



 **Convention on the
Conservation of Migratory
Species of Wild Animals**

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Distr. GENERAL

UNEP/ScC11/Doc. 18
28 August 2002

ELEVENTH MEETING OF THE
CMS SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL
Bonn, 14-17 September 2002

**OBSERVER'S REPORT ON MEETINGS OF THE IWC
SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE (2001, 2002)**

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There have been two meetings of the IWC Scientific Committee since the last meeting of the CMS Scientific Council, in London in July 2001 and in Shimonoseki, Japan in April-May 2002. A summary follows of the substantive workings of the two meetings in relation to cetacean species listed in CMS Appendix I and Appendix II.

2001 meeting

Appendix I species:

Pontoporia blainvillei - Results of the 4th franciscana workshop held in Brazil in 2000 were presented. Results of modelling studies suggested declines in southern Brazil and Chile. It was recommended that the species be classified as "Vulnerable" in the IUCN Red List. The incidental catch in Brazil in 2000 was estimated as >850.

Balaenoptera musculus - In an IWC-sponsored research cruise in the Southern Ocean, 16 blue whales were sighted, and biopsy samples for genetic analysis were collected from 11-14 whales. The population of blue whales south of Madagascar was estimated at 424, and in the Antarctic at 1,100. Results of studies on sub-species differentiation (*B. m. musculus* vs. *B. m. brevicauda*) were reported; differences in blowhole shape, body proportions and diving behavior may allow discrimination of the two forms at sea. Acoustic behavior may also differ. The Committee proposed continuing work on this problem and on satellite tagging and genetics in preparation for a stock assessment.

Megaptera novaeangliae - Progress toward a Southern Hemisphere stock assessment was reviewed, including abundance estimation, population dynamics modelling, and stock identity. The Committee noted establishment of a coordinated research and conservation effort for humpback whales in the Indian and southern Atlantic Oceans; a recent regional workshop was held in South Africa. A work plan toward the stock assessment for the Southern Hemisphere was agreed.

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A comprehensive assessment of North Atlantic humpbacks was initiated at the meeting. It was agreed there are at least two breeding stocks, one over-wintering in the West Indies and second in either the Cape Verde Islands or the southern Norwegian Sea (if the latter, the Cape Verde animals would be part of the West Indies stock). Separate feeding substocks were delineated for purposes of the assessment in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Newfoundland/Labrador, Iceland, and Norway. Abundance of the West Indies feeding stock was estimated at 10,752 in 1992. The population is estimated to have grown by about 1/3 since the late 1970s. While the comprehensive assessment was not completed, it was agreed that an appropriate unit for management is the feeding substock. A plan was agreed for intersessional work.

Balaena mysticetus - The status of small stocks in Davis Strait/Baffin Bay, Hudson Bay/Foxe Basin, and Okhotsk Sea was reviewed, and it was recommended that priority be given to improving abundance estimates and modelling management of small populations.

Balaena glacialis - Given that there are only about 300 North Atlantic right whales remaining, the Committee urged in 2000 as a matter of absolute urgency that every effort be made to reduce anthropogenic mortality to zero. Two known ship-strike kills occurred in early 2001. New data on acoustics and movements, and an upcoming workshop on entanglement in fishing gear was noted.

Balaena japonica - Historical studies show that the size and range of the North Pacific right whale population have greatly diminished since the 19th century. In aerial surveys conducted in 2000, five sightings were made of a total of thirteen whales. Analysis of eleven biopsy samples revealed five individuals, all males.

Balaena australis - Off South Africa, 327 cow-calf pairs were sampled in a combined photo-identification/genetic study of abundance and life-history.

Appendix II species:

Pontoporia blainvillei - See above.

Inia geoffrensis - 78 were reported taken in 2000 in live-capture fisheries in Brazil.

Phocoena phocoena (North and Baltic Sea, western North Atlantic, Black sea) - The IWC/ASCOBANS Working Group reported on advice offered to ASCOBANS on methodology for its program of assessment of status of stocks in the Baltic and North Seas. Norway reported on a feasibility study to derive estimates of abundance in its inshore waters.

Phocoenoides dalli - The Small Cetaceans Sub-Committee conducted a review of the status of stocks exploited by Japan. However, Japan refused to participate, on grounds that small cetaceans are outside the remit of the IWC. The Sub-Committee was thus unable to complete a full assessment of the status of the stocks and repeated its earlier advice that catches be reduced as soon as possible to sustainable levels and that a full assessment of status be conducted as soon as possible, taking into account recommendations that 1) genetic analyses be carried out to address the issue of stock structure in the Okhotsk Sea, 2) new abundance estimates be generated for all of the involved stocks, 3) bycatches be included in the assessment, 4) the program of collection of bycatch data from the Russian salmon fishery in the Japanese EEZ be continued, 5) bycatches in the Japanese salmon fishery be collected and reported, 6) other nations in the region with salmon fisheries in the region (e.g., Korea) collect and report bycatch data.

Berardius bairdii - Japan did not report its landings (for the reason mentioned above), but takes in 1998 and 1999 were 54 and 62, respectively.

2002 meeting

Appendix I species:

Balaenoptera musculus - An assessment of southern hemisphere blue whales is planned for 2005, following completion of an assessment of minke whales based on data from the same surveys. A preliminary estimate of abundance is 1,700 (95% CI = 760-3700). A work plan for intersessional research on subspecies identification, abundance-estimation methodology, and several additional issues was developed. Satellite-tagging will be reviewed at the 2003 meeting.

Megaptera novaeangliae - Results of research in Arabian Sea, East Africa, West Africa, South Africa, Fiji, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Brazil and the Southern Ocean were reported. Population increases were reported for Brazil and Western Australia. An estimate of increase in the Southern Ocean based on Japanese surveys was debated. Formation of the South Pacific Whale Research Consortium was announced. A work plan for research toward a comprehensive assessment was developed.

The comprehensive assessment of North Atlantic humpbacks begun last year was completed. Population increase was reported for the Gulf of Maine, Icelandic waters, and the West Indies, at a rate of 3% per annum or more. A number of research items were recommended to be pursued. An annual quota of up to four whales was recommended for the aboriginal-subsistence whale fishery in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Balaena mysticetus - Catches and catch limits were reviewed for the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas stock. A full assessment is planned for 2004. The stock is estimated to be larger than it was at any time in the last century and is still growing. The previously recommended annual catch limit of 102 whales would be consistent with the requirements of the IWC Schedule. New information on the other, smaller and depleted stocks (Davis Strait/Baffin Bay, Hudson Bay/Foxe Basin, Okhotsk Sea) was reviewed. No bycatch or intentional removals were reported. Killer whales were observed taking 10 out of a pod of 30 bowheads in Greenland in April this year.

Eubalaena glacialis - North Atlantic right whales continue to be killed in collisions with ships and entangled in fishing gear, a major threat to the continued existence of the species, and the Committee repeated its expression of concern and the recommendation that all attempts be made to reduce such kills to zero as a matter of absolute urgency.

Eubalaena japonica - Surveys in the southeastern Bering Sea reported sightings of five North Pacific right whales. Three whales were also sighted in the western North Pacific. The Committee noted that this is one of the most critically endangered species of whale and recommended as a matter of urgency that every effort be made to gather information about its status and assist its recovery.

Eubalaena australis - A summer feeding ground has been discovered on the west coast of South Africa, the first such coastal feeding ground reported for the southern hemisphere.

Appendix II species:

Delphinapterus leucas - A permit for a catch quota of 1,000 beluga whales has been issued by the Russian Central Commission of fisheries. The Committee expressed concern over such takes of small cetaceans when there is insufficient information to adequately assess the impact and recommended that the takes be preceded by an assessment of the size of the affected populations and the impacts of the removals.

Phocoena phocoena (North and Baltic Sea, western North Atlantic, Black sea) - Results of a survey showed harbor porpoise to occur in very low numbers in Polish waters of the Baltic Sea. The Small Cetaceans Sub-Committee reviewed the ASCOBANS draft recovery plan for the Baltic and offered a number of comments and suggestions, including the use of shipboard observers to determine bycatch levels and use of pingers on a provisional basis only, pending progress with other mitigation approaches. Experiments in other areas indicate that exclusion of porpoises from preferred habitat by acoustic alarms may be a greater problem than has been thought.

Sousa chinensis/S. teuszii - The Small Cetaceans Sub-Committee conducted a review of biology and status of the humpback dolphins (*Sousa* spp.) as its main item of business. A review of systematics was inconclusive, and it was recommended that the recognition of two species be maintained provisionally. One possibility suggested by the morphological and genetic data is that there is a single species with strongly differentiated ocean-basin and local populations. A review of population estimates led to the conclusion that humpback dolphins are not abundant in any part of their range. Movements appear to be diffuse rather than coordinated migrations. The two oldest animals examined were 34 and 46 years old. Calving interval is estimated at three years in South Africa. Life history appears to be similar to that of the bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops* spp.). Degradation of the limited coastal habitat is thought to be a serious danger in many areas. Incidental takes in fishing nets or anti-shark nets is reported from almost all areas of the range. Very high levels of contaminants in humpback dolphin tissues are also thought to pose a conservation threat. The Committee made a number of recommendations for conservation research and action.

Other issues

A mini-symposium on effects of climate change on cetaceans is planned for the 2003 meeting in Berlin. The Small Cetacean Sub-Committee in 2003 will concentrate its efforts on a review of the status of Black Sea dolphins and porpoises (*Tursiops*, *Delphinus* and *Phocoena*).