

Republic of Korea Voluntary National Cetacean Conservation Report, 2022

**Submitted by the Government of Republic of Korea to the Conservation Committee
at the 68th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission**

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1. Legal Mechanisms

1.1 The Conservation and Management of Marine Ecosystems Act

In accordance with the *Conservation and Management of Marine Ecosystems Act*, Republic of Korea designates marine organisms under protection, when species are remarkably decreasing or internationally high worthy of protection. The *Act* prohibits the catch of marine organisms under protection, unless authorized for limited purposes such as restore. Currently, Korea designated 13 Cetacean species under protection such as gray whale, Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin.

1.2 The Public Notice on Conservation and Management of Cetacean Resources

Korea legislated *Public Notice on Conservation and Management of Cetacean Resources* to effectively conserve the Cetacean to comply with the international norms and thereby contributing to the conservation of marine ecosystem. According to this *Public Notice*, Cetacean catch is prohibited except for limited purposes such as rescue, treatment. When a bycaught, stranded, or adrift Cetacean is discovered, it must be immediately reported to the Korea Coast Guard.

1.3 Others

Korea sets legal mechanisms that regulate Cetacean catch and bycatch during the fishing activities as below:

- *Enforcement Rules of Distant Water Fisheries Development Act* requires fishing entities to immediate release of marine mammals when bycaught and implement Bycatch Reduction Measures.
- *Public Notice Concerning the Implementation of the UN Resolution on Deep Sea Fisheries on the High Seas* was enacted to protect marine ecosystem particularly in areas not covered by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations. The *Public Notice* regulates fishing entities to establish and implement bycatch reduction measures on marine mammals and immediate release when bycatch.

- *Enforcement Decree of the Fisheries Act* is planned to be amended to enforce reporting obligations to fishing vessels in the coastal area when a Cetacean is bycaught.

2. Measures to Reduce Bycatch

2.1 Research

Korea has been committed to implementing bycatch reduction measures through developing and distributing fishing gears designed to reduce bycatch. Currently, distributing escape devices across the coastal stow net fisheries is being carried forward. Moreover, non-impact and non-explosive acoustic devices designed to deter marine mammals from approaching gill nets or trawling gear are under research.

2.2 Management Measures

Korea has strengthened management measures on Cetacean bycatch through prohibiting sales of stranded and adrift Cetacean.

Education and training to fishing entities, local governments, governmental officials, and Maritime police also have been strengthened regarding the reporting systems and rescue measures for cetacean. Capacity building is also being implemented to rescue and cure centers specialized in marine mammals.

“Marine Mammal Release Manual for Offshore and Coastal Fisheries” has been developed and distributed for fishing entities, which stipulates safe-release measures according to fishing gears such as set-net, gill net, etc.

In addition, the *Distant Water Fisheries Development Act* fulfills to comply with the conservation and management measures of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) by setting regulatory measures, such as restrictions on port entry and departure, suspension of fishing operations, and penalty fine when contravening measures adopted by RFMOs.

3. Management Measures to Address Marine Debris

Marine debris poses serious threat to Cetacean as it causes entanglement, ghost-fishing and depletion of marine ecosystem. In this regard, Korea puts best efforts to conserve Cetacean by addressing marine debris issue.

Korea has developed biodegradable fishing gear that could be naturally degraded in the water. Korea is planning to gradually increase the distribution of biodegradable gear, and target to obligate the implementation of utilizing biodegradable gear in gill nets and traps.

Korea takes life cycle approach to tackle marine debris by preventing additional debris increasing, effectively collecting the debris and facilitating recycle. Korea established *Marine Debris Framework Plan 2021-2030* under the vision of achieving Marine Plastic Zero by 2050. Korea also established National Marine Debris Management Committee to facilitate active discussion on marine waste issues among related governments.

Moreover, *Adopt-a-Beach Program* is implemented to raise public awareness and involvement in marine waste reduction. This program encourages institutions and local communities to look after the beach which would be adopted by the preferences of program participants. Since 2020, 72 institutions have adopted their beach and continuously been engaging in beach cleaning activities.

Especially in September 2022, Korea hosted the 7th International Marine Debris Conference, where enabled over 800 presentations taken and promoted in-depth discussion on marine debris issues.

4. Whale Watching

In Korea, whale watching activities are being operated in Jeju Island for Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin. The Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries has been developing the *Guidelines for Watching Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin*, taking suggestions of NGOs and experts into consideration. Specifically, it stipulates differential speed limits depending on the distance between the vessel and the dolphins. If the vessel is within the distance of 50 to 300m from dolphin, the vessel must stop the screw of the vessel, and the vessel shall not approach the dolphin within the 50m distance. Compliance of the *Guidelines* is examined by eco-tourism experts and civil society participating in 'eco-keeper program.' Meanwhile, the government is in process to amend the *Marine Ecosystems Act* to prohibit disturbance of migration and feeding, and any actions interfering the habitat of marine organisms under protection during the watching activities.