



Ref: PN1505

15 September 2015



Image: CINMS/NOAA

**Accessible, user-friendly and key to understanding
vessel/whale collisions:
the new-look IWC Ship Strikes Database**

The IWC today launches the second generation of a global database that plays a leading role in work to quantify, analyse, and ultimately prevent collisions between vessels and whales.

Increased accessibility and a more user-friendly interface are key enhancements to the system, which was first introduced in 2009 as the only global database. It now holds records of around 1,200 collisions, with a steady stream of new reports.

Collecting accurate data on ship strikes is notoriously difficult. Collisions between large vessels and whales often go unnoticed or unreported unless the animal happens to become lodged and carried into port on the bow of a ship, or strands with obvious strike injuries. Even then it's not always possible to determine where and when the whale was struck, or if it was already dead when hit.

Large ships pose the greatest risk to whales but it's an issue for all vessel types. The consequences for smaller craft can be just as serious as for the whale, with several vessel losses and even human fatalities reported. A number of IWC initiatives have raised awareness of the issue across the shipping, cruise and yacht racing sectors, providing information mapping areas where whales are known to gather, and helping ocean users to anticipate likely whale behaviours.

Since its launch in 2009, the IWC has promoted the database to coastal communities and interest groups, as well as a wide variety of ocean users and marine mammal scientists. Their feedback has been central to development of the upgraded version. The database is now easier to use online or from a smart phone, which makes it quick and simple to report a collision immediately, when details are fresh. The interface has been redesigned, also aiming to improve ease and speed of use, whilst still seeking the same detailed information required by scientists who will verify and analyse every record.

Explaining the long-term aim of the programme, Simone Panigada, one of the IWC Database Co-ordinators said:

“It’s in everyone’s interests to reduce the number of ship strikes. We can only do this by collaboration, sharing information and building a better understanding of where and when collisions occur.”

Fellow database co-ordinator, Fabian Ritter, added:

“This information will allow us to map incident ‘hot spots’ and work together to develop targeted, practical and cost-effective mitigation measures to minimise the number of collisions and make the oceans safer for both whales and humans.”

Technical tools that alert mariners to whales are being tested, but so far none has proven to be an applicable solution. To date, the only effective mitigation measures are slowing down vessels or re-routing traffic away from known whale concentrations. As a more comprehensive and verified database is developed, scientists should gain a better understanding of where and when such measures should be targeted, in order to provide the best possible advice to ocean users.

Notes to Editors:

- You can access the 2015 Ship Strikes database [here](#).
- For more images and information please contact kate.wilson@iwc.int.