



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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FOURTH MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES TO
THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR
THE CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS AND THEIR
HABITATS IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS REGION

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ABSTRACT: RESPONDING TO LARGE WHALE ENTANGLEMENT: A GLOBAL INITIATIVE OF THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

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Over 300,000 whales, dolphins and porpoises are estimated to die from entanglement in fishing gear annually. Recent studies suggest that present assessment methods severely underestimate the numbers of entangled large whales. The IWC has agreed that in many habitats, and for most populations, it is the greatest source of human related. The IWC is the primary global intergovernmental organization dealing with conservation and management issues related to large whales. The 88 member countries of the IWC provide a forum for governments from around the world to discuss issues relating to conservation and welfare of whales. In addition to the conservation implications for several populations, in 2010 the IWC recognized the extreme welfare concerns associated with entanglement and established an international expert workshop to review the issue. The workshop concluded that the problem occurs wherever whale distribution overlaps with rope, nets and debris and it recommended establishing a program to advise and assist developing professionally trained response networks, while still recognizing that prevention was the proper ultimate solution. Subsequently, a second expert workshop was held in 2011, attended by the heads of the world's established national and regional whale entanglement response programmes. The workshop:

- agreed to “principles and guidelines” for safe entanglement response;
- designed a strategy and associated plans for capacity building;
- established an expert panel under the auspices of the IWC to carry out this initiative.

Given growing numbers of well-meaning, but dangerous and often counter-productive interventions by untrained individuals, the IWC has placed a strong emphasis on capacity building. Since the workshop in October, 2011, overview seminars, trainings and apprenticeships have been conducted for over 1,200 trainees from more than 34 countries, teaching all aspects of the science and management of the entanglement issue. This is, so far, the only marine animal rescue effort which has reached such international consensus on standards, protocols and capacity building.

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David Mattila is currently “shared” staff with the Secretariat of the International Whaling Commission and the Center for Coastal Studies (USA), where he assists with several global conservation and management issues, including large whale entanglement and ship strike mitigation initiatives. He officially joined the IWC and CCS in 2014 after being seconded to the IWC by the USA (NOAA) since 2011. Between 2001 and 2011 he worked as the Science and Rescue Coordinator for NOAA’s Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. He has a long history of international whale work, including as a principal coordinator of two Ocean-wide, international collaborative studies of humpback whales: the SPLASH project in the North Pacific (2004-2006) and the YONAH project in the North Atlantic (1992-1993). He is also a founding member of the International Committee on Marine

Mammal Protected Areas, which is now also an IUCN Task Force. Since 1984 he has worked with the large whale entanglement issue, helping to develop unique rescue tools, techniques and training programs. He helped to establish, and was the first coordinator of the large whale disentanglement network along the Atlantic coast of the United States (1996) and later, upon moving to Hawaii, he helped to set up the network there. These networks respond to reports of entangled large whales, release them when possible and gather information that will ultimately lead to the prevention of these events, as they are costly to fishers, whales and well-meaning but untrained rescuers. He has convened four international (IWC) workshops on this topic, which included participation by the directors of all existing national entanglement response networks around the World. Beginning in 2012 he has helped to train over 1,200 participants from 34 countries.