

NJG/JAC/30221

10 August 2005

CIRCULAR COMMUNICATION TO COMMISSIONERS
AND CONTRACTING GOVERNMENTS
IWC.CCG.500

Call for nominations of national contact points in regard to ship strikes of cetaceans

You will recall that at IWC/57 in Ulsan, the Commission agreed to a recommendation from the Conservation Committee regarding work to make progress on the issue of whales being killed or seriously injured by ship strikes. An initial work plan (see attached) was developed by a Ship Strikes Working Group (SSWG) established under the Conservation Committee, led by Belgium and comprising Argentina, Australia, Brazil, France, Italy, Luxembourg, New Zealand, South Africa, UK and the USA.

I am now writing at the request of Alexandre de Lichtervelde, Commissioner for Belgium and chair of the SSWG, to seek nominations for national contact points. Appropriate persons would be those already responsible for collection of information on ship strikes on cetaceans or those specialized or particularly interested in this issue. Such contact points will facilitate collection and dissemination of information in the future. The identification of national contact points had been suggested initially by the USA during discussions of the SSWG in Ulsan.

Please nominate your national ship strikes contact point(s) by completing the form attached and returning it to the Secretariat by **20 September 2005**.

Nicky Grandy
Secretary to the Commission



INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

Nominations for national contact point(s) for ship strikes

Government:	
<u>Contact details for nominated contact point(s):</u>	
Name:	
Address:	
Tel:	Fax:
E-mail:	
Name:	
Address:	
Tel:	Fax:
E-mail:	

**Please return to the Secretariat by 20 September 2005
(email: Secretariat@iwcoffice.org; fax: +44 1223 232876)**

Report of the Ship Strikes Working Group (SSWG) consultative meeting

- Members: Belgium (convenor), Argentina, Australia, Brazil, France, Italy, Luxembourg, New Zealand, South Africa, UK, USA
- Observers ¹: Denmark/Greenland, Korea

1. Introductory items

A first, consultative, meeting of the new Ship Strikes Working Group (SSWG) took place at the Lotte Hotel, Ulsan, Korea, on 14 June 2005. A list of participants is given in Annex 1. It was convened subsequent to a call for interested Parties to define terms of reference for such a working group, in the context of discussion of document IWC/57/CC7 as presented by Belgium the previous day. The main purpose of the meeting was to define terms and propose to the Commission that ship strikes with whales be approved as one of two high priority issues² to be implemented initially in the Conservation Committee (CC) (cf. task 2 of Resolution 2003-1). The SSWG recognises that the data review aspects of the work plan as indicated below are of interest also to the Scientific Committee's (SC) By-catch and other human-induced mortality subcommittee.

2. Appointment of Chair

Koen Van Waerebeek (Belgium) was appointed Chair. He also served as rapporteur.

3. Terms of Reference

3.1 Comprehensive global review of information on ship strikes with whales

Scattered information on ship strikes exists in published papers, unpublished reports, conference abstracts and personal communications. Ship collisions have most recently been reviewed by Laist *et al.* (2001), however these authors concentrated on the North Atlantic and did not address waters off South/Central America, Africa (except South Africa), Middle East, Asia nor Oceania. Indications are that substantial new information has become available since 2001. Paper SC/57/BC1 (Felix and Van Waerebeek, 2005) showed that the problem may be vastly underreported. Measures to reduce ship strikes in North Atlantic right whales were discussed by Russell (2001) and may serve as a template for other species and areas.

Belgium proposed to draft a technical document "Global Review of information on Ship Collisions with Whales and other cetaceans, with an evaluation of current monitoring and mitigation initiatives", to be submitted at IWC/58, firstly, to the Scientific Committee Meeting at IWC/58 and subsequently to the Conservation Committee. An outline of issues to be addressed was earlier provided as a guideline by Belgium and cosponsors in document IWC/57/CC7 (relevant section reproduced in Adjunct 2).

The USA indicated that experts were available who could contribute to the exercise. The USA has worked with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) on mitigation of ship strikes with endangered north Atlantic right whales in the NW Atlantic shipping corridors. It was stated that besides reviewing technical aspects, recommendations should be formulated and aspects of outreach and education on the issue of ship strikes should also be considered. NZ emphasized the importance of meaningful involvement with the IMO in this area, as ultimately any solutions seeking to control vessels on the high seas will have to substantively involve them. The UK encouraged that the reporting of ship strikes be presented in a positive manner, rather than implying punitive implications could result. Belgium agreed that raising awareness for the issue will be important also to improve response when requesting information.

Australia noted that in the intersessional period Australia and New Zealand hoped to work with the South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) to gather information on threats to whale populations in the South Pacific. They offered to provide relevant information to this group. South Africa reiterated that recommendations should form an integral part of the technical document to be presented to the Scientific Committee and suggested that a distinction be made between domestic shipping traversing coastal waters, which resorts under national regulations, and shipping traffic in international waters which however may be transient through EEZ and territorial waters. South Africa also reminded that a source of (relatively modest) funding

¹ The delegate of Dominica planned to attend but was unable to participate due to last minute commitments.

² the other so-called "stinky whale" issue, a suspected case of pollution affecting gray whales, the cause of which will be investigated by the USA, the Russian Federation and Mexico.

would need to be identified (~ € 5,000). The Belgian Government, the IWC and international NGOs were suggested as potential co-sponsors.

3.2. Intersessional E-mail discussion group

Proposed initial work plan

- (i) Identify and liaise with organisations that already have (eg. ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS), or are preparing to set up, programmes of data collection and/or mitigation of ship collisions.
- (ii) For each region or subregion identify persons active or interested in this field.
- (iii) Establish contacts with national and international bodies that may potentially contribute with valuable information and open avenues for collaborative efforts on future mitigation measures. These include e.g. member nations, International Maritime Organization (IMO), UNCLOS, selected large shipping companies and port authorities (e.g. Hong Kong Port Authority already collaborating with local dolphin research and conservation) and others.
- (iv) Identify further sources of information.
- (v) Report back to next Conservation Committee meeting.

Output would consist mainly of a progress report to the Conservation Committee at IWC/58. Membership should be kept flexible and open to changes as needs develop. It was agreed that the chair of the SC Bycatch subcommittee (Per Berggren, Sweden) and the SC Chair (Arne Bjorge) be invited to join the Email discussion group.

3. Other

Denmark suggested that national legislation relating to the reporting of ship strikes also be reviewed. IWC national progress reports which already request reporting of ship strikes could be expanded so as to include more technical details. However, information on legislation would best be solicited from member nations to be made available through the voluntary National Conservation Reports.

France and Luxemburg suggested that certain maritime insurance companies might favourably view upon, and encourage, shipping companies to report collisions (and near-misses) with whales. The UK noted that some yachting organizations could contribute with reported cases of collisions and damage caused to yachts.

Denmark and Italy stated that ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS³ have for years compiled information on ship strikes in European waters, and should be contacted. The USA recommended that national points of contact be identified among IWC members. Panama and Japan, considering their huge shipping industry, were suggested as potential important contributors of data. It was agreed that special attention be paid to critical areas where high shipping traffic and vulnerable cetaceans coincide.

It is important to separate out those areas that are primarily scientific and those that are not. For example, promoting the reporting of ship strike information is essentially a technical issue that the CC is in a good position to address. Receiving and interpreting the data, and where necessary recommend action is a SC matter. Implementing SC advice is again essentially a technical/policy matter that the CC can address.

4. Adoption of Report

The report was adopted on 17 June 2005.

References

- Felix, F. and Van Waerebeek, K. 2005. Whale mortality from ship collisions underreported, case studies from Ecuador and West Africa. Document SC/57/BC1 submitted to Scientific Committee, IWC, Ulsan, Korea.
- Laist *et al.* 2001. Collisions between ships and whales. *Marine Mammal Science* 17(1): 35-75
- Russell, B. 2001. Recommended measures to reduce ship strikes of North Atlantic Right whales. National Marine Fisheries Service (US) contract report (unpublished).

³ Confirmed (pers.comm. to KVW) by Mr. Marco Barbieri, Technical Officer with CMS, Bonn.

Adjunct 1. List of Participants

Argentina Miguel Iniguez	France Vincent Ridoux	New Zealand Al Gillespie
Australia Gillian Slocum	Italy Caterina Fortuna	South Africa Herman Oosthuizen
Belgium Koen Van Waerebeek (Chair)	Korea Zang Geun Kim	UK Jenny Lonsdale
Denmark/ Greenland Maj F. Munk Michael C.S. Kingsley	Luxemburg Pierre Gallego	USA Roger Eckert Diana Weigmann Rollie Schmitt

Adjunct 2.

The following text was excerpted from IWC/57/CC7.

1.1. Ship strikes

Collisions with ships can and do kill whales, especially the larger species and those inhabiting waters with high shipping volumes. For at least one species (North Atlantic right whale), ship strikes have been identified along with entanglements as the top two factors that threaten the species with extinction. Apart from certain species and areas (e.g. right whales off USA and Canada) the issue is mainly still at the stage where more information on the extent of the problem and the options for counter-measures needs to be gathered.

Outline Program of Work

- (1) Conduct a study of shipping traffic volumes around the world in relation to cetacean occurrence to identify:
 - areas of potentially high interaction;
 - areas of uncertain status due to lack of information on cetacean occurrence;
 - areas of uncertain status due to lack of information on shipping volumes;
 - areas where interaction can be assumed to be relatively low.
- (2) Promote, review and collate research into assessing and improving the efficacy of counter-measures, including:
 - systems for warning vessels of whale presence in the area
 - arrangements for sighting whales and taking avoiding action
 - mechanisms for alerting whales to oncoming vessels
 - relocation of shipping lanes
 - speed limits
- (3) Develop and implement in conjunction with the appropriate maritime organisations of a global scheme for reporting observed or suspected ship strikes. This should be web-based and supervised in close to real time so that the database supervisor can solicit further information from those reporting ship strikes soon after the event.
- (4) Based on the information gathered, identify areas, routes, seasons and species for which priority for preventive action is highest. Develop mitigation plans for these priority cases in collaboration with coastal states and relevant organisations.