

## Forum

Opinions and letters are welcome and should be addressed to the Editor at [giuseppe@disciara.net](mailto:giuseppe@disciara.net)

### Dolphin captures in the Agreement area

Article II of the ACCOBAMS Agreement text requires Parties to "prohibit and take all necessary measures to eliminate, where this is not already done, any deliberate taking of cetaceans." Concerns about the capture of cetaceans from the wild are mirrored by the IUCN's Cetacean Specialist Group, which notes in its current Conservation Action Plan for the World's Cetaceans that "Removal of live cetaceans from the wild, for captive display and/or research, is equivalent to incidental or deliberate killing, as the animals brought into captivity (or killed during capture operations) are no longer available to help maintain their populations. When unmanaged and undertaken without a rigorous program of research and monitoring, live-capture can become a serious threat to local cetacean populations." Furthermore, dolphin captures have been shown to result in a six-fold increase in mortality risk during and immediately after capture. And yet, in spite of the knowledge about their impact on cetacean populations and individuals, such captures continue in places around the world. This includes the ACCOBAMS Agreement area, where the Government of Turkey has recently approved the capture of 30 bottlenose dolphins in Turkish waters of the Mediterranean, Black, Aegean and Marmara Seas for Turkey's growing number of facilities offering dolphin assisted therapy to members of the public.

The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee has raised concerns about dolphin assisted therapy in at least two of its meetings, noting the "increasing interest in the Agreement area... to the extent that such operations are likely to cause increasing conservation problems to wild cetacean populations through illegal takes and reintroductions". Facilities displaying captive cetaceans in the Agreement area have recently included sea pens in the Mediterranean holding Arctic belugas, including in Turkey. This must be considered as highly inappropriate for both welfare and conservation reasons. In 2005, a beluga escaped from a sea pen facility in Budva, Montene-

gro during a storm and was not recovered. Its fate is unknown.

Turkey is a Party to the Bern Convention, which prohibits "all forms of deliberate capture and keeping" of bottlenose dolphins, a species listed on its appendix of strictly protected species. Turkey is not a Party to ACCOBAMS and is therefore not bound by the Agreement text, but Parties should be very concerned about the impact on the bottlenose dolphins in the Agreement area as a result of captures there.

CATHY WILLIAMSON  
 Captivity Programme Manager  
 Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society  
[cathy.williamson@wdcs.org](mailto:cathy.williamson@wdcs.org)

### The name of the sperm whale

In the scientific literature the sperm whale is sometimes called *Physeter macrocephalus*, sometimes *Physeter catodon*. Which is the correct name? Or are there two species?

GÜL MORAN, Istanbul  
[kuwanini@yahoo.com](mailto:kuwanini@yahoo.com)

*It is commonly accepted that there is only one extant species of sperm whale in the world. Unfortunately, considerable confusion surrounds the scientific name of the species, as correctly noted by our reader Gul Moran. The problem originates from the unfortunate decision by Carl von Linné of having listed not one but four species in the genus Physeter in his "Systema Naturae": P. catodon, P. macrocephalus, P. microps and P. tursio (1758, 10<sup>th</sup> edition, pages 76-77). Of these, luckily the last two soon faded into oblivion, clearing the scene for the other two to compete, with alternating fortunes, for denominating the sperm whale. This competition, unfortunately, is still ongoing 2.5 centuries later. Clearly, there is no doubt in anyone's mind that both names refer to the same critter, so the logic would dictate that cetacean zoologists should not lend themselves to*

International  
 Commission on Zoological  
 Nomenclature:  
<http://www.iczn.org/>

Schevill W.E. 1986. The  
 International Code  
 of Zoological  
 Nomenclature and  
 a paradigm:  
 the name  
*Physeter catodon*  
 Linnaeus 1758.  
 Marine Mammal Science  
 2(2):153-157.

be unduly distracted from more serious business by their obsession for bibliographic archaeology, as wittingly argued by the late Bill Schevill back in 1986. However, the zoologists' failure of agreeing on the name of the planet's largest predator since the dinosaurs have disappeared is a visible embarrassment, and justifies doubts on the ability of the category to be authoritative on more complex taxonomic issues. True, arguments in favour and against either name have appeared often on zoological journals, and Schevill's article mentioned above is one of the many. Some have looked for clues in the words that von Linné used to characterise catodon or macrocephalus, which however can be made to point one way or the other (indeed, the sperm whale does have the teeth in the lower jaw, but, indeed, it also has a large head); others have resorted to provisions from the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, such as the "principle of first reviser", or considerations of "line priority". Admittedly, argumentations from both sides are scholarly and equally compelling, so it is hard to imagine how the matter might be put to rest on such bases. A decision from the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature would indeed settle the discussion once and for all, and one wonders what is holding back cetacean taxonomists from submitting an application to this effect. Until that happens, to support nomenclatural stability, the use of the name that is currently most frequently used, i.e. *P. macrocephalus*, should be strongly encouraged. On this point, at least, there is no controversy. A quick search through the article titles in the 23 volumes of "Marine Mammal Science", just to get a sense of the situation, provided 95 hits for *macrocephalus* and 28 for *catodon*. A wider test over the entire Google database yielded twice as many "*Physeter macrocephalus*" as there were "*Physeter catodon*". In conclusion, FINS' long answer to a very short – but valid – question is: there is only one species of sperm whale, and it should be called *Physeter macrocephalus*.

### **Cuvier's beaked whale strandings in the Mediterranean – what have we learned?**

The ACCOBAMs area has been important in the study of 'military assisted' beaked

whale strandings. Indeed, it was a cetacean scientist from the Mediterranean, Alexandros Frantzis, who coined the phrase 'atypical', now associated worldwide with stranding events linked with naval activities. Almería recently witnessed an 'atypical' mass stranding event. Four healthy Cuvier's beaked whales, *Ziphius cavirostris*, had been feeding and were in good body condition before ending up scattered along the beaches of the beautiful coastline of Andalucía in southern Spain during a NATO exercise in the Cartagena exercise Area in January 2006 (see FINS 2(2):17-18).

What have we learned from this, the latest in a succession of similar events to occur throughout Europe and the world? Contrary to the 2004 Resolution on the environmental effects of high-intensity active naval sonar from the European Parliament, we are not aware of any attempts to undertake a full and transparent investigation of the events surrounding, and leading up to, the Almería stranding. Such information is critical for us to learn from this event, and to be able to better inform future procedures during similar exercises.

Numerous NATO and other naval exercises take place within the Mediterranean, and globally, each year. How confident can we be that the incident in Almería will not be repeated? Not confident at all it would seem. Indeed, we are aware of 'atypical' mass strandings of Cuvier's beaked whales in both Sicily in April 2006 and in Algeria in March 2007, with little associated information. Whilst ACCOBAMs is implementing Noise Guidelines for the protection of cetaceans in the region, these can only be successful if utilised to determine appropriate precautionary management and mitigation measures. This begins with a full and transparent investigation of events surrounding the Almería stranding, and all 'atypical' mass strandings, and such an investigation is now overdue.

SARAH DOLMAN  
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society  
[sarah.dolman@wdcs.org](mailto:sarah.dolman@wdcs.org)

*The U.S. Navy has recently acknowledged that a NATO Response Force was conducting active sonar training within 50 nautical miles of the stranding site, on the days of the Almería event.* 