

The case for further action on the Dall's Porpoise

IWC 60 Santiago, Chile

Introduction

The Dall's porpoise hunt in Japan has been the largest directed kill of any cetacean species in the world for over a quarter-century and is carried out at hugely unsustainable levels. Action by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) has had a positive impact on the hunt in the past, resulting in reductions in catches from the very high numbers of the mid-1980s.

The IWC needs to take further action now to help prevent extirpation of the Dall's porpoise from Japan's coastal waters. We urge IWC member governments to call on the Government of Japan to halt the Dall's porpoise hunt until a full status review of the targeted populations has been carried out by the Scientific Committee of the IWC.

Background

Commercial hunting of Dall's porpoises in north-eastern Japanese waters began in the late 1920s when the introduction of engines dramatically increased catch success rates of this fast-swimming species.

Traditionally the meat was used for local consumption and the annual catch stood at less than 5,000. By the early 1980s however the hunt had expanded to the Sea of Japan and southern Okhotsk Sea with an annual catch of between 10,000-13,000.⁽ⁱ⁾

In the mid-1980s the hunt dramatically expanded for two reasons: firstly, to substitute for a lack of striped dolphin meat in southern Japan, where striped dolphins had been severely over-hunted; and secondly, to substitute for baleen whale meat following the introduction of the 1986 international moratorium on commercial whaling. In 1988, a record 40,367 Dall's porpoises were hunted.⁽ⁱⁱ⁾

After an IWC resolution in 1990 criticising the hunt, a quota of 17,700 animals was allocated to the Dall's porpoise hunt by the Government of Japan. The actual annual catch, which averages at just under 15,000 animals, ignores a 2001 IWC resolution calling on Japan to *"halt the directed takes of Dall's porpoises until a full assessment by the Scientific Committee has been carried out."*⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾

Reported catches of Dall's porpoises from 1963 to 2006^(v, vi)

Year	TOTAL	Year	TOTAL
1963	9,040	1985	10,378
1964	9,440	1986	16,515
1965	9,180	1987	25,600
1966	7,980	1988	40,367
1967	5,150	1989	32,048
1968	6,020	1990	21,802
1969	7,020	1991	17,634
1970	8,060	1992	11,403
1971	5,210	1993	14,318
1972	5,190	1994	15,947
1973	7,230	1995	12,396
1974	6,470	1996	16,100
1975	7,350	1997	18,540
1976	9,899	1998	11,385
1977	9,358	1999	14,807
1978	8,426	2000	16,171
1979	6,872	2001	16,852
1980	6,718	2002	15,949
1981	9,803	2003	15,720
1982	12,883	2004	13,789
1983	12,776	2005	14,664
1984	9,764	2006	12,014
			564,238



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***"Since catch records began in the early 1960s, more than half a million Dall's porpoises have been killed in Japan's coastal waters."*^(v)**

IWC Scientific Committee action

The IWC's Scientific Committee has expressed serious concern regarding the sustainability of the Japanese Dall's porpoise hunt at least 12 times in the last 16 years. However to date, no full assessment of the hunted populations has been possible, as the data requested by the Scientific Committee and the Commission has not been provided by Japan. Since the 2001 Resolution calling on Japan to stop the hunt, over 88,000 Dall's porpoises have been taken by Japanese fishermen, with unknown numbers of animals struck and lost.^(iv) In addition, unknown numbers of Dall's porpoises are caught accidentally in fishing nets each year.

Recent developments

New abundance estimates for Dall's porpoise have recently been published by Japan's Fisheries Agency in a resource assessment paper.^(vi) The new population estimates are 173,638 (CV=0.212) for the *dalli*-type porpoises and 178,157 (CV=0.232) for *truei* porpoises, compared to previous estimates of 226,000 and 217,000 respectively. Accordingly, a new quota of 16,875 porpoises has been applied since 2007.^(vii)

The Fisheries Agency paper states that the Government of Japan has decided to apply the management concept of Potential Biological Removal (PBR)^(viii) to the Dall's porpoise hunt. However, the new quota of 16,875 porpoises for 2007 and 2008 is far higher than would be expected if PBR was applied. This relatively small reduction in quota is unlikely to have any positive impact on the Dall's populations given that the average catch over the last ten years has been just under 15,000 porpoises.

Recommendations for action at IWC 60

In its 2007 report the Scientific Committee reiterated its '*extreme concern*' for the stocks of Dall's porpoise exploited by Japan and strongly recommended that new abundance estimates be generated and catches reduced to sustainable levels as quickly as possible.

The Government of Japan (GoJ) has consistently argued that it advocates the sustainable utilisation of whale populations based upon scientific advice. The grossly unsustainable nature of the Dall's porpoise hunt and the refusal of the Government of Japan to provide data to the Scientific Committee and/or allow its scientists to take part in the IWC status review of this species totally belies this claim.

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The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and Campaign Whale call on all IWC member governments to:

- Urge the GoJ to halt the Dall's porpoise hunt until a full assessment has been carried out by the IWC Scientific Committee;
- Request that the GoJ presents all data on Dall's porpoise, including full technical data on the most recent surveys, to the Scientific Committee of the IWC in order that the status review may take place;
- Urge the GoJ to fully adopt the PBR approach as originally envisaged in its management of small cetaceans;
- Encourage the GoJ and all range States to quantify and reduce the bycatch of Dall's porpoises.



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