

 <p><b>International Whaling Commission</b> 135 Station Road, Impington, Cambridge CB24 9NP, UK</p>	<p><b>Statement to the Ninth Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals</b> <b>1-5 December 2008, Rome, Italy</b></p>
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The International Whaling Commission (IWC) is pleased to attend the 9th Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) being hosted by the Government of Italy and to have the opportunity to provide, via this statement, information on its activities of relevance to CMS. More details can be found on the Commission website ([www.iwcoffice.org](http://www.iwcoffice.org)). We would like to thank the Government of Italy and the CMS Secretariat for the excellent facilities.

## OVERVIEW

The IWC was established under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling which was signed in Washington DC on 2nd December 1946. The Convention provides a clear mandate for the conservation of whale stocks and management of whaling, based on scientific advice. While the members of IWC have differing views regarding the acceptability of whaling, all agree the importance of conservation and the value of the best scientific advice. The IWC currently has 82 member countries.

The IWC Schedule governs the conduct of commercial and aboriginal subsistence by member countries throughout the world. These measures include the designation of protected species, whale sanctuaries (the Indian and Southern Ocean Sanctuaries) and catch limits as well as the provision of catch and biological information. There has been a moratorium on commercial whaling since 1985/86 which is binding on those member countries that do not have an 'objection' to it (a legal right under the Convention) or reservation. Norway and Iceland have caught whales commercially in recent years under these provisions. The IWC sets catch limits for aboriginal subsistence whaling undertaken by native/aboriginal peoples of the USA, Russian Federation, Denmark/Greenland and St. Vincent & The Grenadines. The Convention allows member governments to issue special permits to take whales for scientific research; Japan is the only IWC member country to issue such permits (in the North Pacific and Antarctic) at present.

## Scientific research and management advice

The Convention underlines the importance of scientific advice to the conservation and management actions taken by the IWC. The Commission encourages, co-ordinates and funds cetacean research in relation to conservation and management and publishes the results of scientific research in its own *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management*. It also promotes studies into related matters such as the humaneness of hunts. Last year, the IWC research budget comprised just over £300,000.

The Commission has established a number of Committees, Sub-committees and Working Groups to assist it in conducting its business. Of particular relevance to the work of CMS are the Scientific and Conservation Committees.

### *Scientific Committee*

The IWC Scientific Committee, established in 1950, is a world recognised authority on cetacean conservation and management science. It comprises around 200 of the world's leading cetacean biologists and meets annually as a body (for 2 weeks) as well as holding several specialist workshops each year, addressing the wide variety of issues on which the Commission requests advice.

This involves pioneering work on a number of issues including the development of the management procedure approach for determining safe anthropogenic removal levels for whales stocks (both direct such as whaling and indirect such as bycatch and ship strikes); abundance estimation (from vessels, aircraft and using mark-recapture techniques); stock structure; environmental concerns (habitat degradation, noise, chemical pollution, climate change, ecosystem modelling, diseases etc); whalewatching (assessing impacts, compiling/developing guidance on best practice); reviewing proposals for and results from special permit catches; reviewing proposals for sanctuaries; reviewing status and direct and indirect removals of small cetaceans. The Committee is also working on the provision of integrated advice for specific populations within a conservation management plan framework. The Committee's comprehensive 400+ page reports are published annually in the journal.

### *Conservation Committee*

The Conservation Committee is a technical body established in 2003. It has considered matters such as: the causes for 'stinky' inedible gray whales caught by the Chukotkan aboriginal subsistence hunters from the Russian Federation; ship

strikes (a Ship Strikes Working Group has been established); proposals for new whale sanctuaries; and management of whalewatching. Its reports are published in the *Annual Report of the International Whaling Commission*.

### **Co-operation with other organisations**

The Commission recognises the great value in co-operating with other similar bodies on many of the issues it faces, especially at the scientific level. These include CMS (with which IWC has a Memorandum of Understanding) and its cetacean agreements ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS<sup>1</sup>; ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea), IATTC (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission); CCAMLR (Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources); Southern Ocean GLOBEC; NAMMCO (North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission); FAO (Committee on Fisheries); PICES (North Pacific Marine Science Organisation); IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) and ECCO (Eastern Caribbean Cetacean Commission) and most recently IMO (International Maritime Organisation).

#### *Co-operation with CMS*

There is particularly strong co-operation with CMS cetacean agreements as summarised below.

ASCOBANS: IWC representatives, including the Secretariat's Head of Science attend routinely meetings of ASCOBANS's Advisory Committee and Meetings of the Parties, providing quantitative advice on conservation issues, especially with respect to bycatch and in determining its conservation goals, where an IWC initiative led to the formation of a joint IWC/ASCOBANS working group. ASCOBANS endorsed the IWC POLLUTION 2000+ programme. IWC scientists also played important roles in: the development of the Jastarnia Plan for harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea; the conservation plan for harbour porpoises in the North Sea and the SCANS I and II abundance surveys.

ACCOBAMS: IWC representatives also attend meetings of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and its MoPs. The Secretariat's Head of Science is a full member of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and IWC scientists have played an important role in many aspects of ACCOBAMS work especially related to the major ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative, developing recommendations for best scientific practice, the development of the conservation plan for the common dolphin, work on bycatch and participating in the Steering Committee for work on Mediterranean fin whales and on ship strikes.

## **SUMMARY OF IWC ACTIVITIES OF PARTICULAR INTEREST/RELEVANCE TO CMS**

### **Ship strikes**

As indicated above, the IWC is addressing the problem of ship strikes through its Scientific and Conservation Committees and is also working in close co-operation with the Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS and with IMO, in assisting the Marine Environment Protection Committee in the development of a guidance document on minimizing the risk of ship strikes with cetaceans.

Many species of whales and dolphins may be vulnerable to collisions with vessels. Most reports of collisions involve large whales but collisions with smaller species also occur. Especially with large vessels, collisions often either go unnoticed or unreported, particularly for the smaller species. It is not only the animals that can be injured or killed; for some incidents there has also been serious damage to the vessel and serious or even fatal injuries to passengers have occurred involving hydrofoil ferries, whalewatching vessels and recreational craft.

While this is clearly an issue for safety at sea and animal welfare, it is difficult to obtain appropriate data to see for which cetacean populations this may be a conservation problem, apart from certain critically endangered populations where even single deaths may threaten the population. The IWC is focussing efforts on obtaining data to allow a quantitative evaluation of the problem and thus to be able to target mitigation efforts. A vital component of this has been the development of a standardized global database of information on collisions between vessels and whales. It is not only a depository for existing information but, from the beginning of December 2008, an online ongoing facility for collecting new information ([http://www.iwcoffice.org/sci\\_com/shipstrikes.htm](http://www.iwcoffice.org/sci_com/shipstrikes.htm)). The expert review group assisting with this work and providing quality control on data entries and be contacted at [shipstrikes@iwcoffice.org](mailto:shipstrikes@iwcoffice.org). Plans for a multi-stakeholder workshop on ship strike mitigation, possibly a joint activity with ACCOBAMS, are underway.

### **Habitat degradation**

Evaluating and incorporating information on factors that can affect the conservation status of cetacean populations but do not kill them quickly is particularly challenging, if appropriate mitigation measures are to be developed and their success or otherwise evaluated. The IWC has discussed environmental issues for many years and formalised this in 1997 when it established a standing working group of the Scientific Committee on Environmental Concerns. In 2004,

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<sup>1</sup> ASCOBANS: Agreement on Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas, ACCOBAMS: Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area

the Scientific Committee held a workshop to develop a quantitative approach to the issue of habitat degradation and cetaceans. Habitat degradation can potentially involve a number of issues including noise, chemical pollution, depletion of prey, disease and direct habitat destruction. The work of the Scientific Committee is directly relevant to CMS Resolution 8.22 adopted in 2005. Only a brief summary of some aspects of the work is given here. Detailed reports are published annually in the *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management*.

#### *Anthropogenic noise*

Sound is of great importance to cetaceans. Environmental factors that interfere with their ability to use sound for communication, echolocation etc may have serious consequences. To determine effects and develop mitigation measures requires considerable scientific effort. In co-operation with others, the IWC Scientific Committee is investigating the potential impacts of a range of anthropogenic sources of noise on cetaceans, including seismic surveys, mid-frequency sonar and ambient noise from shipping. It agrees that internationally co-ordinated research is needed to address gaps in knowledge on sonar-related cetacean strandings including improving the ability to conduct necropsies as quickly as possible, standardising data collection on the animal's environment at the time of the death/stranding, and coordinating with military or other government agencies so that all factors related to the stranding are examined. With respect to ambient shipping noise, IWC has joined a new initiative of IMO, agreed at the recent 58th session of the Marine Environment Protection Committee, regarding minimising the incidental introduction of noise from commercial shipping to reduce potential adverse impacts on marine life. The IWC work on noise is directly related to CMS draft resolution 9.19 on bycatch submitted to this meeting.

#### *Chemical pollution*

The IWC has funded and co-ordinated a major research programme POLLUTION 2000+ to examine cause-effect relationships between chemical pollutants and cetacean health at the population level. Phase I of this programme investigated whether predictive and quantitative relationships exist between biomarkers (of exposure to and/or effect of PCBs) and PCB levels in certain tissues and examined the validation/calibration of sampling and analytical techniques. The results of Phase I are published and Phase II is now being developed.

#### *Climate change*

The IWC held a first workshop on climate change and its possible effect on cetaceans in 1997, over a decade ago. A second IWC workshop, taking into account the more recent work of the IPCC and work on cetaceans will take place in spring 2009 in Sienna, Italy.

#### **Endangered species**

In addition to its work on species for which direct exploitation is occurring or may be considered, the Scientific Committee is concerned about populations that have been heavily reduced in the past. It is in the process of undertaking in-depth assessments of all large whale populations but this is a major long-term task. Thus far it has focussed particularly on the right whales (Southern, North Atlantic and North Pacific), humpback whales (North Atlantic, Southern Hemisphere in progress), Southern Hemisphere blue whales and the western North Pacific gray whale. For several, but not all, populations of southern hemisphere right and humpback whales there is evidence that they are recovering strongly. The southern blue whale, whilst remaining at a very small proportion of its unexploited size, is thankfully also increasing (as shown by data collected under the IWC's 30-year international Southern Hemisphere research programme now called SOWER - the Southern Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research programme). However, the situation is still critical for right whales in the North Atlantic and North Pacific and for the western North Pacific gray whale. With respect to the latter, IWC scientist are participating fully in an IUCN initiative (<http://cms.iucn.org/wgwap/index.cfm>). For such populations in particular the Scientific Committee is intending to integrate its advice in a conservation management plan framework.

#### **CMS programme of work to address adverse human induced impacts on cetaceans**

At IWC's 60<sup>th</sup> meeting in Santiago, Chile in June 2008, the CMS Secretariat provided information on progress with the development of a work programme in accord with CMS Resolution 8.22. At that time it requested the co-operation of the IWC to review IWC-related aspects of the work. We note the revised programme to implement Resolution 8.22 (Conf. 9/Rev 1, Annex B) and re-iterate our willingness to assist in its review as requested.

#### **SUMMARY**

The IWC is very pleased to attend the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of Parties of CMS. In particular we note the comments of the CMS Secretariat to the IWC about co-operation at recent IWC meetings. We would like to re-iterate the value we see in international co-operation with CMS and the many other intergovernmental bodies with which we co-operate. We hope that this short statement has illustrated the IWC's commitment to such co-operation, and the considerable amount of time and resources the IWC puts into work with CMS, especially through ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS. We trust that such co-operation will further global efforts for conservation and management with respect to cetaceans.

Information on IWC publications, including the *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management* and the *Annual Report of the International Whaling Commission* can be found at <http://www.iwcoffice.org/publications/pubmain.htm>.