

SC/66a/BRG/19

Investigation of washed grey whales *Eschrichtius robustus* along Gulf of Crest seashore (northwest Bering Sea) in 2014

A. Vinnikov, P. Tiupelev, V. Sirenko, G. Sirenko, D.
Litovka, S. Zagrebelny



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

**INVESTIGATION OF WASHED GREY WHALES *ESCHRICHTIUS*
ROBUSTUS ALONG GULF OF CREST SEASHORE
(NORTHWESTERN BERING SEA) IN 2014**

A. Vinnikov¹, P. Tiupelev², V. Sirenko³, G. Sirenko³, D. Litovka¹, S. Zagrebelny¹

¹Chukotka branch of FGBNU "TINRO-Center" (Anadyr, Russia) tinro@anadyr.ru

²FGBNU "TINRO-Center" (Vladivostok, Russia)

³FGBUN "Primorsky dolphinarium" (Vladivostok, Russia)

In August of 2014 at the Gulf of Crest (the northwestern Bering Sea) seashore two washed dead Gray Whales were found and examined (Figure). Natives from the nearby Uelkal village has reported about their finding.

The first whale was located 15 km (9.3 miles) NNW of the Uelkal village and was lying in 10 m (33 ft) from the surf strip on its back. It was 8.7 m (28.5 ft) sub-adult male, the measurement "between the tip of the snout to the eye" was 1.74 m (5.7 ft).

The second whale was washed 16 km (9.9 miles) NNW of the Uelkal village and was lying in 40 m (131 ft) from the surf line on its abdomen. It was 12 m (39 ft) adult female, the measurement "between the tip of the snout to the eye" was 2.38 m (7.8 ft).

Both whales were exposed by necrotic decomposition and had numerous bites of seabirds.

Presumably, they died in 2013 and were thrown ashore by a sea storm, and after the ice melting in the spring of 2014 their carcasses were found in the distance from the shoreline.

General examination of the gray whales carcasses shown that killer whales bites/scars, gunshot and harpoon wounds, traces of a fishing gear were not detected. Most likely the death of two whales was due to natural causes.

In 2013, a group of scientists from the Marine Mammal Council (Moscow, Russia) informed about 16 dead gray whales on the Arctic coast of Chukotka, of which 9 were found and reported by Natives from coastal villages. None of the bodies had traces of the whaling, so it was not 'struck & lost whales', and whales died also by some natural causes. Previously it was assumed that the natural death rate of the gray whale can be up to 5-6% from the population number. The reasons of the gray whale natural deaths in Chukotka waters will be discovered. ChukotTINRO scientists asked Chukotka Natives to report about every findings of dead whales for their scientific examination.



Figure - Gray whale carcasses found and examined at the Gulf of Crest (the northwestern Bering Sea) seashore in 2014. A - 8.7 m male; B - 12 m female