meeting, the CITES Conference of Parties adopted Decisions 17.299 to 17.301 with the aim of addressing these concerns and encouraging range states to use genetic analysis to identify Black Sea bottlenose dolphins proposed for trade and establish accessible repositories of genetic identification data[25]. An analysis of recent trade data by the CITES Secretariat suggested very low levels of trade had been reported over the last decade in live specimens of *Tursiops truncatus* from Black Sea range States, with decreasing numbers reported as wild-caught and some increase in captive-bred individuals. At its 18th Meeting, the CITES Conference of Parties adopted Decision 18.55, directing the CITES Secretariat to continue collaborating with ACCOBAMS for the effective conservation of CITES-listed species of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea[26]. A 2019 National Geographic article about wildlife tourism references ongoing acquisition of Black Sea bottlenose dolphins in Russian waters and the use of microchips from dead previous captive individuals to cover up the source of newly acquired individuals.[27]

[15] https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6419437/Russia-bans-whale-jails-international-outcry.html
[16] https://whalesanctuaryproject.org/the-whale-jail-in-srednyaya-bay/
[17] https://uk.whales.org/2019/06/10/russia-company-behind-infamous-whale-jail-is-fined/
[18] https://whalesanctuaryproject.org/whale-aid-russia-the-first-releases/
[19] http://www.fish.gov.ru/obiedinennaya-press-sluzhba/novosti/33507-rosrybolovstvo-ne-budet-razreshat-vylov-kosatok-i-belukh-dazhe-v-nauchnykh-i-kulturno-prosvetitelskikh-tselyakh?fbclid=IwAR3FIRKp4BXOJ-o_-fiW_9FVfh-fBAfBQ1aXGT8lLCPPAC-CoeRAmplbAjw
[20] Black Sea bottlenose dolphins, *Tursiops truncatus ponticus*, are listed on CMS' Appendix I
[21] https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/app/2016/E-Appendices-2016-03-10.pdf
[22] http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/133714/0
[23] http://www.accobams.org/new_accobams/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/ACCOBAMS_Text_Agreement_English.pdf
[24] http://www.accobams.org/images/stories/MOP/MOP5/Documents/mop5%20final%20report.pdf
[25] https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/doc/E-CoP18-090.pdf
[26] https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/doc/E-CoP18-090.pdf
[27] https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2019/06/global-wildlife-tourism-social-media-causes-animal-suffering/

Yangtze finless porpoises[28], China

Controversial plans to relocate 14 Yangtze finless porpoises (*Neophocaena asiaeorientalis ssp. asiaeorientalis*) from protected natural areas to commercial captive facilities in China (China Cetacean Alliance 2019) were announced in July 2018[29]. There are unconfirmed reports that six individuals were transferred to Chimelong Ocean Kingdom and eight to Haichang Ocean Park.

The Yangtze River Fisheries Administration ordered conservation areas in Anhui and Hubei provinces to send 14 finless porpoises to facilities at Chimelong Ocean Kingdom in southern Guangdong province and Haichang Ocean Park in Shanghai, for breeding purposes. Both facilities are commercial operations presenting marine mammals and other wild animals to the public in the form of shows and interaction programmes. No details about how long the porpoises will remain in captivity have been released[30]. The porpoises are native to the Yangtze River and classified by the IUCN as critically endangered. The plans were condemned by international non-governmental environmental organisations[31] and the IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group, in an August 2018 letter to Chinese Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs[32], strongly urged "a reconsideration of the approach", requesting them "to refrain from depleting the populations in reserves to supply commercial facilities"[33]. A review of the prospects of captive breeding Endangered or Critically Endangered small cetaceans (Curry et al 2013) raises a number of concerns about such efforts and concludes that substantive conservation efforts needed to prevent extinction are a reduction or elimination of their primary threats. Several wild Yangtze finless porpoises are reported to have been moved to Chimelong Ocean Kingdom and Haichang Ocean Park in 2021, as part of an effort to relocate 19 individuals[34].

Bottlenose dolphin captures, Cuba

Resolución No. 51/2004 establishes the management regime for the capture of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) in national waters. Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, the live capture of well over 200 bottlenose dolphins was carried out in Cuban waters for display in national facilities and export overseas, resulting in concerns being raised about the sustainability of such captures (van Waerebeek et al 2006). Live captures continue in the Sabana-Camagüey Archipelago (Whitt et al 2011), although exact figures are not available.

Unconfirmed bottlenose dolphin captures, Ghana and Solomon Islands

The CITES trade database records the export from Ghana of 50 wild-caught common bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) to China in 2019 and the import into China of 56 wild-caught Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops aduncus*) in four different shipments from the Solomon Islands between 2016 and 2018. Efforts are underway to confirm whether this trade took place.

[28] Yangtze finless porpoises are listed on CMS' Appendix II
[29] https://iucn-csg.org/update-on-yangtze-finless-porpoise-in-china/
[30] http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1002743/conservationists-slam-porpoises-relocation-to-aquariums
[31] http://chinacetaceanalliance.org/en/2018/08/15/ccas-concerns-over-the-ex-situ-plan-of-transporting-yr-finless-porpoises-to-aquariums/
[32] https://iucn-csg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Letter-to-China-Min-of-Agric-17-Aug-2018.pdf
[33] https://iucn-csg.org/update-on-yangtze-finless-porpoise-in-china/
[34] https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_12592122?fbclid=IwAR3XDBnfxy6nlQQ19jdic8qHeetIHfniYiER4IRJM9ho-HovIJxAXlTEbso

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