

Report of the intersessional work on Anthropogenic Underwater Noise

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Submitted by the AUNWG

Background

Since at least 2004, the IWC Scientific and Conservation Committees have been discussing the effects of noise on cetaceans. Cetaceans rely on sound for survival. It is their primary sense, necessary for successful foraging, migration, and reproduction. Man-made (anthropogenic) ocean noise has increased dramatically in recent years, with sources ranging from shipping to seismic exploration, drilling, and construction. Anthropogenic ocean noise is identified as a priority threat in the IWC Conservation Committee's Strategic Plan. Research is ongoing to understand the impact of noise on cetaceans and the effectiveness of various approaches to reducing exposure.

At IWC67 in 2018, the Committee approved proposals for additional work on Anthropogenic Underwater Noise, such as forming an intersessional correspondence group further to scope this work and collaboration with other organisations. It also approved a revised workplan for the Commission, which included preliminary activities on underwater noise. At the same meeting, an IWC Resolution on Underwater Noise (Resolution 2018-4) was adopted.

At the IWC68, the review workplan 2022-2024 was adopted (see Annex 1 of [CC/68/12.1.1/01](#)). The workplan included a questionnaire to identify areas of ongoing and planned marine seismic surveys for hydrocarbon exploration for the next 5 years (2023-2028). The questionnaire was submitted to the Scientific Committee (SC68D) and approved. The questionnaire was subsequently approved by CC and endorsed at IWC68.

SEISMIC EXPLORATION

A questionnaire to compile global information on marine seismic surveys for hydrocarbon exploration, including currently ongoing activities and planned activities for the next 5 years (2023-2028), and identify sensitive areas with potential impacts to cetaceans from impulsive noise was endorsed by the IWC68. The survey was circulated from the IWC Secretariat to all member States, as well as other relevant international organisations, such as the CBD, the CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Joint Noise Working Group, the EU MSFD TG Noise Group, among others (IWC.ALL.441). So far, 30 responses have been received. These are from governmental and non-governmental agencies of Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, South Africa, Spain, Uruguay, USA. A second communication was sent (IWC.ALL.456). The results of a preliminary analysis was submitted to SC69A. Once all information has been collected, a Geographical Information System will be used to map the data, and recommendations will be outlined. A final document will be drafted for distribution to

the Conservation and Scientific Committees, and the Commission, in addition to other organisations and bodies.

COOPERATION WITH THE IMO

At MEPC 76 in 2021, the IMO agreed to review the 2014 Guidelines and identify the next steps. This was addressed in the Ship Design and Construction Sub-Committee (SDC 8) in January 2022. An outcome from this meeting was establishing a correspondence group coordinated by Canada to work on updating the IMO noise guidelines for reducing underwater noise from commercial shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life and identification of next steps. Following recommendation (SC2184) encouraging further intersessional collaboration and coordination between the Scientific Committee and the Conservation Committee on underwater noise, representatives of the SC and CC, along with the Secretariat, have joined the IMO CG to contribute to discussions reviewing the Guidelines. The process has involved three rounds of input in the form of questionnaires on general issues to be addressed. The IMO Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Construction (SDC 9) met from 23-27 January 2023. The draft revised Guidelines developed by a correspondence group were further revised by a working group that met during the Sub-Committee session. These draft guidelines were adopted at the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 80), which met from 3-7 July 2023.