

Summary of Workshop on Incidental Catches of Cetaceans 24-25 March 2009 Albert Borschette Conference Centre, Brussels

Rapporteur: Paul Trebilcock

Current Status of the Populations of Cetaceans in European Waters

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee –JNCC- (United Kingdom) gave a presentation on the current status of cetacean populations. This presentation is available on the DG MARE Website for information¹. There was a general consensus from the scientists present that there was still a need to improve knowledge on overall numbers and distribution of cetaceans in European waters.

There was also a need to better understand sub-populations in terms of individual species and spatial distribution.

Although it was felt that data could be improved it was felt that cetacean populations overall were at least stable and in some sub-populations were improving.

Implementation of Reg. 812/2004: Best-practice and Difficulties

Presentations on implementation of Regulation 812/2004 were received from the following:

- * SMRU, United Kingdom
- * Swedish Board of Fisheries, Sweden
- * IFREMER, France
- * Aquastudio Research Institute, Italy
- * Europeche/ACFA

All of these presentations are available on the Commission's website for information².

¹ The presentations of the workshop are available through this link:
http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/meetings_events/events/archives/events_2009/conference_240309_en.htm

² Idem as 1

There was a feeling that this regulation had been rushed in due to a perceived disaster in cetacean populations but it was acknowledged that this perception had changed and that cetacean populations appeared to be relatively stable in most cases.

It was noted that the fishing industry had been active in trialling 'pingers' in a number of Member States. However it was noted that there were a number of problems concerning cost, safety and reliability with currently available 'pingers'.

It was noted that work is ongoing in several Member States focusing on 'pinger' spacing and improving their design to improve reliability and practical handling performance.

General Discussion and Main Conclusions

The workshop was focussed on implementation of the regulation and not on improving or changing the regulation itself, although amendments were not ruled out by the Commission they felt this would be more difficult.

The Commission were clear that there was flexibility already built into the existing regulation and that this flexibility should be explored fully in the first instance.

The following points emerged from the discussions:

- There was a need to improve knowledge on overall numbers and distribution as well as sub-population understanding. It was clear that there was a data and knowledge deficit on cetaceans.
- Need for continuous monitoring as populations were dynamic and constantly changing in terms of numbers and distribution, although it was noted that low by-catch levels in most fisheries make this difficult.
- It was suggested that use should be made of the Data Collection Regulation (DCR) and any other appropriate data collection systems that might provide useful data on cetaceans to gather supplementary data.
- Some from the scientific community felt that there was a need to improve observer programmes.

- It was suggested that to assist in by-catch mitigation there was a need to identify acceptable levels of by-catch by species and area. This would enable management measures to be implemented and adapted accordingly.
- With regard to 'pingers' there was a need for ongoing technical and financial support from the Commission and Member States for further development and improvement of 'pinger' design. The improvement of 'pinger' performance, design and cost were seen as vitally important if fishermen were to use them effectively.
- It was suggested that responsibility should be given back to fishing industry. Each fishery had specific issues regarding cetaceans. Therefore objectives need to be agreed and the industry/scientists should then develop effective management measures.
- It was felt by most present that flexibility in the implementation of the regulation was essential for effective implementation. Working with the fishing industry would offer the best chance of successful mitigation strategies rather than a dictatorial approach which was seen as unproductive.
- Need to improve communication with fishing industry.
- Raise public awareness of efforts made by the fishing industry.
- The fishing industry did not want to catch cetaceans and were willing to explore all mitigation measures.

The Commission explained that it would be producing a full report following the workshop. The report would be reviewed by both the EU Council and Parliament. This report will be available on the Commission's site:

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/meetings_events/events/archives/events_2009/conference_240309_en.htm