

Progress Report on IWC Ship Strike Data Coordination

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SUMMARY

The work of the data coordinators until today resulted in a variety of outreach activities, a large number of contacts being established, and the increase of user friendliness as well as the technical functioning of the data base.

Some 20 inquiries were received, and we provided relevant literature, general information as well as specific advice how to use the data base. In several cases, this stipulated the entry of new cases.

Until the end of 2013, the data base held a total of 1073 incidents, both historical and recent. 559 of these were previously classified as being “definite strikes”. A total of approximately 100 new cases have been entered since then, representing an increase of roughly 10% of the total number currently held in the data base. All new entries will still have to be verified by the IWC Ship Strike Data Review Group. For another estimated 200 new incidents, the data is expected to be incorporated during 2013.

From the new data, it became clear that ship strikes are an issue in areas previously not dealt with in greater detail, i.e. the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Canada). Also, according to data recently published (raw data has been provided to IWC, see above), Alaskan waters appear to be another emerging “hot spot” for ship strikes.

Given that this work appears to trigger the use and hence the “success” of the IWC data base, as well as considering that many of the coordinators’ tasks will still have to be addressed, we suggest that funding for ship strike data coordination should continue.

BACKGROUND

The primary objective of the agreement is to progress the conservation and management work of the International Whaling Commission with respect to the issue of vessel collisions with cetaceans. In particular, it focussed on work identified by the joint ACCOBAMS/IWC workshop on this issue and the recommendation of the Scientific Committee for ship strikes co-ordinators that was endorsed by the Conservation Committee and the Commission in 2012. Special attention was given to populating the global ship strikes database established by the Commission. The tasks assigned to the ship strikes coordinators are appended to this document. It has been recognised that it will not be possible - in the initial stages of the co-ordinators role - to complete all of the tasks outlined below; the initial focus has therefore been on those items identified below. This report sets out the activities realized during the first six months (Dec 2012 until May 2013) of the agreement.

The work of the co-ordinators is being supervised by a steering group comprising Chemay, Donovan, Leaper, Perrin, and Rojas-Bracho.

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.*

In general, a number of inquiries about the ship strike issue were received, including agencies, the maritime industry and scientists. We provided relevant literature and general information as well as specific advice how to use the ship strike data base. In several cases, this stipulated the entry of new incidents, in one case even a large number of cases (see also below).

Messages to Marmam and ECS-talk email lists have been sent, presenting the role of the ship coordinators and the need to increase public awareness for the ship strike database as well as the need to increase the sample size and facilitate data submission. The message had various feedbacks with interest from different parts of the world. Contacts have been established and several data entries were received. Both ship strike coordinators are in touch with relevant scientists to further increase the number of reports.

We also got in touch with a representative from Parcs Canada, who had not been aware of the data base. This institution since 1992 has been compiling incidents of whale-vessel collisions and fresh injuries on marine mammals in the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park, Québec (Canada). Parks Canada was willing to provide the data on these incidents, which resulted in 50 new case entries to the data base. Because Parks Canada and the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans have created a working group in place with the shipping industry and Transport Canada, we will keep track of these activities.

Finally, we contacted researchers and authorities working in Sri Lanka, an apparent hot spot for vessel collisions with blue whales. Thus we promoted the use of the data base for the ship strike cases recorded in this part of the world.

A journalist from magazine Wired was interested in the issue and an article in the magazine is currently being drafted; the article will focus on ship strikes off the coast of California (USA) with an emphasis on the effort carried out by the IWC.

Contacts with a marine wildlife veterinarian and epidemiologist (who recently joined the conservation committee of the Society for Marine Mammalogy) were also established. She is interested in ship strikes given that they have had a number of cases in the Pacific Northwest of the US and she is involved in stranding response and epidemiological analyses of stranding data. Possible collaborations include:

- a) applying spatiotemporal analyses and GIS when evaluating predictive factors for certain events;
- b) incorporating environmental features (oceanographic, climatic, anthropogenic) into quantification of the strength of association between predictive factors and stranding events (such as ship strikes);
- c) retrospectively monitoring ship strike data, including spatial and temporal trend analyses;

These are some examples of epi tools that can contribute to, and assume a role in, ongoing ship strike mitigation measures that would provide further data and help with generating hypotheses on potential risk factors.

Several papers have been evaluated and will be presented at the SC meeting in Korea. One paper, prepared by the JRC of the European Commission, <http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/111111111/27790>, will be presented as a For Info paper and the results will be discussed by the members of the Sub Committee.

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

Current email list were checked for new publications regarding ship strikes and several authors we contacted and motivated to either enter cases directly into the data base or provide raw data on 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.

A large number of press & internet reports about collisions were followed up to identify details about the cases described. This resulted in a number of new cases being entered into the data base, including historical incidents, cases with sailing vessels and near misses.

A number of IWC papers and other publications were checked for collision cases. According authors were contacted to provide further information. This resulted in a number of new entries concerning small cetaceans (e.g. bottlenose dolphins in Florida). Several cases reported for Arabia are expected to be entered into the data base soon. Moreover, we received raw data on a large number (>100) of ship strikes in Alaska. These are currently being entered into the data base.

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;*

A message to the ACCOBAMS working group on ship strikes has been circulated presenting the role of the IWC and the ship strikes coordinators. The need to collect data on ship strikes has been reiterated and the link between ACCOBAMS and the IWC has been underlined. A specific recommendation will be presented to the next ACCOBAMS meeting of Parties, presenting the common work plan and the need for a coordinated effort in the next triennium, joining forces with ASCOBANS and other relevant stakeholders.

- *consider whether there is value in highlighting recent cases/reports on the web page in a positive manner to encourage further reporting.*

(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;*

A general IWC communication strategy is currently being developed by the Secretariat. While the primary focus for the time being will be on the issue of entanglement, it is expected that this evolves as a learning field which also will inform actions concerning the ship strike section of the website. The coordinators kept in touch with the new IWC communication officer and submitted a number of suggestions how the website section could be adapted. This dialogue is on-going, while any decision and adaptation of the website is subject to the general communication strategy.

The new edition of the Belgian leaflet has been sent out to different NGOs (e.g. IFAW, M.E.E.R. e.V.) and also to a Naval Architecture and Marine Consulting Office representative for wider distribution. The leaflet has also been distributed together with the roll-up banner presented at the ECS conference (see below).

- *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.*

Contacts were established with representatives from the Expert Group on Environmental Protection of the Maritime Institute Bremen (Germany) as well as the Federal Administration for Water and Shipping (Wasser- und Schifffahrtsverwaltung des Bundes, Germany). We provided literature and offered advice.

The Belgian leaflet has been produced as a new edition, and the coordinators took part in the development of the update. The leaflet is available in six languages: English, French, Spanish, Arabian, Chinese, Russian (see Appendix 2, Figure 2).

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

A representative from ASCOBANS was met during the ECS conference and informed about the role and the purpose of the new data coordinators. A message to the existing ACCOBAMS ship-strikes working group, which was originally created during the 5th ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, held in Rome in 2008, was sent asking for collaborative effort to populate the IWC ship strikes database and to inform about the current effort carried out with the ship strike

coordinators. The ToR will be updated and will be included in the final report of the ship strike coordinators.

(6) Provide an annual update to Scientific Committee.

(This report)

(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.).

A self-standing banner display has been developed by the coordinators – with the support from the steering group - and two copies were produced. The display has been presented during the ECS conference in Setubal (Portugal) and has been exposed in the main poster room for the full duration of the conference (see Appendix 2, Figure 1). Numerous conference participants have shown interest in the work carried out by the IWC on this issue. The next events where the self-standing display will be displayed are the ACCOBAMS Meeting of Parties in Tangier (Morocco) in November 2013 and the Biennial Conference of the Society for Marine Mammalogy, in Dunedin (New Zealand) in December 2013.

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.

While using the data base to enter new cases, some details of functionality were found to need improvement. A concise review of the structure and design of the data base was undertaken. This resulted in a wish list of changes, some of which have been incorporated already. Thus, the technical functioning of the database has been enhanced. Several users of the data base encountering similar difficulties were informed about how to circumvent difficulties and thus successfully enter new data.

The technical maintenance and user friendliness of the data base are being developed on an on-going basis.

Moreover, “paper versions” of the data base have been created. There are several versions available, according to different scenarios (whale seen at sea, whale stuck on bow, whale washed ashore, etc.). These paper/pdf versions can be provided as downloads to be used in the field while being offline.

(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

For IWC documents, see above, section 1(4).

Cases from Ritter (2012) were started to be entered. A total of 111 entries of collisions between sailing vessels and cetaceans are expected to be realized until the end of 2013.

To summarize, the work of the data coordinators until today resulted in a variety of outreach activities, a large number of contacts being established, a significant number of new incidents being entered, and the increase of user friendliness as well as the technical functioning of the data base.

We suggest that funding for ship strike data coordination should continue, given that this work appears to trigger the use and hence the “success” of the IWC data base, as well as considering that many of the coordinators’ tasks will still have to be addressed.

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Appendix 1: Description of tasks of ship strike data coordinators

(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 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.

Appendix 2



Figure 1: The new ship strike banner at the ECS conference in Setubal (Portugal), April 2013.

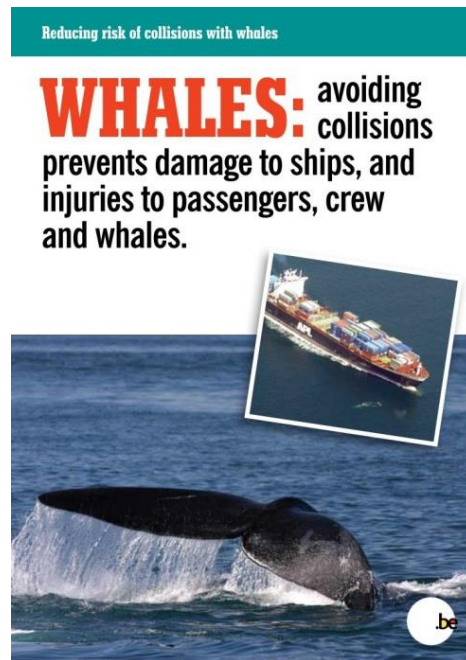


Figure 2: The updated Belgian leaflet (title page, English version).