



**CONVENTION ON
MIGRATORY
SPECIES**

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15th MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES
Campo Grande, Brazil, 23 – 29 March 2026
Agenda Item 25.3.2

VESSEL STRIKES*

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

Summary:

This document reports on progress to implement Decisions 14.48–14.50 *Reducing the risk of vessel strikes for marine megafauna* and proposes adopting new draft Decisions.

The attached draft Decisions would support the achievement of Targets 2.1, 2.2, 3.2 and 6.4 of the Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024–2032.

Rev.1 and Rev.2 correct the geographical nomenclature in accordance with the UN Secretariat editorial directive (ST/CS/SER.A/42) of 3 August 1999.

*The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CMS Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

VESSEL STRIKES

Background

1. Collisions between vessels and migratory marine megafauna (vessel strikes, also often referred to as ship strikes) are a global conservation concern. Recognizing this threat, COP14 adopted Resolution 14.5 *Reducing the risk of vessel strikes for marine megafauna*, which urges Parties to adopt measures to reduce this risk. The Resolution also encourages Parties to propose core aggregation zones and known migration corridors of vulnerable marine megafauna where there is a significant risk of vessel strikes, for the implementation of International Maritime Organization (IMO) mitigation measures. In addition, COP14 adopted the species-specific *Guidance on Reducing the Risk of Vessel Strikes for Whale Sharks (Rhincodon typus)*, annexed to the Resolution.
2. COP14 adopted the following Decisions on this issue:

14.48 Directed to Parties that are Range States to CMS-listed species of marine megafauna that are subject to vessel strikes

Parties that are Range States are requested to:

- a) *reach out to relevant stakeholders engaged in commercial, recreational or other vessel activities to encourage systematic reporting of all vessel strike incidents involving whales, dolphins or porpoises to the Ship Strikes Database of the International Whaling Commission (IWC);*
- b) *review and apply, as appropriate, the findings of and recommendations provided in the CMS report Limiting Global Ship Strike on Whale Sharks - Understanding an increasing threat to the world's largest fish;*
- c) *collaborate with other Range States on the implementation of the Guidance on Reducing the Risk of Vessel Strikes for Whale Sharks, annexed to Resolution 14.5 Reducing the Risk of Vessel Strikes for Marine Megafauna; and*
- d) *report to the Conference of Parties at its 15th meeting on the progress in implementing the decision through their National Reports*

14.49 Directed to the Scientific Council

The Scientific Council is requested to, subject to the availability of external resources:

- a) *review the reports submitted by Parties through their National Reports on the implementation of Decision 14.48 (a) - (c) and make recommendations to Parties;*
- b) *collaborate with the IWC and International Maritime Organization (IMO) to identify areas where CMS-listed cetaceans are at high risk from vessel strikes, including by mapping shipping lanes against Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), develop advice on appropriate placement of re-routing measures, including area avoidance and/or the establishment of vessel speed restrictions for key cetacean habitats, and make recommendations to Parties;*
- c) *assess the collision risk for further CMS-listed marine megafauna taxa that are likely to suffer from vessel strikes, and identify areas where conservation measures are most needed, also considering existing information about identified Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) and future information about identified Important Marine Turtle Areas (IMTAs); and*
- d) *report to the Conference of Parties at its 15th meeting on the progress in implementing this decision.*

14.50 Directed to the Secretariat

The Secretariat shall, subject to the availability of external resources:

- a) assist the Scientific Council with the implementation of Decision 14.49 (a) - (c);
- b) engage with the IMO to collaborate on measures to reduce vessel strikes on CMS-listed marine species; and
- c) bring the following reports to the attention of the IMO:
 - i. the report to be developed by the Scientific Council on areas with a high risk of vessel strikes for cetaceans and the recommendations on appropriate mitigation measures;
 - ii. the report *Limiting Global Ship Strike on Whale Sharks - Understanding an increasing threat to the world's largest fish, found in UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.27.2.3, and the Guidance on Reducing the Risk of Vessel Strikes for Whale Sharks which is annexed to Resolution 14.5 Reducing the Risk of Vessel Strikes for Marine Megafauna.*

Identifying areas where CMS-listed cetaceans are at high risk from vessel strikes

3. The 7th meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council (September 2024) noted that significant work had already been undertaken by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) towards implementation of Decision 14.49 (b), and that this could be used to identify areas where some CMS-listed cetaceans are at high risk from vessel strikes.
4. The IWC has been working to address the problem of vessel strikes on cetaceans through its Scientific and Conservation Committees. To develop appropriate mitigation measures, the IWC has so far focused its efforts on obtaining data. This would allow a quantitative evaluation of the factors involved in vessel strikes which could help target mitigation efforts more effectively.
5. In its *Strategic Plan to Mitigate the Impacts of Ship Strikes on Cetacean Populations: 2022-2032*,¹ the IWC identifies 'High Risk Areas' for cetaceans where vessel strikes are one of the leading causes of death and may threaten local conservation status. High Risk Areas are defined by the IWC as "the convergence of either areas of high volume of shipping and whales, or high numbers of whales and shipping". High-volume shipping areas include historic shipping routes, designated shipping lanes and approaches to ports. Areas with high numbers of whales include whale aggregation zones, locations where whales are known to return to regularly in numbers, or areas or habitats that are critical for whale populations.
6. At-risk populations are also defined in the IWC Strategic Plan. These are populations of cetaceans whose 'population viability' is at risk due to vessel strikes. A number of single or interacting factors may influence population viability, including the proportion of a population in high-risk areas, the number of reproductively mature females within a population, and the susceptibility of a particular species to vessel strikes – for example, species that swim slowly or remain at the surface for long periods are at greater risk.
7. Table 1 is adapted from the IWC's *Strategic Plan to Mitigate the Impacts of Ship Strikes on Cetacean Populations: 2022-2032*. It shows where CMS-listed cetacean species are identified as being at high risk and the relevant CMS Parties for these areas.

¹ IWC Strategic Plan to Mitigate the Impacts of Ship Strikes on Cetacean Populations: 2022-2032
<https://archive.iwc.int/pages/view.php?ref=19858&k=>

Table1. Locations of at-risk CMS-listed whale populations.

Location	Species	CMS listing	Relevant CMS Range State(s)	IWC action stage	Actions undertaken / further actions needed
South Africa, Port of Cape Town	Southern right whale	App I	South Africa	Stage 1	Ship strike risk analysis to be undertaken.
South Africa, Port of Cape Town	Humpback whales	App I	South Africa	Stage 1	Ship strike risk analysis to be undertaken.
Spain, Canary Islands	Sperm whales	App I & II	Spain	Stage 3	Trials of whale detection systems on high speed ferries under way. If successful, they need to be expanded to all fast ferry operators and protocols developed to help vessels respond effectively to whale detections.
SW Atlantic. Sub-Antarctic island at 54°15'S 36°45'W	Blue whales	App I	²	Stage 3	Voluntary 10 knot speed reduction implemented by the Government
SW Atlantic. Sub-Antarctic island at 54°15'S 36°45'W	Humpback whales	App I	²	Stage 3	Voluntary 10 knot speed reduction implemented by the Government
Sri Lanka	Blue whales	App I	Sri Lanka	Stage 4	Industry proposal to create a new Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) discussed at IMO. Now with Sri Lankan Government for further consideration.
Greece, Hellenic Trench, Mediterranean	Sperm whales	App I & II	Greece	Stage 4	Information provided through Notices to Mariners and pilot books regarding the area of most concern. Several shipping companies have committed to avoiding the area or reducing speed. A routing proposal to IMO by Greece would support the voluntary actions taken by some shipping interests and ensure all operators take appropriate actions to reduce risk.
Antarctic Peninsula	Humpback whales	App I	n/a	Stage 5	Areas with 10 knot speed restriction agreed for all IAATO ³ vessels.
France, Monaco, Italy, Pelagos Sanctuary, Mediterranean	Fin whales	App I & II	France, Italy, Monaco	Stage 5	NW Mediterranean PSSA ⁴ established including the Pelagos Agreement Area (Pelagos Sanctuary); Collaboration with Pelagos Agreement. Further work required to effectively implement the Associated Protective Measures to reduce vessel strike risks within the PSSA.

² A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) and the surrounding maritime areas.

³ International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators

⁴ Particularly Sensitive Sea Area

Location	Species	CMS listing	Relevant CMS Range State(s)	IWC action stage	Actions undertaken / further actions needed
Spain, Balearic Islands, Mediterranean and Cetacean Migration Corridor	Fin whales	App I & II	Spain	Stage 5	NW Mediterranean PSSA established including the Pelagos Agreement Area (Pelagos Sanctuary); Collaboration with Pelagos Agreement. Further work required to effectively implement the Associated Protective Measures to reduce vessel strike risks within the PSSA.
Spain, Balearic Islands, Mediterranean	Sperm whales	App I & II	Spain	Stage 5	NW Mediterranean PSSA established including the Pelagos Agreement Area (Pelagos Sanctuary); Collaboration with Pelagos Agreement. Further work required to effectively implement the Associated Protective Measures to reduce vessel strike risks within the PSSA.
Spain, Morocco, Eastern Alboran Sea, Mediterranean	Fin whales	App I & II	Spain, Morocco	Stage 5	Cabo de Gata TSS relocated. Monitoring required to assess adherence to TSS.
Spain, Morocco, Eastern Alboran Sea, Mediterranean	Sperm whales	App I & II	Spain, Morocco	Stage 5	Cabo de Gata TSS relocated. Monitoring required to assess adherence to TSS.
Panama	Humpback whales	App I	Panama	Stage 6	Routing and speed reduction measures implemented through IMO. Monitoring required to assess adherence to speed reduction measures.
Argentina, SW Atlantic Golfo Nuevo, Península Valdés	Southern right whale	App I	Argentina	Stage 6	A vessel traffic corridor with speed restrictions implemented by the Argentinean Coast Guard since 2008 each year from 1 June to 30 November. Monitoring required to assess adherence to measures.
New Zealand, Hauraki Gulf	Bryde's whales	App II	New Zealand	Stage 7	Voluntary speed restrictions implemented by Ports of Auckland. Monitoring shows good uptake by industry. Continued monitoring required to ensure ongoing uptake.
Spain, Morocco, Straits of Gibraltar, Mediterranean	Fin whales	App I & II	Spain, Morocco	Stage 7	Recommended seasonal speed restriction in place through IMO - monitoring has demonstrated almost no knowledge or compliance. Monitoring required to assess adherence to measures. Outreach to industry required to improve awareness and compliance.
Spain, Morocco, Straits of Gibraltar, Mediterranean	Sperm whales	App I & II	Spain, Morocco	Stage 7	Recommended seasonal speed restriction in place through IMO - monitoring has demonstrated almost no knowledge or compliance. Outreach to industry required to improve awareness and compliance.

8. The IWC's *Strategic Plan to Mitigate the Impacts of Ship Strikes on Cetacean Populations: 2022-2032* identifies various 'action stages' for each at-risk cetacean population. These range from identifying potential areas/populations of concern (stage 1), to the implementation and monitoring of mitigation measures through national regulations or the International Maritime Organization (IMO) (stages 6 and 7). Intermediate stages include conducting risk analyses and assessing potential mitigation measures, stakeholder consultations and voluntary measures. Table 1 identifies the relevant 'action stage' for each population and provides updates on the most recent measures taken and potential next steps. The action stages have been updated since the last iteration of the IWC Strategic Plan to account for more recent developments.
9. While the primary focus of the IMO is on maritime safety and security, it also has a role to play in the protection of the marine environment from shipping and the conservation of vulnerable marine species. The IMO provides guidance to ensure that shipping activities are conducted in a sustainable and responsible manner, while minimizing impacts on the marine environment. It is responsible for approving both the establishment of international shipping lanes and any proposed changes to existing international shipping lanes.
10. The IMO has developed guidance outlining principles and actions for minimizing the risk of ship strikes with cetaceans.⁵ It recognizes that minor changes to shipping routes in high-risk areas – shifting high volumes of traffic away from critical whale habitat – could lead to a substantial reduction in strikes, and that such re-routing measures are likely the best mitigation measure.⁶ Where re-routing is not possible, due to factors such as whale distribution, whale behaviour/habitat use, and/or ship routing options and limitations, vessel speed reduction offers the most straightforward solution to reduce risk.
11. Area-based marine conservation and management measures have been shown to be effective in a number of areas. The process for identifying Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) and Important Marine Turtle Areas (IMTAs) provides the necessary guidance for developing such conservation initiatives for CMS-listed cetaceans, sharks, rays, pinnipeds, sirenians, otters, fish and polar bears. Reporting on IMMAs, ISRAs and IMTAs, as well as related proposed Resolutions, can be found in [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.3.1](#).

Engaging with IMO

12. In an effort to implement Decisions 14.50 (b) and (c), in October 2024 the Secretariat and the IMO discussed possible synergies between CMS and the IMO to reduce the risk of vessel strikes on marine megafauna. The Secretariat drew the attention of the IMO to the report on *Limiting Global Ship Strike on Whale Sharks - Understanding an increasing threat to the world's largest fish* ([UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.27.2.3](#)), and the *Guidance on Reducing the Risk of Vessel Strikes for Whale Sharks* ([annexed to Resolution 14.5](#)).

Discussion and analysis

13. The work conducted by the IWC to identify high-risk areas for vessel strikes can be used to identify CMS-listed cetacean populations at risk and the relevant CMS Range States. These include the species and countries shown in Table 1 above.

⁵ MEPC.1/Circ.674: <https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Documents/674.pdf>

⁶ MEPC 69/21 *Report of the Marine Environment Protection Committee on Its 69th Session* (2016)

14. Furthermore, through the work done at the IWC to identify action stages for addressing vessel strike risk and measures already undertaken or proposed, it is possible to identify next steps for each of these locations and populations, as outlined in the final column of Table 1 above.
15. Further action to target populations of CMS-listed cetaceans identified as at high risk of vessel strike would be beneficial. A Decision to this effect directed to Parties⁷ is proposed in the Annex.

Recommended actions

16. The Conference of the Parties is recommended to:
 - a) adopt the draft Decisions contained in the Annex of this document; and
 - b) delete Decisions 14.48–14.50.

DRAFT DECISIONS

VESSEL STRIKES

Directed to Parties

15.AA Parties identified in Table 1 of UNEP/CMS/Doc.25.3.2 *Vessel Strikes* are requested to:

- a) implement actions to reduce the risk of vessel strike on at-risk CMS-listed cetacean populations identified by the International Whaling Commission (IWC), including:
 - i) undertaking risk analysis and assessment of potential mitigation options where this has not yet been done;
 - ii) introducing mitigation measures through national regulations or the International Maritime Organization (IMO); and
 - iii) implementing monitoring measures to evaluate their effectiveness, including awareness of and compliance with such measures by industry;
- b) report to the Conference of Parties at its 16th meeting on the progress in implementing the Decision.

Directed to the Scientific Council

15.BB The Scientific Council is requested, subject to the availability of resources, to:

- a) identify further populations of CMS-listed species at risk of vessel strike by mapping shipping lanes against Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), in collaboration with the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force;
- b) identify areas where CMS-listed cetaceans are at high risk from vessel strikes, including by mapping shipping lanes against IMMAs, in collaboration with the IWC and IMO; and
- c) develop advice on appropriate placement of re-routing measures, including area avoidance and/or the establishment of vessel speed restrictions for key cetacean habitats, and make recommendations to Parties.

Directed to the Secretariat

15.CC The Secretariat shall, subject to the availability of resources, support the Scientific Council with the implementation of Decision 15.BB.