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SB/JAC/32174
21 July 2016

Circular Communication to Commissioners and Contracting Governments

IWC.CCG.1217

Invitation to report on follow up to IWC workshop “Euthanasia Protocols to Optimize Welfare Concerns for Stranded Cetaceans”

Circular IWC.CCG.1214 of 15 July 2016 provided the Draft Agenda for the forthcoming meeting of the Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Welfare Issues (WG WKMWI) on Thursday 20 October 2016.

The purpose of this Communication is to invite Contracting Governments to report on progress to implement the recommendations of the IWC Workshop on “Euthanasia Protocols to Optimize Welfare Concerns for Stranded Cetaceans”, held in London, 11-13 September 2013. The workshop recommendations are given below for reference and the full report can be found at:

<https://archive.iwc.int/?r=3469>

Any reports received will be discussed under Item 3 of the WG WKMWI agenda on 20 October 2016.

Contracting Governments wishing to provide a report at this meeting are invited to inform the Secretariat at Secretariat@iwc.int by 31 August 2016.

Recommendations of the IWC Workshop on “Euthanasia Protocols to Optimize Welfare Concerns for Stranded Cetaceans”.

1. The workshop stresses that human safety should always be considered paramount.
2. The workshop recommended that the humaneness should be the first criteria for any euthanasia method, rather than concerns over aesthetics or public acceptance, although also important in the bigger picture when managing euthanasia. A humane death will often involve the very shortest time to death, but not always if pre-sedation is undertaken to provide anxiolysis and analgesia (AVMA 2013). Other criteria for the chosen method of euthanasia include availability of equipment and drugs, existing knowledge/expertise, and relevant legal/regulatory framework (including cultural, political, aboriginal, socioeconomic differences between countries).
3. The workshop recommended several chemical and physical techniques for euthanasia of large beached whales, including chemical sedation followed by potassium chloride (KCl) intra-cardiac injection for baleen whales (Harms et al 2014) and high calibre ballistics and explosives (cranial implosion technique) (Coughran et al 2012) for baleen and sperm whales.

4. The workshop strongly recommends that euthanasia of cetaceans should not be conducted by untrained personnel, as this may endanger humans and increase the suffering of the animals.
5. The workshop recommended that in order to ensure the safety of response personnel, attempts at euthanasia of beached whales should not be conducted when a whale is in surf and should be conducted only when a whale has been stabilized or is above the tide line.
6. All euthanasia methods should be tested on dead animals first, to develop methodological expertise and obtain correct anatomical knowledge (e.g. via necropsies on strandings).
7. The workshop recommended that for chemical methods, removal of the injection site to limit risk of disposal and potential for relay toxicity is a minimum requirement. Where barbiturates have been used, the entire carcass should be disposed of where scavengers cannot access it.
8. The workshop recommends that IWC member nations refine existing or develop new incident response protocols based on the principles and guidelines found in this report.
9. The Workshop recommends, for each event, the collection of appropriate data, full documentation of the event and the sharing of experiences/data to refine decisions and situation handling in the future. This process should include information on both successes and failures; the latter can be extremely informative in developing improvements and preventing mistakes being repeated.
10. The workshop recommends the addition of a number of 'outcome' fields to the existing IWC National Progress report database for live strandings: released/rescued; euthanized (method categories as in Table 3); no intervention.
11. The Workshop noted the value of establishing a voluntary group of experts (contact list) that can be consulted by the IWC and others to: (1) provide advice on euthanasia protocols and methods to relevant authorities; (2) provide objective information to the media if requested and (3) assist the IWC Secretariat in populating the IWC website. The Workshop recommends that this list be maintained by the IWC Secretariat.
12. The Workshop noted the great potential of the IWC to facilitate work on live strandings and euthanasia techniques, similar to the approach developed for disentanglement (IWC, 2013). It therefore recommends the establishment of a live stranding response component of the IWC website with a layered capacity. It also encourages IWC countries to facilitate the exchange of information, expertise, technology and training.
13. With respect to data gaps, the workshop agrees that more work is needed on the environmental persistence and potential effects of some chemical methods and encourages this research and provision of information. The Workshop notes the importance of composting as a safe and environmentally positive means of disposal of cetacean carcasses and it encourages national and local authorities to facilitate this method of disposal where appropriate.
14. The Workshop recognised the effectiveness of penthrite grenades and encourages the development of a darting-gun type delivery system that it is suitable for beached animals and may also be appropriate for entangled whales at sea. It requests that a progress report on this topic is provided to the 2014 Annual Meeting of the IWC.
15. Related to this, the Workshop endorses a previous Workshop recommendation (IWC, 2012) concerning the need to develop methods for euthanasia of cetaceans at sea (entangled or otherwise requiring human intervention). It agrees that this may be facilitated by the holding of a future technical Workshop and requests that this be considered further at the 2014 Annual Meeting.
16. At several places in this report, the Workshop highlighted difficulties with mass stranding events. It therefore recommends that the IWC consider holding or facilitating the holding of a future Workshop on mass stranding events, including management, social, welfare and euthanasia considerations



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