

SC/66b/HIM/02

4th Progress Report on IWC Ship Strike Data Coordination May 2016

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INTERNATIONAL
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BACKGROUND

The primary objective of the data coordinators 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 focuses on work identified by workshops on this issue organized over the last few years and the recommendation of the Scientific Committee for ship strikes co-ordinators, as endorsed by the Conservation Committee and the Commission in 2012. Tasks to be considered also derive from the report of the IWC Scientific Committee and in particular from the discussions in the Non-deliberate human-induced mortality of large whales (HIM) working group.

The tasks assigned to the ship strikes coordinators are appended to this document. This report summarizes the fourth term of work carried out by the IWC ship strike data coordinators between May 2015 and May 2016. Some of the work carried out and presented in this report represents a continuation of the activities started three years ago, including updates and improvements. The IWC SC in 2015 recommended that priority over the coming year should be given to data entry and validation, and this indeed became a main focus of our work, as specified below.

SUMMARY

The activities carried out in the past 12 months resulted in a variety of outreach actions, with further contacts being established, including the follow-up on every requests sent by potential data providers. Significant effort has been dedicated to increasing the user friendliness, as well as the technical functioning of the IWC ship strike database, which has now been profoundly renewed. In close contact with the database developers we were testing and assessing new functionalities, such as those related to the process of data review, the option to bulk upload data and the specifications of database fields, etc.

Special attention has been given to populating the global ship strikes database established by the Commission with new entries and to starting the data review process.

As of 30th May 2016, the database held a total of 1151 incidents, both historical and recent. Since the 1st of May 2015, 51 new reports have been submitted, including some near miss events. A number of entries were realized by the data co-ordinators, but an increasing number also stemmed from the public, including scientists working in the field.

The coordinators also engaged with the Data Review Group (DRG) to streamline the process of classifying cases. Following a meeting of the DRG during IWC SC65b in Bled to lay out working

procedures of the group, new functions have been implemented in the database backend and the review process has now started. Over the last few months, a number of reports have been reviewed by the DRG.

Contacts with the ACCOBAMS and the Pelagos Sanctuary Executive Secretariats as well as ASCOBANS have been maintained to discuss possible synergies in assessing and mitigating ship strikes, and a variety of boating/shipping and maritime organisations were contacted.

A substantive document on the IWC's work on ship strikes has been submitted to the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) in April 2016.

As usual a number of inquiries about the database were received, and we provided relevant literature, general information as well as specific advice.

The Power Point presentation on ship strikes and the role of the IWC and the IWC info banner were presented at three international conferences and two expert workshops.

A summary of the work of the data-coordinators will be presented to the Conservation Committee (CC) at its biennial meeting in Portoroz (SLOVEnia) in October 2016.

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.

The coordinators are in contact with Australia and United States to make sure there is 100% compatibility between national databases and the IWC one and to facilitate bulk uploads of present records from one database to the other.

(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.

A number of inquiries about the ship strike issue are received every year, including agencies, the maritime industry and scientists. We have been regularly answering emails, providing relevant literature and general information, as well as specific advice how to use the ship strike database.

A fourth message to MARMAM and ECS-TALK email lists has been sent, describing the role of the ship coordinators and reiterating the need to increase public awareness about and use of the database, and to trigger data submission from the cetological community.

(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.

During SC65a on Jeju (Korea, 32013), the SC agreed on criteria to classify ship strike cases on the basis of newest scientific findings and recent publications. These criteria are now being applied during the evaluation of reports through the Data Review Group.

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

Current email lists and other sources are being kept under supervision for new publications or reports regarding ship strikes; several authors were contacted and motivated to enter cases directly into the database or provide raw data on collisions.

(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.

Routinely, we re following up on press & internet reports about collisions to identify details about the cases described. This resulted in a number of new incidents being entered into the database, both recent and historical.

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;*

Contacts with the ACCOBAMS and PELAGOS Executive and Permanent Secretaries are held on regular basis, either via email or by participating to Scientific Committee meetings or Meeting of Parties. In particular, the need to provide data to the IWC database on ship strikes has been stressed both at the Technical and Scientific Committee of the Pelagos Sanctuary and ACCOBAMS. In addition, the IWC data-base and the need to provide data are highlighted in a draft resolution on ship strikes which will be discussed and adopted by the ACCOBAMS Meeting of Parties in November 2016 and are included in the Pelagos Sanctuary work-programme for the next biennium (2016-2017). Moreover, the database was presented during a dedicated workshop on strandings, organized in Genoa by the Italian Stranding Network; all veterinarians present were informed on the database and IWC's effort on ship strikes.

A similar liaison is maintained with ASCOBANS (see also below).

(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.*

During 2016, an increasing number of reports to the database were registered, including from scientist working in the field. These reports were thoroughly checked and a message was sent to the reporting person to request additional information and/or clarification in some cases.

(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;*

The coordinators have been regularly in touch with the IWC communication officer and submitted a number of suggestions how the website section could be adapted. This dialogue is on-going.

A press release on the relaunch of the database and email exchanges has been produced in collaboration with the IWC communication officer.

- *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;*

One of the coordinators participated in the ASCOBANS AC meeting in The Hague (September 2015) to present on the issue of ship strikes and to envision ways for a closer collaboration between IWC and ASCOBANS.

The IWC ship strike banner and the latest edition of the Belgian leaflet have been presented and distributed at the SMM Biennial Conference and the ECS annual Conference, as well as the Progress in Marine Conservation in Europe (PMCE) conference (see photos on p. 9).

Likewise, the IWC Power Point presentation on ship strikes was shown at several occasions during the Annual Conference of the ECS, at the SMM Biennial and the PMCE conferences (see also below).

One coordinator participated remotely in a meeting of the Working Group on Ship Strikes in the Canary Islands (July 2015), describing the role of IWC and reinforcing the willingness of the organization to co-operate with the Working Group. Members of that working group were met at the ECS conference in March 2016 to discuss the current state of play and further collaboration.

Regular contacts between the coordinators and various NGOs repeatedly also involved discussions about ship strikes and IWC's ongoing work.

Furthermore, several boating/shipping and maritime organisations were contacted, such as the World Shipping Council (WSC), Sailors for the Sea and the Maritime Academy at Linnaeus University (Sweden).

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

The ASCOBANS Secretary was met during the Advisory Committee meeting in The Hague (September 2015).

Contacts with the ACCOBAMS and the Pelagos Sanctuary Executive Secretariats have been regularly maintained to discuss possible synergies in assessing and mitigating ship strikes. Emphasis was laid on facilitating tests of the REPCET system as an alerting tool for ship strikes, helping to reach an adequate number of ships equipped with the system to allow robust statistical evaluation. Similar effort has been accomplished within the Technical and Scientific Committee of the Pelagos Sanctuary held in Genova in May 2015 (see also above). One coordinator - representing ACCOBAMS - has also participated to the First meeting of the CMS Sessional Committee (18-21 April 2016) in Bonn (Germany) and has discussed links to strengthen collaboration.

During previous discussions of the Conservation Committee, Scientific Committee and Commission it was agreed that a document on the IWC's work on ship strikes be submitted to the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC). In response, a document was submitted to MEPC69 (London, 18-21 April 2016) called 'Information on recent outcomes regarding minimizing ship strikes to cetaceans' (MEPC 60/10/3). The paper draws attention to work by the IWC on the issue including identification of high risk areas and potential mitigation measures and the collection of data through the IWC ship strike database. The MEPC noted the information in the IWC paper and encouraged member Governments to make mariners and authorities aware of the need to report any incidents to the IWC database.

(6) Provide an annual update to Scientific Committee.

(This report)

(7) Consider developing PowerPoint presentations/posters for use at workshops, symposia, conferences, etc.

In collaboration with the German based NGO M.E.E.R., a Power Point presentation on ship strikes for crew and staff had been developed. This presentation titled 'Ship Strikes: How to Mitigate a Problem With Many Unknowns', provides an introduction to the issue. It includes an overview of the technical, operational, legal and educational mitigating actions currently in place or being discussed. The presentation also highlights the role of the IWC and its global database (see also below).

Additionally, three copies of the IWC ship strike display banner are ready to be displayed at various events (see below).

(8) Consider presenting information at specific conferences (e.g. ECS, SMM etc.).

The info banner has been displayed at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Marine Mammalogy (San Francisco, December 2015) where the banner has been hosted at the NOAA stand. The banner has also been presented during the ECS conference in Madeira (Portugal, March 2016).

The Power Point presentation (PPT) has been presented at the ECS conference several times: Full versions were presented to the workshops “*Conserving Cetaceans in the Seas Around Europe Through Synergy-building Between the Relevant Legislative Frameworks*” and “*Anthropogenic threats to marine mammals of the Mediterranean Sea*” and a shortened (10 minutes) version was included in the conference oral program within a newly established “FOR INFO” session. Moreover, the PPT was part of the regular program of the Progress in Marine Conservation in Europe (PMCE) conference (Stralsund, Germany September 2015, see photos on p. 9).

Thus, a large international audience was informed about the work carried out by the IWC on this issue.

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.

A thorough review of the structure and design of the database had been undertaken and according changes had been incorporated into the new version of the database. The technical functioning of the database thus has been substantially enhanced, on the basis of the newest technical solutions available. The new system has incorporated a number of details and functionalities to achieve maximum user friendliness, both for the general public as well as the administrators. Also, and for the first time, special functions were incorporated to facilitate the work of the Data Review Group.

(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

A total of 51 new reports of collisions between vessels and cetaceans have been entered since May 1st 2015. This is a comparatively high number, especially as a number of new reports came from the public and interested researchers. This underlines the effectiveness of the work accomplished during the past years.

(4) Work with Data Review Group to ensure that all new records are appropriately reviewed including identification of potential duplicate reports.

The coordinators engaged with the Data Review Group (DRG) so as to start and streamline the evaluation process. Over the last few months, a number of reports (including recent and

historical incidents) have been reviewed by the Group in order to classify cases following the categories approved during SC65a in 2013.

A meeting of the DRG is planned for IWC SC66b in Bled, to lay out working procedures of the Group, as well as the validation of the new database technical system and how to implement missing functions.

One missing piece still is the finalisation of a tool to bulk upload data to the database. Several according trials have been conducted and a technical solution thus seems close. With this option implemented, it will be possible to upload several hundred more reports to the database, stemming from different sources.

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Appendix 1: Description of tasks of ship strike data coordinators

(green/grey fonts: issues that have been tackled so far or are under development)

(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.*

Photos from various events where IWC's effort on ship strikes was presented 2015/16.



IWC ship strike banner presented at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Marine Mammalogy in San Francisco, December 2015), at the NOAA stand.



IWC ship strike banner & Belgian leaflets presented at the Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society on Madeira, March 2016.



PPT presentation at the PCME conference in Stralsund, September 2015.



PPT presentation at the Annual conference of the European Cetacean Society on Madeira, March 2016.