

[Revised]¹ Chair's Summary Report of the 59th Annual Meeting, Anchorage, Alaska, May 2007

The 59th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) took place at the Hotel Captain Cook, Anchorage, Alaska from 28 to 31 May 2007. It was chaired by Dr Bill Hogarth (USA). It was attended by 73 of the 77 Contracting Governments. The associated meetings of the Scientific Committee and Commission sub-groups were held at the same venue in the period 7 to 25 May.

A brief report of the outcomes of the main agenda items is provided below. A full report including details of Commission discussions will be available in the Chair's Report of the 59th Annual Meeting.

1. STATUS OF STOCKS

Antarctic minke whales

Completion of revised circumpolar abundance estimates for Antarctic minke whales continues to be a high priority as there is no agreed current estimate. An intersessional meeting on this issue is planned and the Scientific Committee hopes to reach agreement on abundance estimates and their interpretation at next year's Annual Meeting.

Western North Pacific common minke whales

Scientific Committee work on the in-depth assessment of western North Pacific common minke whales continues. Specification of some plausible hypotheses for stock structure has begun and the Committee expects to draw conclusions about stock structure in the Sea of Japan at next year's meeting and then to consider information on stock structure in the waters east of Japan. Preliminary abundance estimates from recent sighting surveys in Russian Federation and Korean waters were reviewed and the Committee welcomed plans for further surveys in Japanese and Korean waters in the intersessional period.

Southern Hemisphere humpback whales

Completion of the Comprehensive Assessment of Southern Hemisphere humpback whales has high priority. Substantive progress was made last year for Breeding Stocks A (eastern South America), D (western Australia) and G (western South America). This year work focused on Breeding Stocks B and C breeding off western and eastern Africa respectively. Information presented suggests that both stocks are sub-structured and that further work is needed before abundance estimates can be agreed; this work will be undertaken during the intersessional period.

Southern Hemisphere blue whales

New estimates of abundance and trends for Antarctic blue whales were accepted. Although blue whales are still at a tiny fraction of their unexploited population size, they were increasing at around 8% per year for the period 1978/79 to 2003/04. The abundance estimate for the approximate mid year of 1997/98 was estimated at 2,300 blue whales (95% confidence intervals of 1,150 – 4,500). The Committee also gave some preliminary consideration to blue whales off Chile which it agrees should be managed separately from Antarctic and pygmy blue whales.

Western North Pacific gray whales

The Scientific Committee and the Commission have expressed great concern over the critically endangered western gray whale on a number of occasions. It is probably the most endangered population of large whales. The only known feeding grounds lie along the northeastern coast of Sakhalin Island, where existing and planned oil and gas developments pose potentially serious threats to the population, through habitat damage, ship strikes, noise pollution and oil spills. Entanglements in fishing gear throughout the range also pose a serious threat to the population.

This year the Committee received new information from the joint Russian-US research programme on the Sakhalin feeding grounds. Population modelling work using photo-identification data indicated a high probability of population increase to 2050 provided that there is no additional mortality (to the expected natural mortality) and no disturbance to reproduction. However, a projection of the female population indicated a high probability of population decline and a substantial risk of extinction by 2050 if the recent rate of deaths (four females in the last two years) continues. The urgency of reducing anthropogenic mortality to zero in this

¹ The version circulated in August 2007 and posted on the website had an error in Resolution 2007-4 – see Annex 4.

population was again stressed and the Committee made several suggestions towards an effective mitigation strategy for releasing entrapped animals. The Committee again recommended that every effort be made to ascertain whether all of the entrapped western gray whales that died were previously identified from the Sakhalin feeding ground and that arrangements be made for samples and photographs from these whales to be sent to the archives of the joint Russia-US programme. It also noted with concern that further seismic surveys are scheduled near the Sakhalin feeding ground in 2008 (see also section 9). The potential of telemetry studies to provide information that could assist in mitigation of seismic surveys and prevention of incidental captures was recognised but the Committee agreed that such work must only be undertaken under the most rigorous, risk-averse conditions.

Southern Hemisphere right whales

The Scientific Committee received new information on right whales off the southern Australian coast, where the rate of increase in cow/calf pairs in the period 1993-2006 was estimated at about 7.5%. New abundance information was also available from New Zealand's sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands and Brazil. The Committee briefly discussed right whales in the southeast Pacific where thousands were taken in the 19th century, and it is surprising that no increase has been observed. This population will be considered in more detail next year in Chile.

The Committee agreed that photo-identification studies started recently in Brazil and the long-term series available from the Auckland Islands, Australia, South Africa and Argentina are extremely important. It repeated its previous recommendation that relevant member governments provide funding for long-term monitoring programmes.

North Atlantic right whales

Noting two fatal ship strikes in 2004 and one reported bycatch, the Scientific Committee re-iterated its recommendation that it is a matter of absolute urgency that every effort be made to reduce anthropogenic mortality of North Atlantic right whales to zero. This stock is critically endangered with a remaining western North Atlantic population of around 300 animals.

North Pacific sei whales

Potential sources of information that would facilitate a comprehensive assessment of North Pacific sei whales were identified and the Committee agreed on how to proceed with work prior to assessment. An intersessional working group was established to facilitate progress.

2. WHALE KILLING METHODS AND ASSOCIATED WELFARE ISSUES

The Commission endorsed the report of the Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues that had met on 22 May. The Working Group had reviewed data submitted in response to various Resolutions (1997-1, 1999-1, 2001-2) on whales killed (e.g. weapons used, times to death, instantaneous death rates, numbers struck and lost) and on improving the humaneness of whaling operations (weapons improvement programmes, training etc). During the Working Group meeting, attention was drawn to the suffering caused to large whales through entanglement in fishing gear. The Commission subsequently agreed by consensus that a one-day workshop should be held in conjunction with next year's meeting to address welfare issues associated with entrapped large cetaceans that cannot be released alive.

In the Commission, NAMMCO provided clarification on its November 2006 workshop that addressed problems of struck and lost animals in seal, walrus and whale hunting. It further noted its competency under UNCLOS to manage cetaceans.

3. ABORIGINAL SUBSISTENCE WHALING

The Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Sub-committee met on 23 May to review the Scientific Committee's work on development of an Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Management Procedure and in particular to provide advice to the Commission on catch limits which were up for renewal.

The catch limits requested for subsistence hunts by the USA, Russian Federation and St. Vincent and The Grenadines remained the same as those for the period 2002-2007. Taking into account the advice of the Scientific Committee using the *Strike Limit Algorithms (SLAs)* developed as part of the Aboriginal Whaling Management Procedure (AWMP), the Commission agreed by consensus to renew the following catch limits for a further 5 years:

Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas stock of bowhead whales (taken by native peoples of the USA and the Russian Federation): A total of up to 280 bowhead whales can be landed in the period 2008-2012, with no more than 67 whales struck in any year (and up to 15 unused strikes may be carried over each year).

Eastern North Pacific gray whales (taken by native peoples of the USA and the Russian Federation): A total catch of 620 whales is allowed for the years 2008-2012 with a maximum of 140 in any one year.

Caribbean humpback whales (taken by St Vincent and The Grenadines): For the seasons 2008-2012 the number of humpback whales to be taken by the Bequians of St. Vincent and the Grenadines shall not exceed 20.

The Scientific Committee has not completed the complex task of developing *SLAs* for the Greenlandic fisheries and so was only in a position to provide *ad hoc* advice for some species. The requests by Greenland for catch limits for 2008-2012 differed to those for the previous 5-year block quotas (i.e. higher numbers of minke whales and additional species). After considerable discussion, the following catch limits were adopted by the Commission after three-quarter majority voting (41 in favour, 11 against and 16 abstentions):

West Greenland fin whales: The number struck shall not exceed 19 in each year.

West Greenland common minke whales: The number struck shall not exceed 200 in each year (and up to 15 unused strikes may be carried over each year).

West Greenland bowhead whales: The number struck shall not exceed 2 per year (and up to 2 unused strikes may be carried over each year). The quota for each year shall only become operative when the Commission has received advice from the Scientific Committee that the strikes are unlikely to endanger the stock.

East Greenland common minke whales: The number struck shall not exceed 12 in each year (and up to 3 unused strikes may be carried over each year).

The Scientific Committee will give high priority to developing *SLAs* for Greenlandic fisheries during the coming year.

4. THE REVISED MANAGEMENT SCHEME (RMS)

Revised Management Procedure (RMP)

The Scientific Committee finalised its 'Requirements and Guidelines for *Implementations*'.

The Committee completed the *Implementation* for western North Pacific Bryde's whales and hopes to be in a position to review abundance estimates next year. The *Implementation* for North Atlantic fin whales will be initiated after the 2007 meeting. Regarding an *Implementation Review* for western North Pacific common minke whales, the Committee noted that considerable new information on stock structure has become available since the *Implementation* was completed in 2003 and that further data will be forthcoming from the review of the JARPN programme (that is due shortly). Given this new information, it believed that it would not be feasible to carry out an *Implementation Review* in a single meeting, and recommended that the two-year process envisaged under the 'Requirements and Guidelines for *Implementation*' be followed. The Committee agreed that the new information should be discussed and synthesised before the *Implementation Review* is initiated. It hopes to complete an *Implementation Review* for central and northeastern Atlantic common minke whales at a pre-meeting prior to next year's Annual Meeting.

The RMP estimates a limit for the number of non-natural removals of whales from a particular stock, not simply a catch limit for commercial whaling. The Scientific Committee is addressing ways to estimate numbers of whales removed by indirect means including bycatch in fishing gear and ship strikes. The Committee reviewed progress towards estimating bycatch using: (1) fisheries data and observer programmes; and (2) genetic data from market sampling. With respect to entanglement, the Committee welcomed work that used information on the distribution of fishing effort and of whale distribution to identify high risk areas. The Committee is also looking at cetacean mortality through ship strikes. It reviewed progress with the development of a template for a relational database for ship strikes that could be used for archiving ship strike data globally and agreed that it be further fine-tuned. Ship-strike mortality is a concern for management for two reasons: setting commercial and aboriginal/subsistence whaling catch limits, and evaluating threats to the survival of endangered populations. Present areas of RMP interest are the central and northeastern Atlantic and the western North Pacific. Endangered populations would include the northwest Atlantic for right whales, the area from the China Sea north to the Okhotsk Sea for western Pacific gray whales, and the Straits of Gibraltar and Mediterranean for fin whales, sperm whales and possibly other species.