Proposal for Inclusion of Species on the Appendices of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

A. Proposal: Inclusion of Pontoporia blainvillei in Appendix II

B. Proponent:

C. Supporting Statement

1. Taxon

1.1. Classis	Mammalia
1.2. Ordo	CETACEA
1.3. Familia	Pontoporidae
1.4. Genus/Species/Subspecies	Pontoporia blainvillei (Gervais and d'Orbigny, 1844)

1.5. Common name(s)

English:	franciscana
Spanish:	franciscana
French:	dauphin de la Plata
Portuguese:	toninha, cachimbo

2. Biological data

2.1. Distribution (current and historical)

The franciscana is distributed in the Atlantic coastal waters of South America from the mouth of the Doce River (19°37'S), Brazil (Borobia and Geise, 1985) southward to Peninsula Valdez (42°30'S), Argentina (Lahille, 1899, quoted by Pinedo et al., 1989). There are unconfirmed reports from San Antonio Oeste and Puerto Madryn (Perez Macri and Crespo, 1989). The species is relatively common on the Uruguayan side of the Rio de la Plata (Praderi, 1986).

2.2. Population (estimates and trends)

Nothing is known about populations, stocks or abundance of this species (Pinedo et al., 1989; Brownell, 1989).

2.3. Habitat (short description and trends)

The franciscana lives in coastal marine waters, and may be found up to 30 miles offshore or in waters 30 m deep (Praderi et al., 1989). It is reportedly common in the La Plata estuary and was recently reported from the mouth of the Doce River, Brazil. The species may venture some distance up the La Plata River (Praderi, 1986). Sciaenid and engraulid fishes comprise the main prey items. Squids and shrimps are also reported. Animals examined in Uruguay had eaten fish species common in coastal waters of the mouth of the La Plata River (Praderi, 1986; Pinedo et al., 1989).

2.4. Migrations (kinds of movement, distance, proportion of the population migrating)

Besides the intrusion into the La Plata River in search of prey, there is no additional information on movements of this species.

3. Threat data

3.1. Direct threats to the population (factors, intensity)

The species was occasionally captured by fishermen before the 1950s (Gilmore, 1951, quoted by Mitchell, 1975). Pinedo et al. (1989) reported no evidence of direct captures in present times. Incidental captures occur mainly in the shark gillnet fishery operating in Uruguay since 1942 (Van Erp, 1969; Brownell, 1975). Reports on that fishery provide annual estimates of 2,000 and 1,500 for the late 1960s and early 1970s, respectively (Brownell, 1975). Between 1974 and 1985 the total number of franciscanas taken in the gillnet fishery was 2,495, with an annual mean of 279 for the period 1974-1978. A major reduction in incidental catches began in 1979 because of deteriorating economic conditions for the shark fishermen, resulting in an annual mean catch of only 157 for the period 1979-1985 (Praderi, 1985; Praderi et al., 1989).

In southern Brazil, specifically in Rio Grande do Sul, at least 723 dolphins were recorded in the period 1976-1985 (Praderi et al, 1989; Pinedo et al., 1989). Catches also occur further north, but no estimates are available. In Argentina an annual estimate of 340-350 franciscanas are captured incidentally in fishing nets set for sciaenids and sharks; the estimates do not include Mar del Plata, but catches in this area are likely in the hundreds (Perez-Macri and Crespo, 1989).

3.2. Habitat destruction

Heavy coastal traffic and pollution from industrial development represent potential threats for the habitat of the franciscana (Pinedo et al., 1989). Widespread deforestation and agricultural cultivation are recent in many of the basins draining into the Rio de La Plata system, particularly in southeastern Brazil. In addition, sharp increases in DDT levels have been recently reported in the Lagoa dos Patos, from where the currents may transport the pollutant to the La Plata estuary, an area frequented by franciscanas (O'Shea et al., 1980).

3.3. Indirect threat (e.g. reduction of breeding success by pesticide contamination)

Dieldrin, PCB and DDT and its metabolites were present in very low concentrations in the blubber of franciscanas from Uruguay. The ratios of DDT to DDE in franciscanas were are least an order of magnitude higher than those from small cetaceans from California. PCBs were the only residues detected in muscle and brain tissues (O'Shea et al., 1980). Pollutant levels, however, are low when compared to other odontocetes (Wagemann and Muir, 1984). Nothing is known on the effects of pollutants in the franciscana.
Fish species of commercial value normally constitute the diet of franciscanas (Praderi, 1985), so an increase in the fishing effort for these fishes could reduce available food for the dolphins.

3.4. Threats connected especially with migrations

No information

3.5. National and international utilization

In Brazil, the blubber of incidentally caught franciscanas may be used as fish attractant (Borobia and Geise, 1985). In the San Clemente area, Argentina, the meat is used for human consumption by the Turkish, Jewish and Arabian people in the local communities (Praderi et al., 1989).

4. Protection status and needs

4.1. National protection status

This species is protected through national legislation in Brazil and Argentina. No protection exists for the franciscana in Uruguay (Atkins, 1989; Praderi et al., 1989).

4.2. International protection status

Pontoporia blainvillei is listed in Appendix II of CITES. Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay are parties. The species is categorized as "Insufficiently Known" (Perrin, 1989) but its status as "Vulnerable" has been recommended (Perrin and Brownell, 1989).

4.3. Additional protection needs

Because almost nothing is known about the species, studies on population size and identity, biology and interaction with the fisheries are needed. The Governments of the Range States should enact national protective legislation or improve enforcement of the existing laws, as the case may be. Support should be provided to national research groups presently working on the species. Further, a regional plan should be developed for coordinated research and management of the species.

5. Range States

Argentina, Brazil Uruguay.

6. Comments from Range States

7. Additional remarks

8. References

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