

# SC/68B/HIM/10

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## 8th Progress Report on IWC Ship Strike Data Coordination May 2020

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data coordinators)



INTERNATIONAL  
WHALING COMMISSION

## **8<sup>th</sup> Progress Report on IWC Ship Strike Data Coordination – May 2020**

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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 vessels colliding with cetaceans. In particular, it focuses on work identified by workshops on this issue 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 from the discussions in the 'non-deliberate human-induced mortality of large whales (HIM)' working group.

As usual, the tasks assigned to the ship strikes coordinators are appended to this document. This report summarizes the eight term of work carried out by the IWC ship strike data coordinators between May 2019 and April 2020. Some of the work represents a continuation of the activities started six years ago, including updates and improvements. The IWC SC in 2016 recommended that priority over the coming year should be given to data validation, and this indeed became the main focus of our work over the last three years, as specified below. It can be expected that this report will be the last on of the ship strike co-ordinators, as they main task has been completed and all the records contained in the on-line data-base has been duly validated.

### **SUMMARY**

The activities carried out in the past 12 months resulted in a variety of outreach actions, including the follow-up on requests sent by potential data providers. As recommended by the SC, strong focus has been given to continue and intensify the data review process, while keeping the global ship strikes database updated with new entries and by making sure that every existing record receives the needed attention during the assessment process.

The Data Coordinators, with consultation of the Data Review Group (DRG) have now completed this review process. Several hundreds of reports have been assessed and assigned a case number and, wherever possible, also final category. Thus, all available reports are now listed as cases (n=933) in the data-base.

Since 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2019, more than 250 new reports have been submitted to the ship strike data base.

The usual 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. There is an ongoing project funded by the Pelagos Agreement on ship strikes in the Pelagos Sanctuary and this will be carried out by a team of international scientists till September 2020.

Through a collaboration between the IWC and the Galway-Mayo Institute for Technology (GMIT), the IWC was able to secure services by student Christina Winkler to populate the data base. Her efforts made it possible to complement the existing data with a large number of ship strike incidents. Another aim was to produce an updated summary and statistical analysis of the complete data set held the ship strike data base. This summary can be found in paper SCXX/XX.

Two IWC info banners on ship strikes were presented during the World Marine Mammal Conference in Barcelona in December 2019.

## 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 via the Secretariat have been in contact with Australia and United States to facilitate bulk uploads of present records from one database to the other. The IWC is still waiting these records to be provided, in order to classify all records from the US and Australia. The provision of the US data still is a priority to further advance the review process, especially as a larger number of US cases reviewed by the coordinators and the DRG were not classified because it was assumed that the original records hold greater detail of information.

This matter has had priority for the last 12 months and despite several attempts to move this forward, we are still in a stand-by situation; without this the task of the ship strikes coordinators cannot not be fully completed. We **recommend** that the IWC Secretariat will accomplish this in the nearest future.

Through a collaboration between the IWC and the Galway-Mayo Institute for Technology (GMIT), the IWC was able to secure services by student Christina Winkler to populate the data base. Her efforts made it possible to complement the existing data with a large number of ship strike incidents that were previously held as a back-lash by one of the Data Coordinators. A total of 234 additional reports thus were entered manually into the data base.

*(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 systematically 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.

*(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, 2013), the SC agreed on criteria to classify ship strike cases on the basis of newest scientific findings and recent publications. Over the past years, these criteria have been applied during the evaluation of reports by the Data Coordinators with the help and support of 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; authors were 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, the Data Coordinators are following up on press & internet reports about collisions (which are received *inter alia* through a *Google Alert*) 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;*

The Data Coordinators over the past years regularly received requests for an updated summary on the available data on-line (the existing one stems from 2010). In May 2020, we are now in a position to provide such an updated summary, which will contain an analysis of all data held in the data base as of April 2020 (see paper SCXX/XX). The updated summary is a collaboration between the IWC and the Galway-Mayo Institute for Technology (GMIT), Ireland. Through a contract with the GMIT, the IWC was able to secure services by student Christina Winkler, beginning in December 2019. The aim was to produce an updated summary and statistical analysis of the complete (and reviewed) data held in the data base while Ms Winkler at the same time prepared her bachelor thesis for the study of Applied Freshwater & Marine Biology, under the supervision of Sinead Murphy, Ph.D, as well as the Data Coordinators. The results can be found in document SCXX/XX.

We would like to stress, though, that the analyses will need to be considered as incomplete, as the data sets from the Australian and the United States regional data bases are still missing.

- *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 resolution on ship strikes, which has been adopted by the 7<sup>th</sup> ACCOBAMS Meeting of Parties in November 2019. This has also been reiterated and included in the Pelagos Sanctuary work-programme for the next biennium (2020-2021).

A project titled 'Proposal to develop and evaluate mitigation strategies to reduce the risk of ship strikes to fin and sperm whales in the Pelagos Sanctuary' has been funded by the Pelagos Agreement in April 2018 and will be carried out till September 2020. This project will draw on the extensive experience of a number of groups in a collaboration to gather new data, provide a spatial analysis of ship strike risk, to define operational indicators and to quantitatively evaluate mitigation strategies. This will result in practical recommendations for a range of options including for optimising the effectiveness of current schemes, such as REPCET.

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

*(2) Monitor and respond to emails addressed to the [shipstrikes@iwcoffice.org](mailto: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 2018-2020, an increasing number of new reports to the database were registered, including from scientist working in the field. All new reports were reviewed 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 in touch with the IWC communication officer and the dialogue is on-going.

- *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;*

Regular contacts between the coordinators and various NGOs are maintained, involving discussions about ship strikes and IWC's ongoing effort. Additionally, two IWC info banners on ship strikes were presented during the World Marine Mammal Conference in Barcelona in December 2019 (see Figure 1 on page 7).

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

ASCOBANS and the IWC are in regular contact on ship strike issues. Further work and a closer collaboration between IWC and ASCOBANS have now been established. During its annual meeting in Stralsund (Germany) in October 2019, the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee was informed about the state of play with the IWC data base.

Contacts with the ACCOBAMS and the Pelagos Sanctuary Executive Secretariats were maintained to discuss possible synergies in assessing and mitigating ship strikes, and boating/shipping and maritime organisations were contacted (see also above).

*(6) Provide an annual update to Scientific Committee.*

(This report)

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

(No new development)

### **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.*

During the review process by the Data Coordinators and through the collaboration with the GMIT to produce an updated summary (see above), a number of issues arose concerning the data format in the data base. These included problems that originated from the import of the data from the old (pre-2015) to the current data base system. These issues were discussed and partly solved through a series of virtual meetings with the Secretariat early 2020. Some of the issues remain and are currently being dealt with so as to guarantee the optimum functioning of the data base and to solve any remaining issues with the data.

*(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 around 250 new reports of collisions between vessels and cetaceans have been entered since May 1<sup>st</sup> 2019. The great majority of those resulted from the co-operation between IWC and GMIT described above.

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

The coordinators have been engaging with the Data Review Group (DRG) to complete the evaluation process, which has started and was streamlined in 2016-2017. Over the last year, all remaining reports (including recent and historical incidents) have been reviewed in order to classify cases following the criteria approved during SC65a in 2013. Thus, a total of 1,162 reports are currently held in the data base, which resulted in a total of 933 cases.

Following a meeting of the Data Review Group (DRG) during IWC SC66b in Bled to lay out working procedures of the group, new functions have been implemented in the database back-end and the review process has now been carried out during the past four years. The Data Coordinators, with the support from the DRG, classified cases using the categories approved during SC65a in 2013, following the same procedure described in previous reports.

One missing piece still is the finalisation of a tool to bulk upload data to the database. Several according trials had been conducted. With this option implemented, it will be possible to upload a great number of reports to the database, stemming from different sources such as the US and AUS regional data sets. We **renew our recommendation** that this tool is being developed as soon as possible.

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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](mailto: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.*



**Figure 1:** The IWC ship strike banner presented at the World Marine Mammal Conference (WMMC) in Barcelona, Spain in December 2019.