

ICELAND. PROGRESS REPORT ON CETACEAN RESEARCH, MAY 2007 TO APRIL 2008 WITH STATISTICAL DATA FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 2007.

COMPILED BY

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This report summarises information on research on large cetaceans obtained from: the Marine Research Institute (MRI), Reykjavík, Iceland, the Research Committee for Biological Seafood Quality (RCBSQ) the Institute of Natural History (INH), University of Iceland, Icelandic radiation protection institute as well as data collection from private commercial platforms such as whaling and whale watching companies.

1. SPECIES AND STOCKS STUDIED

| Common name | Scientific name | Area/stock(s) | Items referred to |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Fin whale | <i>Balaenoptera physalus</i> | Icelandic and adjacent waters | 2.2, 3.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5, 8, 9 |
| Blue whale | <i>Balaenoptera musculus</i> | Icelandic and adjacent waters | 3.1, 3.2 |
| Humpback whale | <i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i> | Icelandic and adjacent waters | 3.1.1, 3.1.3 |
| Common minke whale | <i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i> | Icelandic and adjacent waters | 2.2,3.1.3, 4.2,4.4,4.4.1, 4.4.2, 5, 6.1,6.2, 8, 9 |
| Sperm whale | <i>Physeter macrocephalus</i> | Icelandic and adjacent waters | 8 |
| Northern bottlenose whale | <i>Hyperoodon ampullatus</i> | Icelandic and adjacent waters | 4.3, 8 |
| Killer whales | <i>Orcinus orca</i> | Icelandic and adjacent waters | 3.1.1,3.2 |

2. SIGHTINGS DATA

2.1 Field work

2.1.1 Systematic

TNASS

During 25th June – 24th July 2007 the MRI participated in the Trans North Atlantic Sightings survey, (TNASS) the largest synoptic cetacean survey ever attempted. This survey was the 5th in the series of North Atlantic Sightings Surveys (NASS) previously conducted in 1987, 1989, 1995 and 2001, in all of which Iceland has participated. In addition to the full partners of TNASS (Iceland, Faroe Islands, Greenland, Norway, Canada and the Russian Federation) the survey was coordinated with cetacean surveys off western Europe (CODA) and the east coast of USA (SNESSA). On behalf of TNASS, cetacean observers were also placed onboard other research vessels operating simultaneously in adjacent areas in the North Atlantic. Further details regarding overview and scope of the survey (TNASS and associated surveys) can be found at the website of NAMMCO (www.nammco.no).

Three vessels (Víkingsson et al 2008; Desportes and Halldórsson 2008; Gunnlaugsson 2008) and one aircraft (SC/60/PFI12) participated in TNASS on behalf of Iceland covering most of the central North Atlantic area in close cooperation with one Faroese vessel (Mikkelsen 2008).

2.1.2 Opportunistic, platforms of opportunity

As a part of the whale research programme, all effort and whales sighted during the research catch operation are recorded.

Monitoring of sightings during whale watching operations was conducted in Faxaflói and Húsavík. Sighting and effort data is stored at each whale watching company and partly at the MRI.

MRI and a whale watching company operating in SW Iceland co-operated in reporting and compiling sightings data during whale watching excursions. This is a pilot project, initiated in 1999, for investigating the feasibility of using whale watching boats for systematic collection of data on distribution and relative abundance of cetaceans in nearshore Icelandic waters.

2.2 Analyses/development of techniques

Data from TNASS survey conducted in 2007 have been validated and abundance estimation work was initiated in 2007. Abundance estimates for the Icelandic and Faeroes vessel for the main target species (fin and common minke whales) are presented at this meeting in SC/60/PFI13 and SC/60/PFI12.

Various analyses on distribution and abundance of cetaceans in Icelandic and adjacent waters based on the North Atlantic sightings surveys 1987-2001 will be published in a peer-reviewed journal (NAMMCO Sci. Publ.) in 2008.

3. MARKING DATA

3.1 Field work

3.1.1 Natural marking data

The MRI continues its long-term research projects based on photo-identification of cetaceans, notably blue, humpback and killer whales.

Catalogues of individuals based on natural marking data are held at the MRI for blue, humpback and killer whales. Photographs are obtained in special cruises (none conducted in 2007) as well as from opportunistic platforms. Relatively few No time was specifically allocated to photo id work during the TNASS sightings surveys. Collection of photos of white-beaked dolphins and common minke whales were collected from whale watching platforms in Faxaflói Bay (Bertulli and Ratayczak 2007) and some photo id material was also collected in other inshore whale watching locations.

3.1.2 Artificial Marking Data

3.1.3 Telemetry Data

In 2007 an international group of scientist attempted live capture of common minke whales in Faxaflói bay for satellite tracking. A purse seine was used in the capture attempts which proved unsuccessful as no minke whales could be captured.

Three humpback whales were instrumented with satellite tags in the autumn of 2007. Data were received from one of the animals, but only fo few days.

3.2 Analyses/development of techniques

A collaborative study between MRI scientists and colleagues from Norway and Scotland on stock structure and movements of killer whales in the Northeastern Atlantic was continued in 2006 (Foote et al 2007).

Analysis of blue whale photos was continued including comparisons of photos taken off Iceland (by employess of the MRI and whale watching companies) with photos taken elsewhere in the Noth Atlantic, notably around the Azores and off the east coast of North America.

An update on fin whale discovery markings (Gunnlaugsson and Víkingsson 2008) was presented at the first RMP intersessional meeting on NA fin whales.

4. TISSUE/BIOLOGICAL SAMPLES COLLECTED

4.1 Biopsy samples

No biopsy samples were taken in 2006 or 2007.

4.2 Samples from directed catches or bycatches (2007)

Extensive sampling took place from 37 minke whales taken under scientific permit in 2007. The detailed sample list is presented in SC/59/O13.

4.3 Samples from stranded large cetaceans (2007)

| Species | Area | Tissue types* | No. collected | Archived (Y/N) | No. analysed | Contact institute |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Fin whale | N-Iceland | mu,bb,bd,pa | 1 | Y | 0 | MRI |
| Northern bottlenose | Reykjanes | mu,bb,sk,bd | 1 | Y | 0 | MRI |
| Northern bottlenose | Reykjanes | mu,di,bb,sk,bd, | 1 | Y | 0 | MRI |
| Northern bottlenose | E-Iceland | bb,sk | 2 | Y | 0 | MRI |

* te=teeth, mu=muscle, bb=blubber, sk=skin, di=diet, go=gonad, ey=eye, pl=ear plug, bd=blood, pa=parasite

4.4 Analyses/development of techniques

The status of analyses for the different subprojects of the common minke whale research programme (Marine Research Institute 2003) is detailed in SC/60/O13.

Genetics

Laboratory analysis. All samples collected in 2003–2007 for the stock structure component of the minke whale research programme is completed. Today, all samples collected in Icelandic waters from 1981 to 2007 have been genotyped for 16 microsatellite loci and the mtDNA (n= 342 for the microsatellite loci; n= 347 for the mtDNA). In addition samples collected at feeding grounds in Greenland (n=37), Barents Sea (n=50), Norway coastal region (n=37), Spitsbergen (n=63) and North Sea waters (n=7) were genotyped for geographical comparisons. The genetic analyses are presented in SC/60/PFI10.

Samples of fin whales from Iceland 1981-2006 (n=1069), Spain 1985 (n=46), Norway (n=57), West Greenland (n=16) and East Canada (n=38) were statistically analysed for 9 microsatellite loci in order to study the spatio-temporal structure of Northeast Atlantic fin whales (Daníelsdóttir *et al.* 2005a; 2006; Daníelsdóttir *et al.* 2006a). A sub-sample of the total fin whale samples (Iceland 1985, 1987 and 1989 (n=128); Spain 1985 (n=43); Norway (n=39); West Greenland (n=16) and East Canada (n=13) was analysed further. They were screened and statistically analysed for mtDNA sequences and 6 microsatellite loci (same as in Bérubé *et al.* 1998; Bérubé *et al.* 2006) and also 16 microsatellite loci (Bérubé *et al.* 2002; Daníelsdóttir *et al.* 2006a and Skaug *et al.* 2006). Reanalysis of North Atlantic fin whale allozyme data is presented in Daníelsdóttir *et al.* (2006b). Finally, several individuals were selected to run more microsatellite loci and the mtDNA. A total of 365 individuals from Iceland as well as 39 from Norway, 43 from Spain, 15 from West Greenland and 13 from Canada were successfully genotyped and analysed for 15 microsatellite loci, a sex-specific marker and the mtDNA. These results were presented at a technical workshop in December 2007 as a part of the RMP implementation process conducted within the IWC Scientific Committee (Pampoulie *et al.* 2007). An update of the genetic analyses is presented in SC/60/PFI11.

In relation to the RMP Implementation process of North Atlantic fin whales, including genetic and non-genetic indication on stock structure, abundance, catch history and biological parameters (Bérubé *et al.* 2006, Daníelsdóttir *et al.* 2005, 2006a,b,c, Víkingsson 2006, Víkingsson & Gunnlaugsson, 2006, Víkingsson *et al.* 2005, 2006, Sigurjónsson & Gunnlaugsson, 2006, Skaug, *et al.* 2006, Gunnlaugsson & Víkingsson 2006, Pike *et al.* 2006) samples of skin and muscle from common minke whales taken in Icelandic waters in 2007 were collected for genetic analyses (see SC/60/O13). Iceland is constructing a database of the DNA profile of Icelandic and Norwegian minke whales according to the Norwegian DNA database (Olaisen 1997; Dupuy & Olaisen 2002; IWC 1998; Daníelsdóttir *et al.* 2005b). The Icelandic databases will consist of every legally obtained minke whale in Iceland. The purpose is to establish a control system to detect illegal trades of the meat. The Icelandic DNA database will also be used to study population genetic structure of Icelandic minke whales as has been done for the Norwegian minke whales (Skaug & Oien 2004; Skaug *et al.* 2002; 2003; Martien *et al.* 2003; Andersen 2004). The DNA profile of each individual entered into the databases is composed of microsatellite DNA genotypes (allele sizes), sex chromosome genotypes (for sex determination) and mtDNA sequence data. The genetic analysis has been optimized and finalized for the available samples at the Department of Population Genetics, Marine Research Institute, Iceland (DPG, MRI-IS).

Other

In 2007, collaboration was initiated between the MRI and scientist at WHOI and Harvard Medical School in USA on the structure of the auditory system in common minke whales. Samples taken for this purpose will be sent to the USA for analysis.

Laboratory work on blood sampled from stranded and bycaught cetaceans was screened for morbillivirus antibodies at the Institute for Pathology, University of Iceland.

5. POLLUTION STUDIES

Various tissue samples for pollution studies have been routinely collected during dissections of stranded or by-caught cetaceans in recent years. These are stored frozen at the MRI.

Studies were continued on pollutants in common minke whale as a part of a research program under a special permit (SC/60/O13). The pollution studies focus on analyses on contaminant levels (trace elements and organochlorines) in muscle, blubber and various internal organs with reference to i) biological parameters, ii) trophic level, iii) body condition and health status, iv) geographical variation on a small and large scale and v) the applicability of biopsy sampling for estimation of pollutant burden. The status of the analyses is discussed in SC/60/O13.

A study conducted by Hvalur, h.f. on levels of trace elements and organic micropollutants in fin whales caught of Iceland in 2006 have been carried out. Analyses of the results is underway. Age determinations of the same animals have been estimated from growth layers in ear plugs.

6. STATISTICS FOR LARGE CETACEANS

6.1 Corrections to earlier years statistics for large whales

The institute has cooperated with the IWC secretariat on validating the early modern whaling statistics (up to 1915).

6.2 Direct catches of large cetaceans (commercial, aboriginal and scientific permits) for the calendar year 2007

| Species | Type of catch | Area/stock | Males | Females | Total landed | Struck and lost |
|--------------|----------------|------------|-------|---------|--------------|-----------------|
| Minke whale | commercial | CIC | 3 | 2 | 6 | 0 |
| Minke whale* | Special permit | CIC | 11 | 26 | 37 | 2 |

*Detailed list in SC/60/O13

6.3 Anthropogenic mortality of large whales for the calendar year 2007

6.3.1 Observed or reported ship strikes

No reports on ship strikes were received by the MRI.

6.3.2 Fishery bycatch of large cetaceans

No reports on bycatch of large cetaceans were received by the MRI.

7. STATISTICS FOR SMALL CETACEANS

Reported to NAMMCO (see <http://www.nammco.no/>) in Víkingsson and Ólafsdóttir (2007).

8. STRANDINGS

Information on stranded cetaceans in Iceland is compiled by the Marine Research Institute in cooperation with the Institute of Natural History.

8.1 Strandings or dead whales encountered at sea

| Species* | No. strandings | No. post mortens | Contact | Contact email |
|---------------------|----------------|------------------|---------|----------------|
| Fin whales | 2 | 1 | MRI | gisli@hafro.is |
| Common Minke | 6 | 0 | MRI | gisli@hafro.is |
| Sperm whales | 1 | 0 | MRI | gisli@hafro.is |
| Northern bottlenose | 6 | 4 | MRI | gisli@hafro.is |

* large cetaceans

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