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REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT OF THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

1. The Executive Secretary is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the twentieth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, a report received from the Secretariat of the International Whaling Commission.

2. The report was produced by the Secretariat of the International Whaling Commission and outlines the work of the Commission on cetacean conservation and the sustainable management of whaling, with a brief summary, in annex I, on the status and recovery of large whales. In so doing, it provides updated assessment of progress towards Aichi Biodiversity Targets, in particular Targets 11 and 12.

3. The information is provided in the form and language in which it was received by the Secretariat.

* UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/20/1/Rev.1.

Work of the International Whaling Commission on cetacean conservation and the sustainable management of whaling, with a brief summary on the status and recovery of large whales

Introduction

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) was set up in 1946 under the auspices of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW). The Commission has a membership of 88 Contracting Governments. The ICRW contains an integral Schedule which sets out specific measures that the IWC has collectively decided are necessary in order to regulate whaling and other methods/mechanisms to conserve whale stocks. In addition, the IWC undertakes, co-ordinates and funds conservation work on many species of cetacean.

The work of the Commission and its sub-groups has increasingly considered a wide range of issues that are also addressed by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other biodiversity-related MEAs as well as the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. The IWC is mandated to cooperate with other intergovernmental organisations, including the CBD, on many issues.

This document briefly describes IWC work on the conservation and management of cetaceans and provides some detailed information on the status and recovery of large whales.

1. IWC work on conservation and sustainable management

i) Scientific Research

An important feature of the IWC is the emphasis that it places on scientific advice. Through its Scientific Committee, the IWC undertakes extensive study and research on the status of cetacean populations, develops innovative modelling methods to allow for uncertainty when providing management advice for whaling and other direct removals, evaluates lethal and sub-lethal threats caused by human activities, develops and maintains scientific databases, and publishes its own peer reviewed scientific journal, the *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management.* More information can be found at https://iwc.int/scmain

ii) Regulation of commercial whaling

The IWC is responsible for setting catch limits for commercial whaling. It does this by adjusting the numerical limits as laid out in the Schedule to the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (1946). In 1982 the IWC decided that there should be a pause in commercial whaling on all stocks from the 1985/1986 season onwards. This is often referred to as the commercial whaling moratorium, and it remains in place to date. Countries that take whales commercially, either under objection to the moratorium decision or under reservation to it, establish their own catch limits but provide information on those catches and associated scientific data to the Commission

iii) Aboriginal subsistence whaling (ASW)

IWC objectives for management of aboriginal subsistence whaling are to ensure that hunted whale populations are maintained at (or brought back to) healthy levels, and to enable native people to hunt whales at levels that are appropriate to cultural and nutritional requirements in the long term. The Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Working Group was established in 2011 to consider these and other matters in order to assist the Commission in managing aboriginal subsistence whaling and setting appropriate catch limits. The Scientific Committee provides robust advice on safe removal levels for ASW hunts.

iv) Conservation Management Plans

The IWC introduced Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) (https://iwc.int/conservation-management-plans) as a practical tool to help member nations to coordinate conservation work being undertaken. The CMP approach has thus far been used for southeast Pacific right whales, South Atlantic right whales and gray whales in the western North Pacific. Other populations are being considered for candidate CMPs (e.g. Arabian Sea humpback whales).

v) Sanctuaries

Two Sanctuaries are currently designated by the International Whaling Commission. The Indian Ocean Sanctuary, was established in 1979 and covers the whole of the Indian Ocean south to 55°S.The second was adopted in 1994 and covers the waters of the Southern Ocean around Antarctica. An additional proposal for a Sanctuary in the South Atlantic Ocean has been repeatedly submitted to the Commission in recent years but has, to date, failed to achieve the three-quarters majority of votes needed to become designated by the IWC.

vi) Environmental concerns

'Environmental Concerns' is a long-standing item on the Commission's agenda, and the focus of wide-ranging work by both the Scientific and Conservation Committees. The Scientific Committee's working group on environmental concerns aims to evaluate these potential, usually sub-lethal threats and, where possible, devise suitable mitigation measures. The Conservation Committee works with the Scientific Committee, and with other organisations and policy makers to help deliver the agreed mitigation measures at international, regional and local level. Ongoing work programmes relate to a range of environmental threats including habitat degradation, underwater noise, chemical pollution, marine debris and climate change. Further details of this work, including expert workshop reports and their recommendations can be found at https://iwc.int/environment. The Scientific Committee regularly receives a State of the Cetacean Environment Report which provides a non-technical summary of events and the condition of the marine environment relevant to cetaceans in different regions https://iwc.int/socer.

vii) Direct human impacts

IWC programmes to understand and address human impacts on cetaceans include work on ship strikes, and entanglement (primarily in active and abandoned, lost and discarded (ADLFG) fishing gear). *The IWC entanglement programme* was established in 2011 to address the growing problem of whale entanglement and means to prevent it, including by building a global network of professionally trained and equipped entanglement responders (https://iwc.int/entanglement). Since its first training workshop in 2012 this initiative has reached more than 500 scientists, conservationists and government representatives from over 20 countries. The IWC also provides advice on responsible whalewatching (https://iwc.int/whalewatching) and issues related to strandings, including advice on euthanasia where appropriate (https://iwc.int/strandings).

2) The status and recovery of large whales

With respect to ‘status’, the IWC works towards an understanding of where a population is now compared to where it was originally and where it is expected to be in the future given actual and potential threats. This involves integration of considerable data sources and population modelling. The **summary in Annex 1** below provides only a very short non-technical overview by species and ocean basin. Details and references can be obtained through the IWC Scientific Committee reports and from the Secretariat.

3) Small Cetaceans

The Scientific Committee is also engaged in evaluation of the status of small cetaceans. In the past 16 years, it has reviewed the status of numerous species and populations – from the eastern Mediterranean and Red Seas, to east Asian waters, NW Africa and E tropical Atlantic, Southeast Pacific, Caribbean and Western tropical Atlantic. It has focused on taxonomy, population structure

and status of common dolphins worldwide and of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops* spp.) in the Indo-Pacific region. It reviewed the status of Dall's porpoise taken by the Japanese hand-harpoon fishery, of the Humpback dolphin, the marine populations of Finless porpoise, the Franciscana, Killer whales, Beaked whales of the North Pacific, Northern Indian Ocean, North Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea and freshwater dolphin. Particular attention has been given to the highly endangered Vaquita. Without doubts, bycatch has been identified to be "the" crosscutting threat over species and geographical areas.

Annex 1
Status and recovery of large whales

BLUE WHALES (*Balaenoptera musculus*)
Blue whales in the North Atlantic were heavily exploited. A full assessment of present status has not been carried out. Encouragingly though, the available evidence suggests they are increasing, at least in the area of the central North Atlantic; at present, there are around 1,000 animals off Iceland and several hundred in the Gulf of St Lawrence. They remain rare in the northeastern Atlantic where they were once common.
Blue whales in the North Pacific were again heavily exploited. There are insufficient data available to comment on present status in most parts of the North Pacific although there is evidence of an increase rate of about 3% for the Gulf of California. Blue whales in the eastern and tropical Pacific are thought to number around 3,000.
Blue whales in the Southern Hemisphere were also heavily exploited from their pre-exploitation size of perhaps as many as 300,000. In 1998 they were estimated to number around 2,300 and to be increasing between 2.5% - 8.5% per annum. The IWC is undertaking an assessment of Antarctic blue whales at present. There have been no assessments of the pygmy blue whale sub-species to date.

FIN WHALES (*B. physalus*)
Fin whale populations were exploited throughout the North Atlantic. Present total abundance in the North Atlantic is over 35,000 animals although not all areas have been surveyed. Assessments of the population status in the central North Atlantic and off West Greenland have shown populations there to be in a healthy state. The status of fin whales in other parts of the North Atlantic has not been fully assessed. They are vulnerable to ship strikes in the Mediterranean.
Fin whale populations were exploited throughout the North Pacific. There are insufficient data to undertake an assessment of their present status. However, partial estimates for the eastern North Pacific reveal around 10,000 animals with some evidence of annual increase rates of 4-5%.
Fin whales were heavily exploited in the Southern Hemisphere. There has been no recent assessment of their status. Difficulties with stock structure and abundance render reliable assessment of status unlikely in the near future. It is also not possible to provide a reliable estimate of trend for the fin whale populations summering in the Antarctic, although there is some evidence that they are increasing at a small but unknown rate.

SEI WHALES (*B. borealis*)
Sei whale populations in the North Atlantic were exploited by commercial whaling up until the 1970s; there are insufficient data to undertake an assessment of their present status. Catching has not taken place here since the IWC's moratorium on commercial whaling came into effect in 1986, except under special permits in 1986-9. Surveys reveal little sign of increase of sei whales in the northeastern Atlantic. Exploitation was much less severe in the central North Atlantic; a survey in part of their summer range revealed around 10,500 animals in 1989 since when there have been no catches. Sei whales were heavily exploited off Canada up until the 1970s but no recent abundance estimates are available that cover the range of the stock.
Sei whale populations in the North Pacific were heavily exploited by commercial whaling. Recent surveys indicate current abundance of sei whales in the North Pacific is around 40,000. The IWC is undertaking an assessment of North Pacific sei whales at present.

BRYDE'S WHALES (*B. edeni* but taxonomy review is underway)
Bryde's whales prefer warmer waters and are generally found between around 40°N and 40°S. They have been subject to a shorter and less intensive history of whaling than the other baleen whales and primarily for this reason neither the species itself nor any population is considered endangered. The only region for which sufficient data exist to undertake an assessment is the western North Pacific; the most recent (partial) abundance estimate accepted by the IWC is around 20,500 for the year 2000 but the IWC will be undertaking a thorough reassessment of status and management advice in 2017. Some catches occur. The only other reliable estimate of abundance (around 13,000 in the late 1980s) is for the eastern tropical Pacific.

COMMON MINKE WHALES *(B. acutorostrata)*

Common minke whales were taken in most parts of the North Atlantic and are still caught in some areas but these stocks are in a healthy state. Reliable recent abundance estimates exist for the northeastern and central North Atlantic and off West Greenland; these total over 180,000 animals. A new assessment is underway.

Common minke whales were more heavily hunted in the western North Pacific. Difficulties in determining stock structure make firm conclusions on status difficult. As a species in the western North Pacific it is not endangered but there is concern over the status of the 'J-stock' (or stocks) (whose range includes the Yellow Sea, East China Sea and Sea of Japan) and for which there is considerable bycatch in fishing gear. Abundance estimates for parts of the western North Pacific total over 25,000. The eastern North Pacific has been poorly covered by surveys, but very few catches have ever been reported here.

In the Southern Hemisphere, the dwarf minke whale is believed to be *B. acutorostrata* although possibly a sub-species. It typically occurs from the Equator to the Antarctic but occurs only very rarely at higher latitudes closer to the pack ice. There are no estimates of abundance or trends but the impact catches is thought to be small given the low number of animals taken.

ANTARCTIC MINKE WHALES (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*)

Commercial exploitation of Antarctic minke whales (the smallest of the large whales) began in the early 1970s, much later than the other large whale species. The most recent estimate of total Antarctic minke whale abundance in the surveyed areas south of 60°S is around 515,000 animals and thus they are clearly not endangered. However, there has been an appreciable decline in their estimated abundance between the multi-year circumpolar surveys conducted between 1982/83-1988/89 and 1991/92-2003/04. Work continues to determine whether the appreciable decline represents a real decline in abundance, changes in survey methods, changes in the number of animals available to be sighted due to presence within the ice or some combination of these. The carrying capacity (the maximum population size of the species that the environment can sustain indefinitely) of the Antarctic minke whale is estimated to have changed over time so measures of its status such as population size relative to the (current) carrying capacity are not immediately straightforward to interpret. Inside the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, the Antarctic minke whale has been caught by Japan under special permit, although the levels are not believed to be likely to be the cause of population declines.

HUMPBACK WHALES (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

Humpback whales in the North Atlantic were heavily exploited but, at least in the central and western North Atlantic, have recovered to perhaps pre-exploitation levels and number over 12,000 animals. Less is known of the present or past abundance of humpback whales in the eastern North Atlantic but they are estimated to number almost 5,000 animals in the Norwegian and Barents Seas. There is evidence of increase off West Greenland where limited subsistence catches occur. They are also vulnerable to entanglement.

Humpback whales in the North Pacific were also heavily exploited and again have shown positive increase rates in most areas for which there are data (although abundance in the western North Pacific may be only about 1,000).The present abundance in the total North Pacific is estimated at around 22,000. A full assessment of the status of North Pacific humpback whales has yet to be undertaken.

Humpback whales in the Southern Hemisphere were heavily exploited by commercial whaling primarily from the 1920s-1950s in both their Southern Ocean feeding grounds and in their tropical breeding grounds. Thankfully, in most areas for which there are good data, humpback whales have shown evidence of strong recovery towards their unexploited size (which may have been 75,000-100,000 in total), with annual increase rates of about 10% being recorded in a number of areas including off Australia, Southern Africa and South America. However, there is no evidence of recovery for populations in some areas such as Oceania, where there may be as few as 2,000 animals. The total Southern Hemisphere abundance is probably at least 60,000.

GRAY WHALES (*Eschrichtius robustus)*

There are believed to have been two populations of gray whales, both of which were severely depleted by pre-20th century whaling. They have been protected since the 1930s apart from some subsistence whaling from the eastern North Pacific population which has now recovered to around its pre-exploitation level. The most recent estimate of abundance was around 21,000 animals in 2011.
By contrast the situation for the western North Pacific population is unknown. The only known feeding area there, off Sakhalin Island, may contain a mixture of western and eastern animals. Only around 180 gray whales regularly feed there but the numbers are increasing at around 4%. Primary threats revolve around entanglement and oil and gas related activities.

BOWHEAD WHALES (*Balaena mysticetus*)
The bowhead whale is an Arctic species. It was very heavily exploited by pre-20th century whaling but at least two stocks are in a healthy state. The Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas stock numbered over 10,500 in 2001 and has been increasing at an annual rate of over 3% since 1978 when reliable census data were first collected; it may be approaching pre-exploitation levels. The most recent estimate in 2011 was nearing 17,000 animals.
The eastern Arctic-West Greenland population numbers well over 3,500. There are no good estimates of abundance for the Spitsbergen and Okhotsk Sea stocks but they have shown no signs of significant recovery.

NORTH PACIFIC RIGHT WHALES (*Eubalaena japonica)*
The North Pacific right whale was severely depleted by pre-20th century whaling and has shown little signs of recovery. It is one of the most endangered species of large whale. Few abundance estimates exist. There may be several hundred animals in the Sea of Okhotsk feeding grounds. There may be only tens of animals in the eastern North Pacific.

NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALES (*Eubalaena glacialis*)
The North Atlantic right whale was severely depleted by pre-20th century whaling and, like its North Pacific counterpart has shown little signs of recovery in most areas. It is one of the most endangered species of large whale. In the eastern North Atlantic sightings are extremely rare. In the western North Atlantic, the population numbers around 500 with some signs of slow increase. The main threats are entanglement and ship strikes.

SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALES (Eubalaena australis)
Southern right whales were severely depleted by pre-20th century whaling; there may once have been around 70,000-100,000 – there were estimated to be around 14,000 in 2009. The breeding populations of Argentina/Brazil, South Africa and Australia are showing evidence of strong recovery with annual increase rates of 7-8%. Other populations (e.g. off the west coast of South America) have not shown similar signs of increase and remain small.

SPERM WHALES (Physeter macrocephalus)
Sperm whales in all oceans were heavily exploited by whaling. There are no recent estimates of sperm whale abundance that have been accepted by the IWC; their estimation is complicated by their long dive times and behaviour. There have been no recent assessments of their status by the IWC but plans are being developed to do so.

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