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REPORT ON THE 2003 MEETING OF THE IWC SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

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The meeting was held in Berlin, Germany from 28 May to 6 June 2003.

INFORMATION RELATING TO CMS APPENDIX I SPECIES:

Blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*)

Population size in the Southern Ocean was estimated at 1800 (900-3500), which is 0.9% (0.4-1.7%) of original. Current rate of increase was estimated at 3.1 to 8.2% per annum, based on two different methods. Acoustic and genetic research on the questions of distribution, identification and populations of the subspecies (*B. m. musculus* and *B. m. brevicauda*) continues.

Fin whale (*B. physalus*)

Denmark reported that fourteen fin whales were taken in 2002 in Greenland. The IWC has been unable to offer advice on safe catch limits because of inadequate information on the size and status of the stock. A strong recommendation was made for increased collection of genetic samples from the Greenland catch, for analysis of stock structure. No satellite tags were placed on fin whales in the last year in the ongoing research program to track movements. It was also strongly recommended that a survey be carried out to obtain an acceptable abundance estimate for the region impacted by the fishery.

The results of a genetic study suggest little time since divergence of ocean-basin populations, unlike for the other balaenopterids, which exhibit pronounced differences between oceans.

Sei whale (*B. borealis*)

Meat from five sei whales was reported from Japanese markets. The samples grouped genetically with previous samples from New Zealand and South Africa. Origin of the meat is difficult to establish because of possible retention in storage of sei whale meat from both the current Japanese hunt in the North Pacific and a former Icelandic hunt in the North Atlantic.

Humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

Results of research on stock structure and status of Southern Hemisphere humpbacks suggest subdivision into at least 9 stocks; moderately good estimates of trends exist for only two of them. In the Antarctic, abundance in Areas IV and V were estimated at 29,856 and 4,251, respectively; annual rates of increase were estimated at 12.5% and 10.3%. However, some statistical uncertainties suggest these estimates should be treated with caution. The rate of increase in whales passing Point Lookout, Australia was estimated at 8.54%. Survey results from Oman indicate that the small population in the northern Indian Ocean has not from illegal Soviet whaling in the 1960s. The Committee identified

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several items of work needed to complete the assessment of Southern Hemisphere humpbacks, including runs of populations models, assessment of Soviet data for their usefulness, investigation of abundance estimates, completion of a photo-identification catalogue, examination of the issue of correlation between minke and humpback distributions during abundance surveys.

Bowhead whale (*Balaena mysticetus*)

The U.S. reported that 50 bowheads were struck and 39 landed in the 2002 Alaskan subsistence harvest. There was no change in management advice. An in-depth assessment is planned for 2004. Results of tagging programs for the other, smaller stocks of bowhead in Canadian waters suggest interchange of whales between Baffin Bay and Hudson Bay-Foxe Basin and considerable movements overall. Aerial surveys yielded population estimates of 128 for Eclipse Sound and 256 for Prince Regent Inlet and northern Gulf of Boothia. One bowhead was landed in Canada in 2002.

North Atlantic right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*)

Reproduction was reported up; 31 calves were born in 2001 and 21 in 2002. Five whales were known to have died, two probably from ship strikes, one from entanglement in fishing gear, and one due to an unknown cause.

North Pacific right whale (*Eubalaena japonica*)

No new information was presented on this species, but the Committee expressed an opinion that the situation is as bad or worse than that for the North Atlantic right whale and recommended strongly that research continue, to determine summer distribution and feeding grounds, document anthropogenic mortality and estimate population abundance.

Southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*)

Based on photo-identification studies, 700 reproductive females are estimated to congregate in Argentine waters. Annual rate of increase of the population is estimated at 6.8%.

Sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)

A proposal was submitted for an in-depth assessment of sperm whales. It was approved in principle but recommended for funding for work in 2004. Co-sponsorship will be sought for the assessment.

INFORMATION RELATING TO CMS APPENDIX II SPECIES:

Fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) – see above

Sei whale (*B. borealis*) – see above

Bryde's whale (*B. edeni*)

Work continued on a pre-implementation assessment of western North Pacific Bryde's whales in preparation for an implementation of the Revised Management Procedure in response to an announced interest by Japan in resumption of commence commercial whaling on the species in the North Pacific. This work is expected to be completed in 2004. Inputs include estimates of abundance, stock boundaries, and past catches.

Antarctic minke whale (*B. bonaerensis*)

A new estimate of abundance for Area V was 9,600 (6,000-15,500). The issue of whales being missed because of being in the ice pack was discussed at length, and a recommendation was made that available data collected in various programs be re-examined to estimate the order of magnitude of this factor. The Committee has not yet decided whether decreasing abundance estimates in the time series of surveys indicates a decreasing trend in the population or is caused by other factors; this issue will be pursued further in 2004. The last of the current series of circumpolar surveys will be completed in

2004.

Sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) – see above

White whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*)

The Committee expressed concern over large catches and depletion of West Greenland white whales and the status of white whales of some stocks in Canada and Russia. It reiterated the importance of collecting basic data and rigorously assessing these stock.

Narwhal (*Monodon monoceros*)

It was noted that in excess of 1,000 narwhals were taken annually in Greenland through the 1990s and that recent removals have likely increased. The Committee recommended that information on stock identity and better catch records be obtained.

Harbor porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) (Baltic Sea population, Black Sea population)

The Committee reviewed the status of the harbor porpoise in the Black Sea. Due to a lack of reliable data on abundance and history of exploitation, it was possible only to conclude that the population probably declined dramatically in the 20th century as a result of large directed catches. Fishery bycatches and habitat degradation are currently the greatest threats. The Committee urged cooperation among range states through ACCOBAMS to assess and mitigate threats. The ASCOBANS recovery plan for the Baltic Sea was noted and strongly endorsed.

Dall's porpoise (*Phocoenoides dalli*)

The Committee attempted in past years to carry out an assessment of the populations exploited directly in the western North Pacific in Japanese harpoon fisheries but was unable to do so because of non-cooperation by Japan in providing information and analyses. This has not changed.

Common bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) (Black Sea population)

Same as for harbor porpoise above.

Killer whale (*Orcinus orca*)

A recent take of killer whales in Greenland was noted, and it was recommended that data on the catches be submitted to the IWC. A review of the population structure and systematics of killer whales is on the list of items to be considered at future meetings of the Committee.

Short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) (Black Sea population)

Same as for harbor porpoise above.