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## Introduction

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This supplement to the *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management* contains the report of the 1998 Annual Meeting of the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). The meeting was held in Muscat, Oman, from 27 April-9 May 1998 and was attended by over 115 participants (including some 30 invited participants); 22 member nations were represented. Several major topic areas were considered.

Discussion of the Revised Management Procedure for baleen whales (RMP) centred on: consideration of the software used; general issues regarding abundance estimation; the development of *Implementation Simulation Trials* for North Pacific minke whales and Bryde's whales; and further consideration of abundance estimates for the North Atlantic minke whales. General questions of data access and availability were addressed that are of relevance to many aspects of the Committee's work. The Committee also reviewed the final specification for the RMP and made a small number of clarifications to the wording.

The IWC has placed high priority on the development of a management procedure for aboriginal subsistence whaling (AWMP). Given the results so far, a likely potential scenario is that the Commission might establish an Aboriginal Whaling Scheme that comprises the scientific and logistical (e.g. inspection/observation) aspects of the management of all aboriginal fisheries. Within this, the scientific component might comprise some general aspects common to all fisheries (e.g. guidelines and requirements for surveys and for data c.f. the RMP) and an overall AWMP within which there will be common components and case-specific components.

Current aboriginal subsistence whaling operations were reviewed by the Committee, especially the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas Stock of bowhead whales. In addition, the need for the development of a cooperative research programme for the Greenlandic stocks of fin and minke whales subject to aboriginal subsistence whaling was identified.

The Committee also considered the results of a Workshop held on the status of right whales. Whilst certain populations in the Southern Hemisphere, although still depleted, are increasing, the same is not true for the Northern Hemisphere, where there is no evidence of increase. A series of management and research recommendations were made.

The IWC has a major research initiative in the Antarctic (SOWER - Southern Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research Programme) with two main components, one concerning the abundance estimation of minke whales and other baleen whales south of 60°S, and the second concerning the status of Southern Hemisphere blue whales. The initial component of this latter component involves the development of methods to identify pygmy blue whales from true blue whales at sea.

In recent years, the Committee has increased its interest in the relationship between cetaceans and their environment. Two major research initiatives are underway. One concerns the effects of pollutants on cetaceans, and will be called POLLUTION 2000+. The other concerns the influence of temporal and spatial variability in the physical and biological Antarctic environment on the distribution, abundance and migration of whales. The latter, called SOWER 2000, will be undertaken in cooperation with SO-GLOBEC and CCAMLR.

In its consideration of small cetaceans, the Committee concentrated on a review of species in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, with special reference to the Middle East. It also gave further consideration to the criteria used for assessing the status of harbour porpoise populations.

The Committee continued to address scientific issues with respect to whalewatching operations. These included reviewing existing regulations, studies of the effects of different approach distances and platforms; quantitative methods used to assess the short-term reactions of cetaceans; and the basis for judgements of adverse effects.

Other matters considered by the Scientific Committee at the meeting included the review of scientific permits, progress on assessments of sperm whales, humpback whales and other species, and research needs and priorities for future years.

G.P. Donovan  
*Editor*

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