

## Annex Q

### Report of the Steering Committee on the Proposed Meeting on Mortality of Cetaceans in Fishing Nets and Traps

W.F. Perrin

The Steering Committee (Perrin, Brownell, Harwood, Kasuya, Arnbom and Braham [vice L. Jones]), members of the local organising committee (DeMaster and Barlow) and others interested met to review progress.

#### BACKGROUND

The Committee last year developed terms of reference for the meeting (*Rep. int. Whal. Commn* 39:153) and recommended that it be funded (*Rep. int. Whal. Commn* 39:63). The Commission approved the meeting in principle but postponed it because of budgetary limitations and a wish to give primary emphasis to immediate needs for the Comprehensive Assessment (*Rep. int. Whal. Commn* 39:27).

#### TIME AND PLACE OF THE MEETING

The group agreed that at least one year of lead time will be required to ensure the participation of the experts and organisations recommended for inclusion and for preparation of invited papers. Further, it was recognised that the meeting would be best postponed until after the 1990 meeting of the Scientific Committee, to minimise conflict with the Comprehensive Assessment and preparations for it. Mid-January 1991 is proposed. Perrin reported that the invitation extended last year by the Southwest Fisheries Center to hold the meeting in La Jolla, California, still stands.

#### FUNDING

The budget for the meeting was estimated last year at £30,000. It was agreed and emphasised that commitment of funds by the Commission must be made this year if the meeting is to be held in January 1991 with adequate lead time.

Arnbom announced that WWF-Sweden has agreed to contribute £5,000 towards the costs of the meeting. It was agreed to continue to seek multinational endorsement and support from other organisations in addition to the IWC. Possibilities suggested included UNEP, FAO, IUCN, IOC, CMS, non-governmental organisations and national agencies such as the US Marine Mammal Commission, US National Marine Fisheries Service, Japan Fisheries Agency and Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service. The group noted that the IUCN Species Survival Commission's Cetacean Specialist Group has recommended that the meeting be held and given it high priority in its current action plan (Perrin, 1988).

#### NEW INFORMATION

The group reviewed substantial new information on incidental kill of cetaceans in gillnets and other fishing gear contained in documents for this meeting and other sources.

At least 15 sperm whales and 101 other cetaceans died in a new gillnet fishery for swordfish in Italian waters during less than three years (SC/41/SM3); the total is possibly much larger, because only a fraction of the area of this fishery was covered by the salvage effort. Darling (1988) reported entanglement of a sperm whale in a gillnet near Hawaii. Heyning reported that a dead adult male sperm whale entangled in gillnetting washed ashore in northern California in 1988. Arnbom reported entanglement of a sperm whale in gillnets in the Azores in 1986 and a humpback whale in a gillnet in the Swedish Baltic in 1984. Sixty-one gray whales, four minke whales, two humpback whales, two unidentified balaenopterid whales and two unidentified large whales were documented as entangled in gillnets along the Southern California coast in the 1980s (SC/41/PS14). Again, the coverage is only partial; for example, although the sample size is very small, extrapolation to the entire area of the fisheries involved yields an estimate of 441 orquals for the period 1980-85. R. Holt reported that the USA Right Whale Recovery Plan (presently in draft form) notes that a large proportion of right whales in the northwest Atlantic show scars thought to be due to fishing gear, including lobster pot lines. Braham reported that 64 humpback whales were entangled in fishing gear off Eastern Canada in 1988; 50 were released alive (*Rep. int. Whal. Commn* 39:189). Over the period 1979-88, 429 were entangled and 81 died. On the US east coast, 20 were entangled between 1975 and 1986 of which 6 died. Off the Pacific coast of Canada and Alaska, 23 were entangled and 1 died during 1984-88. Eight minke whales, four unidentified mysticetes and 3,317 other cetaceans were reported taken incidentally in fishing gear in Japanese waters in 1988 (SC/41/ProgRep Japan). These and other such incidental takes reported by Langelier *et al.* (1988) and in SC/41/SM1, SM23, SM29, ProgReps Australia, Iceland, New Zealand, Sweden and USA, reinforce the conclusion that incidental mortality, especially in gillnets and fish traps, could well be a significant factor for some stocks of whales and should be addressed in an organised and concerted way.

#### REFERENCES

- Darling, J.D. 1988. Working with whales. *Nat. Geogr.* 174(6):886-909.
- Langelier, K.M., Stacey, P.J., Baird, R.W. and Marchetti, R. 1988 : 1987 cetacean strandings in British Columbia. *Proc. Joint Conf. Amer. Assoc. Zoo Vet. and Amer. Wildl. Vet.*, November 6-10, 1988, Toronto, Ontario.
- Perrin, W.F. (compiler). 1988. *Dolphins, Porpoises, and Whales. An Action Plan for the Conservation of Biological Diversity: 1988-1992.* IUCN, Gland, Switzerland, 30pp.