
BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE RELEASE AND HANDLING OF ENCIRCLED CETACEANS

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PURPOSE

To provide the Scientific Committee with options for developing *best practice guidelines for the safe release and handling of encircled cetaceans*, as requested by the Commission.

BACKGROUND

At its 17th Session held in May 2013, the Commission adopted Resolution 13/04 *on the conservation of cetaceans*. The Resolution aims to mitigate the interactions between cetaceans and purse seine fishing gear; gather additional information from CPCs on the interaction rates with other fishing gears, in particular gillnets and longlines; and requests that the IOTC SC develop best practice mitigation and handling guidelines for consideration by the Commission at its 18th Session in 2014, to mitigate the impacts of fishing on cetaceans in the IOTC area of competence.

Specifically, paragraph 6 of Resolution 13/04 *on the conservation of cetaceans* states:

“The Commission requests that the IOTC Scientific Committee develop best practice guidelines for the safe release and handling of encircled cetaceans, taking into account those developed in other Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, including the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, and that these guidelines be submitted to the 2014 Commission meeting for endorsement.”

DISCUSSION

At the 9th Session of the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch, held in September 2013, the WPEB reviewed the requirements outlined in Resolution 13/04 *on the conservation of cetaceans*, but could not reach agreement on guidelines for the safe release and handling of encircled cetaceans in IOTC fisheries.

Some participants felt that such a guide was unnecessary, while others considered the proposed guidelines for whale sharks (see paper IOTC–2013–SC16–09) could be adapted for cetaceans.

The Scientific Committee may wish to request that a small project be funded by the Commission, to search the available literature and work with relevant experts in the field, to develop the guidelines in 2014. Such a project could be carried out in tandem with the finalisation of the whale shark guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Scientific Committee:

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC–2013–SC16–08, which aimed to provide the SC with options for developing *best practice guidelines for the safe release and handling of encircled cetaceans*;
- 2) **CONSIDER** recommending that the Commission allocates funds in its 2014 budget, to produce and print the IOTC best practice guidelines for the safe release and handling of encircled cetaceans. The guidelines could be incorporated into an IOTC cetacean identification cards: *“Cetacean identification in Indian Ocean pelagic fisheries”*.