

# SC/68A/HIM/14

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## 7th Progress report on IWC ship strike data coordination – April 2019

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INTERNATIONAL  
WHALING COMMISSION

# 7<sup>th</sup> Progress Report on IWC Ship Strike Data Coordination – April 2019

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## **BACKGROUND**

The primary objective of the data coordinators is to progress the conservation and management work of the International Whaling Commission with respect to the issue of vessels colliding with cetaceans. In particular, it focuses on work identified by workshops on this issue and the recommendation of the Scientific Committee for ship strikes co-ordinators, as endorsed by the Conservation Committee and the Commission in 2012. Tasks to be considered also derive from the report of the IWC Scientific Committee and in particular from the discussions in the Non-deliberate human-induced mortality of large whales (HIM) working group.

As usual, the tasks assigned to the ship strikes coordinators are appended to this document. This report summarizes the seventh term of work carried out by the IWC ship strike data coordinators between May 2018 and April 2019. Some of the work represents a continuation of the activities started six years ago, including updates and improvements. The IWC SC in 2016 recommended that priority over the coming year should be given to data validation, and this indeed became the main focus of our work years, as specified below.

## **SUMMARY**

The activities carried out in the past 12 months resulted in a variety of outreach actions, including the follow-up on every request sent by potential data providers. As recommended by the SC, special attention has been given to continue and increase the data review process, while keeping the global ship strikes database updated with new entries and by making sure that every existing record receives the need attention while it is being assessed.

The Coordinators, after consultation with the Data Review Group (DRG) have started the review process by choosing current records and working backwards through time: over the last 12 months, all the reports older than 31 December 1999 have been reviewed and assigned a category. In total, 384 reports have been assessed and are now listed as cases in the data-base, which leaves 118 old reports to be assessed, excluding any new incoming new reports.

New reports have been submitted to the data base from the public, including scientists working in the field, and some new entries were compiled by the data co-ordinators.

Contacts with the ACCOBAMS and the Pelagos Sanctuary Executive Secretariats, as well as ASCOBANS, have been maintained to discuss possible synergies in assessing and mitigating

ship strikes. There is an ongoing project funded by the Pelagos Agreement on ship strikes in the Pelagos Sanctuary and this will be carried out by a team of international scientists till April 2020. This project will allow to assess ship strikes in the areas, together with suggesting mitigation measures to be applied in the Pelagos Sanctuary and in other areas of the Mediterranean Sea.

As usual, a number of inquiries about the database were received, and we provided relevant literature, general information as well as specific advice. In a number of cases, a folder containing extensive information about IWC's work on ship strikes ("ship strike briefing") was provided to interested parties.

## **1. DATA GATHERING**

*(1) Liaise with regional databases with large numbers of cases (e.g. US and Australia) in order to facilitate their submission to the global database – this will involve addressing issues of data confidentiality and classification, as well as facilitating easy submission to the database.*

The coordinators keep contact with Australia and United States to make sure there is 100% compatibility between national databases and the IWC one and to facilitate bulk uploads of present records from one database to the other. The coordinators are currently waiting these records to be uploaded, in order to verify all records and cases that occurred in those countries. As there was a larger number of US cases which were reviewed by the DRG but could not be classified because it was assumed that the original records hold greater detail of information on each incident, the provision of the US data now appears a priority to further advance the data review process.

We would like to stress that without the integration of the data from the US and AUS databases the task of the ship strikes coordinators cannot be fully completed.

*(2) Identify national contact points, organisations and groups that hold data on ship strikes that have not been contributed to the global database and encourage them to submit their data to the global database – this will involve use of mail lists (e.g. Marmam, ECS-talk) and will involve addressing issues of data confidentiality and classification, as well as facilitating easy submission to the database. Telephone interviews with identified contributors should be investigated to facilitate submission of data.*

A number of inquiries about the ship strike issue are received every year, including from agencies, the maritime industry and scientists. We have been answering such emails, providing relevant literature and general information, as well as specific advice how to use the ship strike database.

*(3) Follow developments (e.g. in the USA) with respect to establishing criteria for determining cause of death including ship strikes and disseminate this widely.*

During SC65a on Jeju (Korea, 2013), the SC agreed on criteria to classify ship strike cases on the basis of newest scientific findings and recent publications. These criteria are now being applied during the evaluation of reports by the Data Coordinators with the help and support

of the Data Review Group.

*(5) Regularly review scientific journals for ship strike information and contact authors to collate data for entry into the database.*

Current email lists and other sources are being kept under supervision for new publications or reports regarding ship strikes; and authors are motivated to enter cases directly into the database or provide additional data on specific collision cases.

*(6) Use search engines and other internet news monitoring tools for reports of ship strikes and follow up on reports of new incidents in order to gather information as soon as possible after the incident took place and facilitate its incorporation into the database – this will include informing national coordinators promptly of reported incidents within their area.*

Routinely, we are following up on press & internet reports about collisions (which are received *inter alia* through a *Google Alert*) to identify details about the cases described.

## **2. OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION**

*(1) Work with the Secretariat to ensure that the IWC ship strike web site pages are kept up to date including:*

- *updating publicly available summaries from the database;*
- *providing links to other sources of information material e.g. that produced by international organisations such as ACCOBAMS, ASCOBANS, CMS, IMO as well as national groups;*

Contacts with the ACCOBAMS and PELAGOS Executive and Permanent Secretaries are held on regular basis, either via email or by participating to Scientific Committee meetings or Meeting of Parties. In particular, the need to provide data to the IWC database on ship strikes has been stressed both at the Technical and Scientific Committee of the Pelagos Sanctuary and ACCOBAMS. In addition, the IWC data-base and the need to provide data are highlighted in a draft resolution on ship strikes will be discussed and proposed to the 7<sup>th</sup> ACCOBAMS Meeting of Parties in November 2019 and will be included in the Pelagos Sanctuary work-programme for the next biennium (2019-2020).

A project titled 'Proposal to develop and evaluate mitigation strategies to reduce the risk of ship strikes to fin and sperm whales in the Pelagos Sanctuary' has been funded by the Pelagos Agreement in April 2018 and will be carried out until April 2020. This proposed project will draw on the extensive experience of a number of groups in a collaboration to gather new data, provide a spatial analysis of ship strike risk, to define operational indicators and to quantitatively evaluate mitigation strategies. This will result in practical recommendations for a range of options including for optimising the effectiveness of current schemes such as REPCET.

The project will use new satellite imaging technologies to remotely detect whales as a means of validating predictive models of whale habitat and will examine stranding and

photographic records of injured animals to assess any trends in collision rates. Results will be combined with data on shipping to conduct spatially explicit risk assessments, define risk collision indicators for decision aid and to consider how risk might be reduced by changes to ship's routing or operational practices, including vessel responses to real-time information.

A similar liaison is maintained with ASCOBANS (see also below).

*(2) Monitor and respond to emails addressed to the [shipstrikes@iwcoffice.org](mailto:shipstrikes@iwcoffice.org) email address, including reports of new incidents, giving feedback to data providers and dealing with requests for summary information from the database.*

During 2018-2019, an increasing number of reports to the database were registered, including from scientist working in the field. These reports were thoroughly checked and a message was sent to the reporting person to request additional information and/or clarification in several cases.

*(3) Work with the Secretariat to develop a communications strategy. This may include:*

- *exploring ways of raising the profile of the database by contacting other organisations including ECS, ACS, SMM, ACCOBAMS, ASCOBANS, NGOs, recreational boating associations, maritime organisations;*

Regular contacts between the coordinators and various NGOs repeatedly also involved discussions about ship strikes and IWC's according work.

*(5) Assist Secretariat with maintaining links with IMO, ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS etc.*

Contacts with the ACCOBAMS and the Pelagos Sanctuary Executive Secretariats were maintained to discuss possible synergies in assessing and mitigating ship strikes, and boating/shipping and maritime organisations were contacted. The primary aim being to continue to populate the database. The recently funded ACCOBAMS project (see above) will enhance ongoing effort to assess and mitigate ship strikes in the Mediterranean Sea, by exporting the findings from the Pelagos Sanctuary to the whole ACCOBAMS area.

*(6) Provide an annual update to Scientific Committee.*

(This report)

*(7) Consider developing PowerPoint presentations/posters for use at workshops, symposia, conferences, etc.*

Recently, an information packet for educational use, including the ship strike Power Point presentation developed by IWC and German NGO MEER and the IWC guidance documents, has been put online as a free download on M.E.E.R.'s website, see <https://m-e-e-r.de/science/collisions/for-educational-use-2/?lang=en>

### 3. DATABASE MANAGEMENT

*(2) Data entry of new records including data presented in meeting papers and National Progress Reports at annual meetings of Scientific Committee, including sailing vessel cases from Ritter (2012) – priorities for entry to be established with the steering group*

A number of new reports from the public and interested researchers have been entered into the data base. Some new entries also have been compiled by the co-ordinators, as usual.

*(4) Work with Data Review Group to ensure that all new records are appropriately reviewed including identification of potential duplicate reports.*

The coordinators have been engaging with the Data Review Group (DRG) so as to continue the evaluation process, which has started and was streamlined in 2016-2017 following the categories approved during SC65a in 2013.

As recommended by the IWC SC in 2016, priority was given to data validation and over the last 12 months, all reports older than 31 December 1999 have been reviewed and assigned a category. In total, 384 reports have been assessed and are now listed as cases in the database, which leaves 118 old reports to be assessed, excluding any new incoming new reports.

On several occasions, while reviewing a report, it was clear that the associated material and provided evidence was not enough to facilitate the assessment, therefore messages were sent to referenced contacts asking for additional material. This process has significantly slowed down the evaluation of some records and in some cases no feedback has been received. This is most likely attributable to the fact that many records are old by now (the coordinators are going backwards in time) and the point of contacts and the information provided online are no longer available.

Also, during the review process a number of issues have arisen, ranging from fine tuning of the online system and categories to improve responsiveness from members of the DRG. Several messages have been exchanged both with the IWC Secretariat and the members of DRG to further streamline the review process.

One missing piece still is the finalisation of a tool to bulk upload data to the database. Several according trials have been conducted and a technical solution thus seems close. With this option implemented, it will be possible to upload several hundred more reports to the database, stemming from different sources. **It is now a priority to finalize the development of the bulk uploader, as otherwise it is feared that the duties of the co-ordinators cannot be accomplished in full during the coming year.**

Finally, the coordinators are currently waiting US records to be uploaded, in order to conclusively integrate them into the data base. As there was a larger number of US cases which were reviewed by the DRG but could not be classified because it was assumed that the original records hold greater detail of information on each incident. **Hence, the provision of the US data, which has been solicited many times over the past years, now appears another priority so as to further advance the review process.**

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## Appendix 1: Description of tasks of ship strike data coordinators

(green/grey fonts: issues that have been tackled so far or are under development)

### (A) Objectives and broad tasks

#### 1. Data gathering

*(1) Liaise with regional databases with large numbers of cases (e.g. US and Australia) in order to facilitate their submission to the global database – this will involve addressing issues of data confidentiality and classification, as well as facilitating easy submission to the database*

*(2) Identify national contact points, organisations and groups that hold data on ship strikes that have not been contributed to the global database and encourage them to submit their data to the global database – this will involve use of mail lists (e.g. Marmam, ECS-talk) and will involve addressing issues of data confidentiality and classification, as well as facilitating easy submission to the database. Telephone interviews with identified contributors should be investigated to facilitate submission of data.*

*(3) Follow developments (e.g. in the USA) with respect to establishing criteria for determining cause of death including ship strikes and disseminate this widely*

*(4) Regularly contact national co-ordinators or stranding networks (from IWC list) providing them with any new updates relevant to ship strikes and helping to facilitate data entry of any new records to IWC database.*

*(5) Regularly review scientific journals for ship strike information and contact authors to collate data for entry into the database.*

*(6) Use search engines and other internet news monitoring tools for reports of ship strikes and follow up on reports of new incidents in order to gather information as soon as possible after the incident took place and facilitate its incorporation into the database – this will include informing national coordinators promptly of reported incidents within their area.*

#### 2. Outreach and communication

*(1) Work with the Secretariat to ensure that the IWC ship strike web site pages are kept up to date including:*

- updating publicly available summaries from the database;
- providing links to other sources of information material e.g. that produced by international organisations such as ACCOBAMS, ASCOBANS, CMS, IMO as well as national groups
- consider whether there is value in highlighting recent cases/reports on the web page in a positive manner to encourage further reporting

*(2) Monitor and respond to emails addressed to the [shipstrikes@iwcoffice.org](mailto:shipstrikes@iwcoffice.org) email address, including reports of new incidents, giving feedback to data providers and dealing with requests for summary information from the database.*

*(3) Work with the Secretariat to develop a communications strategy. This may include:*

- developing approaches to ensure that the current leaflet on ship strikes prepared by Belgium with assistance from *inter alia* IFAW is as widely distributed as possible within shipping industry (direct to vessels), shipping management companies, and maritime academies;
- exploring ways of raising the profile of the database by contacting other organisations including ECS, ACS, SMM, ACCOBAMS, ASCOBANS), NGOs, recreational boating associations, maritime organisations;
- considering the need to update the leaflet

*(4) Liaise with national Port Authorities and Coast Guards for gathering information on ship strikes, to distribute awareness material and eventually access AIS data.*

*(5) Assist Secretariat with maintaining links with IMO, ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS etc*

*(6) Provide an annual update to Scientific Committee.*

*(7) Consider developing PowerPoint presentations/posters for use at workshops, symposia, conferences, etc.*

*(8) Consider presenting information at specific conferences (e.g. ECS, SMM etc)*

*(9) Explore funding options for future IWC ship strike work.*

### **3. Database management**

- (1) Work with the Secretariat to improve the user friendliness of the database (requires technical assistance) including in response to user problems and suggestions.
- (2) Data entry of new records including data presented in meeting papers and National Progress Reports at annual meetings of Scientific Committee, including sailing vessel cases from Ritter (2012) – priorities for entry to be established with the steering group
- (3) Further development of database handbook, ensuring that the database documentation remains up to date, is widely distributed and that any changes are notified to all actual/potential collaborators.
- (4) Work with data review group to ensure that all new records are appropriately reviewed including identification of potential duplicate reports.