

Republic of Korea - Voluntary National Cetacean Conservation Report, 2024

Submitted by the Government of the Republic of Korea

1. Legal Mechanisms

1.1 The Conservation and Management of Marine Ecosystems Act

In accordance with the *Conservation and Management of Marine Ecosystems Act*, the Republic of Korea designates marine organisms under protection, when species are remarkably decreasing or internationally high worthy of protection. The *Act* prohibits the catch of marine organisms under protection, unless authorized for limited purposes such as restore. Currently, Korea designated 15 cetacean species under protection such as gray whale, Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin.

1.2 The Public Notice on Conservation and Management of Cetacean Resources

Korea legislated *Public Notice on Conservation and Management of Cetacean Resources* to effectively conserve the cetacean to comply with the international norms and thereby contributing to the conservation of marine ecosystem. According to this *Public Notice*, cetacean catch is prohibited except for limited purposes such as rescue, treatment. When a bycaught, stranded, or adrift cetacean is discovered, it must be immediately reported to the Korea Coast Guard.

1.3 Others

Korea sets legal mechanisms that regulate cetacean catch and bycatch during the fishing activities as below:

- *Enforcement Rules of Distant Water Fisheries Development Act* requires fishing entities to immediate release of marine mammals when bycaught and implement Bycatch Reduction Measures.
- *Public Notice Concerning the Implementation of the UN Resolution on Deep Sea Fisheries on the High Seas* was enacted to protect marine ecosystem particularly in areas not covered by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations. The *Public Notice* regulates fishing entities to establish and implement bycatch reduction measures on marine mammals and immediate release when bycatch.
- *Enforcement Decree of the Fisheries Act* enforces reporting obligations to fishing vessels in the coastal area when a cetacean is bycaught.

2. Measures to Reduce Bycatch

2.1 Research

Korea has been committed to identifying the causes of bycatch in order to develop and distribute fishing gears designed to reduce incidental capture, implementing enhanced measures to combat the issue. Specifically, to reduce the entanglement of finless porpoises in stow nets, Korea has developed and supplied escape devices, supported by ongoing research to improve their effectiveness. Additionally, Korea is currently conducting research and development (R&D) on bycatch reduction devices, including a tension sustenance type buoy system and an acoustic deterrent device to mitigate bycatches from gillnet and trap fisheries, as well as marine mammal escape devices for gillnet and setnet gears.

2.2 Management Measures

Korea has strengthened management measures on cetacean bycatch through prohibiting sales of stranded and adrift cetacean.

Education and training to fishing entities, local governments, governmental officials, and Maritime police also have been strengthened regarding the reporting systems and rescue measures for cetacean. Capacity building is also being implemented to rescue and cure centers specialized in marine mammals.

“Marine Mammal Release Manual for Offshore and Coastal Fisheries” has been developed and distributed for fishing entities, which stipulates safe-release measures according to fishing gears such as set-net, gill net, etc.

In addition, the *Distant Water Fisheries Development Act* fulfills to comply with the conservation and management measures of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) by setting regulatory measures, such as restrictions on port entry and departure, suspension of fishing operations, and penalty fine when contravening measures adopted by RFMOs.

3. Management Measures to Address Marine Debris

Marine debris poses a serious threat to cetaceans, causing entanglement, ghost-fishing, and depletion of the marine ecosystem. In response, Korea is putting concerted efforts on conserving cetaceans by addressing the marine debris issue.

Korea has developed the world's first biodegradable fishing gear that can naturally decay in water to mitigate problems associated with abandoned fishing gear. Additionally, the *Fishing Gear Deposit System* is being implemented for trap fisheries to encourage the voluntary return of

discarded fishing gear, with plans to gradually extend the system to include gillnets and farm buoys.

Taking a lifecycle approach to tackle marine debris, Korea aims to prevent the accumulation of additional debris, enhance the effectiveness of debris collection and treatment. Korea is also working to improve collection capabilities by establishing a full-time marine waste collection system, eliminating collection blind spots and developing advanced collection equipment. Furthermore, Korea has established the *National Marine Debris Management Committee* to facilitate active discussions on marine waste issues among relevant ministries and experts.

Moreover, the *Adopt-a-Beach Program* has been implemented to raise public awareness and involvement in marine waste reduction efforts. This program, which was launched in 2020, aims to encourage companies, institutions and schools to look after the beach which would be adopted by the preferences of program participants. As of December 2023, over 200 institutions have participated in this voluntary effort to clean up adopted beaches.

In addition, Korea is endeavoring to raise national awareness of marine debris and spread the culture of voluntary collection among the public through various initiatives, including the "marine debris upcycling contests" and the "*Aljup*" campaign, which encourages marine waste reporting and plogging activities.

4. Whale Watching

The Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea (MOF) has implemented new regulations (amended on 18 October 2022, enforced from 19 April 2023) prohibiting activities that may disturb or disrupt the movement or feeding behaviors of marine protected species during observation and tourism activities. For instance, speed limits for vessels have been established based on distances from the Indo-Pacific Bottlenose dolphin. Specifically, vessels are required to stop their screw propellers when they are within 50 to 300 meters from the dolphin, and they are also prohibited from approaching within a 50-meter radius of the dolphin. Additionally, in 2021, the *Guidelines for Watching the Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin*, initially developed in 2017, have been updated based on feedback from civil society organizations and experts.

ADDENDUM:

Efforts to Reduce Ocean Plastic Pollution in the Republic of Korea

The Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea (MOF) is actively developing and upgrading technologies of collection equipment that can be deployed in inaccessible coastal areas to mitigate domestic marine plastic pollution. MOF is also conducting research on the environmental behaviors and ecological impacts of marine microplastics, which are emerging as a new source of pollution. This research aims to establish scientific foundations for effectively addressing the environmental issue.

Furthermore, to prevent the generation of marine plastic waste, the Fishing Gear Deposit System has been fully implemented this year. This system promotes the prevention and return of lost or discarded fishing gear, which constitutes a significant portion of marine debris. Additionally, Korea is researching the development of eco-friendly buoys made of ceramics to replace styrofoam buoys and thereby stop ocean microplastic pollution.

In addition to these efforts, Korea actively participates in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) for the UN Plastic Treaty as a government delegation to respond to the maritime agendas.