



SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Twenty-Second SPREP Meeting

Apia, Samoa
13 – 15 September 2011



Agenda Item 8.1.2:

Regional Marine Species Programme - Oceania Humpback Whale Recovery Plan

Purpose

1. To seek endorsement of the Meeting for the Oceania Humpback Whale Recovery Plan as developed jointly by the South Pacific Whale Research Consortium (SPWRC) and SPREP with a regional Recovery Team representing PICTs.

Background

2. The 20th SPREP Meeting in 2009 endorsed the development and process for the recovery plan for Oceania humpback whales. The development of the recovery plan was proposed as a joint coordinated undertaking between the SPWRC and SPREP involving input from a multidisciplinary recovery team. The initiative for the recovery plan was also endorsed by the PICT signatories to the MoU for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands region.

Recovery plan for Oceania humpback whales

3. As reported in 2009, the 2008 IUCN Red List update of threat listing for cetaceans moved humpback whales globally from “vulnerable” to “least concern”. However, an exception was made for the Oceania humpback population (as well as that in the Arabian Sea) which was re-classified from “vulnerable” to “endangered”. This decision was based on the fact that this humpback population is likely to have declined more than 70 per cent in the last 3 generations (since 1942), i.e. from the population size prior to whaling. While humpback whales in many parts of the world are showing signs of recovery from whaling, most of the small breeding populations in the South Pacific remain at extremely low levels with some (e.g. Fiji) still remaining vulnerable to local extinction. The Oceania humpback population is genetically and demographically isolated from adjacent breeding stocks and includes sub-stocks in Eastern Australia, New Caledonia, Tonga, Cook Islands and French Polynesia.
4. Humpback whales also underpin the economic benefits derived from the whale watching industry in many Pacific Island states, recently valued at more than USD \$21 million.

5. The regional Whale and Dolphin Action Plan 2008-2012 highlights objectives and actions that promote recovery of depleted cetacean stocks and reducing threats to them. The general outline of steps in developing the recovery plan were as follows:

- development of an issues and options concept paper by the Steering Group with input from a multidisciplinary recovery team. This paper was submitted as an attachment of the working paper which was endorsed by the SPREP Meeting in 2009;
- drafting of a recovery plan by steering group, with input from the recovery team;
- circulation of a draft recovery plan to members for comments; and
- finalisation and submission of the recovery plan for SPREP Meeting endorsement in 2011.

6. The draft Oceania Humpback Whale Recovery Plan is attached as Annex 1. It will contribute to 8 of the 9 theme areas of the regional WDAP, including capacity-building.

Recommendations

7. The Meeting is invited to:

- **endorse** the Oceania Humpback Whale Recovery Plan;
- **direct** the Secretariat to collaborate with SPWRC and other partners, such as CMS, to seek assistance to implement the Oceania Humpback Whale Recovery Plan;
- **call** on members to fully participate and provide support and assistance where necessary for in-country activities under the recovery plan; and
- **call** on partners and donor agencies to provide assistance where possible to ensure the successful implementation of the Oceania Humpback Whale Recovery Plan.

16 July 2011