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**IWC Chile-Peru Southern Right Whale Conservation Management Plan – Progress Report
March 2024**

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Abstract

Eastern South Pacific southern right whale population found off Chile and Peru is one of the most threatened whale populations worldwide. The population was classified as Critically Endangered by IUCN and the International Whaling Commission adopted a Conservation Management Plan (CMP). Over last year, acoustic data obtained off Antofagasta was analyzed, new sightings have been reported and two calf death strandings have been recorded with evidence of human interaction. No anthropogenic death should occur. The CMP should assist with the implementation of conservation measures for this Critically Endangered population of whales.

Introduction

The Chile-Peru southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*) population was classified as Critically Endangered by IUCN in 2008. The impacts of commercial whaling reduced its number to a current estimate of less than 50 mature individuals. Depleted by the 1850's, the southern right whale population of Chile and Peru has not shown any signs of recovery.

Efforts to protect this whale population include the adoption of a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 2012 (Galletti Vernazzani *et al.*, 2016) and a Memorandum of Understanding between Chile and Peru in 2018 (MOU, 2018).

Over these years significant advances have been made (IWC, 2022) and the CMP has recently been updated (IWC, 2023a).

This report summarizes advances made from April 2023 to February 2024.

Passive Acoustic Monitoring

The passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) program for this population has been conducted since 2018. It collected one year data off Isla de Chiloe, Arauco Gulf and Antofagasta. A specialist from Instituto del Mar del Peru was trained on hydrophone maintenance and deployment off Peru should start on 2024. The lack of deck unit in Peru has delayed its implementation. Alternatives are being explored, including travel to Lima with deck unit at each maintenance period.

Analysis of acoustic data has been completed for Antofagasta location site during 2023. No calls have been found. Next proprieties include to use the automatic acoustic detector in 2012 southern Chiloe data and other existing datasets.

Sightings, strandings and human interactions

During 2023, 14 sightings have been reported. Most of them occurred in northern Chile. Although these also includes the largest aggregation found during summer 2023 off Isla de Chiloe (Galletti Vernazzani *et al.*, 2023).

Concerningly, two dead calves were recorded wearing both human interactions marks. The first (9.1 m, TL) in Melinka, Chile, had fishing gear and ropes severely entangled around the mouth as well as propeller cuts around the abdomen. The second (6.2 m, TL), in Tongorachi Beach, Ecuador, is a new northern record for this population. The carcass had fishing net marks and a deep hole in its dorsal area, possibly caused by a gunshot.

Upcoming activities

A statement of rationale to facilitate the issuance of permits to collect biopsy samples from female-calf pairs is being prepared and will be discussed at IWC SC69b, in accordance with SC 2023 recommendations (IWC, 2023b).

The V CMP coordination meeting will take place in Chile before IWC69 and a training workshop on disentanglement response is planned to be conducted in Peru after IWC69.

Conclusions

Analysis of acoustic data will continue and the need for a **deck-unit** is of crucial importance to implement the PAM project in Peru.

The dead of entangled calves are of extreme concern. No anthropogenic dead should occur, and effective measures need to be adopted to avoid further by-catch.

Coordination efforts have proved to be essential for the effective and positive implementation of the eastern South Pacific southern right whale CMP. It is expected to continue to work collaboratively for the conservation of this population.

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