

Recommendation 2.8

on ship collisions

The Scientific Committee has recognised the potential threat of ship collisions to the conservation of some cetacean populations in the ACCOBAMS area, especially of large whales (e.g. CS2/Doc.23). The two species most vulnerable within the area are the fin whale and the sperm whale. This potential threat has been exacerbated by the increase in vessel traffic, including fast ferries, over recent years, throughout the area including within existing sanctuary areas (e.g. the PELAGOS sanctuary). The Committee's recommendations under this topic fall under two headings: assessment of impact at the population level and development of mitigation measures. This work can and should continue in parallel. Matters relating to the fin whale are also relevant to discussions under Recommendation 2.5 (on a fin whale workshop).

Determination of the impact of ship collisions on the most vulnerable populations

Understanding the potential impact of ship collisions requires knowledge of (1) the number of mortalities and (2) the size of the affected populations. With respect to (1) the Committee urges Parties and encourages riparian nations to improve reporting of ship strikes. It also recognises the importance of evidence from both post-mortem information from strandings networks and the ACCOBAMS central database (see Item 4.1.18) and photo-identification studies (photographs may contain evidence of non-lethal encounters with vessels) in this regard and encourages work in this area. With respect to (2) the Committee refers to its recommendation on the importance of baseline information on abundance and distribution (Recommendation 2.9), noting also that for fin whales this forms part of the work of the fin whale workshop (Recommendation 2.5) and for sperm whales it is an important objective of the planned sperm whale cruise (see Item 4.1.11). The potential monitoring value of observations from vessels following regular routes (e.g. ferries) should be investigated further.

Development of effective mitigation measures

Whilst determination of the impact on cetaceans at the population level helps to clarify the priority that mitigation against ship strikes might have in any overall conservation plan, it is in both the interests of cetaceans and shipping companies that ship strikes be minimised towards zero. This will require research (initially focussing on fin and sperm whales) at a number of related levels and should include consideration of existing research and management actions from outside the ACCOBAMS area (e.g. with respect to the North Atlantic right whale):

- (1) mapping the temporal and geographic distribution and abundance of cetaceans (see above) in relationship to similar information on vessel traffic – Parties and riparian states are encouraged to assist in the provision of relevant information on shipping routes and frequencies;
- (2) behavioural and physiological research (including controlled exposure experiments) into the reasons some cetaceans do not avoid collisions with vessels;

(3) examination of methods that might be used by vessel personnel and ship designers to avoid collisions.

The Committee notes that such work would be facilitated by the holding of a workshop. This could most efficiently be held in the context (e.g. immediately before) the fin whale workshop referred to in Recommendation 2.5.