

## Report of Measures Taken in Chile to Protect Southern Right Whales

Submitted by the Government of Chile to the Conservation Committee

### Conservation Status of Southern Right Whale Sub-population

Thanks to the data collected during the last seven years by the Southern Right Whale Project/Chile<sup>1</sup> and the Cetacean Sighting Network of the Chilean Navy, the Chile/Peru “sub-population” of *Eubalaena australis* was recently classified as “endangered” in Chile and as “critically endangered” in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

On March 03, 2009, the population of southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) was officially classified under Chilean legislation as “endangered” under the Fourth Species Classification Process conducted by the National Environmental Commission (CONAMA). This is the maximum level of classification under Chilean legislation for endangered species.

At international level, on August 12, 2008 the conservation status of all cetacean species was finalized for the 2008 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Scientists from the Cetacean Specialist group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission conducted the assessments. The Chile/Peru “sub-population” of *E. australis* was classified as “critically endangered”.

These classifications confirm that the southern right whale sub-population of Chile/Peru is one of the most endangered populations of whales worldwide. Therefore, several measures have been adopted in order to afford maximum protection to the species in Chilean waters.

### Legal Measures

On June 23, 2008 the president of Chile, Michelle Bachelet signed two Decrees related to the protection of cetaceans. The Decree 230 of 2008 of the Ministry of Economy declares all cetacean species found in Chilean waters as Natural Monument, granting 43 species of cetacean’s absolute protection in Chilean jurisdictional waters. The Decree 179 of 2008 of the Ministry of Economy establishes an indefinite moratorium for the extraction of 43 species of cetaceans. The decrees came into force on August and October 2008 respectively.

Also, on June 23, 2008, president Bachelet signed a bill for the protection of cetaceans that was unanimously adopted on September 11<sup>th</sup> by the Chilean Congress. The law came into force on October 15, 2008. The law permanently bans any type of whaling operations on large and small cetaceans and includes several conservation measures for these marine mammals, such as the development of whale watching regulations and contingency plans for collisions/by-catch, among others.

### Sighting Records of Southern Right Whales

Sighting efforts of southern right whales and other cetacean species are conducted along the Chilean coast and Chilean jurisdictional waters through two coordinated national sightings networks implemented by the Chilean Navy and the Chilean NGO Cetacean Conservation Center (CCC).

During 2008, the networks documented seven opportunistic sightings comprising at least ten southern right whales. Four of these whales were individually photo-identified by CCC Southern Right Whale Project/Chile. The records will allow the long-term monitoring of the species and increase the knowledge about this critically endangered population.

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<sup>1</sup> The project is conducted by the Chilean NGO Cetacean Conservation Center (CCC) and its scientific results were presented in 2008 by Galletti Vernazzani, B., Brownell Jr., R.L. and Cabrera, E. 2008. **Sightings of southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) off Chile and Peru from 1976 to 2007**. Paper SC/60/BRG22 presented to the IWC Scientific Committee, June 2008 (unpublished). 12pp.

### **Protection Measures for Cow-Calf Pair of Southern Right Whales**

On July 31<sup>st</sup> 2008, a cow-calf pair of southern right whales was recorded in Quintay, a coastal artisanal fishing and tourist community located 100 km west from Santiago de Chile.

Protective measures were rapidly adopted by the Chilean Navy to grant maximum protection to the whales after receiving a report prepared by CCC about the endangered status of the species in Chile and the opportunistic whale watching operations that were being conducted by visitors from marine platforms such as small boats, jet-skis, kayaks and autonomous diving gear.

These measures included the prohibition to enter the bay where the whales were located from any marine platform, including boat based whale watching operations, artisanal fishing vessels as well as diving operations, and were applied during all the period the whales stayed in the area.

Additional measures such as the permanent monitoring of the whales with a surveillance marine vessel and a coastal patrol of the Chilean Navy guaranteed the safety of the whales until they finally left the area on August 15, 2008.

Similar measures will be taken when sightings of southern right whales near the Chilean coast occurs, until regulations are in place for whale watching operations of the species in the country. These regulations consider the possibility of limiting whale watching of southern right whales to coastal platforms until the species evidence signs of recovery in Chilean jurisdictional waters.