

## Status Report of Conservation and Researches on the Western North Pacific Gray Whales in Japan, May 2010 – April 2011

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### Abstract

Following the IWC Resolution 2001-3, 2004-1 and 2005-3, the present paper reports the status of conservation and researches on the western population of the North Pacific gray whales. Neither sighting nor mortality due to stranding/by-catch has been reported from the adjacent waters off Japan during the period from May 2010 to April 2011. Some research activities and administrative actions were carried out for the conservation of gray whales during the period concerned.

### Introduction

As in IWC Resolution 2001-3, which *inter alia* called on range states and others to actively pursue all practicable actions to eliminate anthropogenic mortality and minimize anthropogenic disturbance to the western population of the North Pacific gray whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*); IWC Resolution 2004-1, which *inter alia* called upon range states to develop or expand national monitoring and research programmes on the western North Pacific gray whales; and another IWC Resolution 2005-3 supporting further efforts to conserve this population, IWC has largely urged the conservation of western North Pacific gray whales.

Under such circumstances, as response to those IWC Resolutions, Japan has provided its status reports on the western North Pacific gray whales, including scientific information on the population: for the period from June 2005 to May 2006 by Kato *et al.* (2006), from June 2006 to May 2007 by Kato *et al.* (2007), from June 2007 to April 2008 by Kato *et al.* (2008), from May 2008 to April 2009 by Kato *et al.* (2009), and from May 2009 to April 2010 by Kato *et al.* (2010). We hereby submit a similar report for this year's meeting on the information for the period from May 2010 to April 2011.

All known occurrences of the western gray whales around Japanese coasts since 1955 are summarized in Table 1.

### Sightings

#### *Systematic Sightings*

Miyashita *et al.* (2011) compiled sighting information of all large cetaceans encountered

during all of systematic whale sighting surveys by National Research Institute of Far Seas Fisheries. While a total of 6,665.7 n. miles for their searching distances, no gray whale was seen. Yasunaga *et al.* (2011) reported sightings from the systematic manner (3,749 n. miles) made at JARPN II – offshore component in 9 June to 22 August 2010, but no gray whale was found. Also, Bando *et al.* (2011) and Yoshida *et al.* (2011) reported no gray whale from sightings through the 2010 JARPN II – coastal component at Ishinomaki-Ayukawa (Miyagi) and Kushiro (Hokkaido) in April to October 2010.

#### *POP sightings during small-type whaling and dolphin fisheries*

There was no report of gray whale sightings by POP bases from all of small-type whaling and dolphin fisheries operations in May 2010 to April 2011.

#### *Other POP sightings*

No sighting of gray whale was reported during the period concerned.

### **Mortality**

#### *Stranding*

No stranding of gray whale was reported during the period concerned.

#### *Entanglement*

No entanglement of gray whale was reported during the period concerned.

### **Research Activities**

As reported in the last year's status report (Kato *et al.* (2010)), Kato started morphological analyses on the two gray whale skeletons (a cow and calf pair) entangled off Onagawa Town in June 2005 and they still continued to analyze them in comparison with other skeletal measurements and other features. This study is expected to be completed in the next year term. Displayed skeleton of the calf at the Ayukawa whale-land museum (Ishinomaki city, Miyagi prefecture) was suffered from the huge earthquake and tsunami that hit the eastern part of Japan on March 11, 2011, but it remains.

### **Administrative Actions**

As reported in Kato *et al.* (2010), Fisheries Agency (FAJ) created an educational leaflet in electronic format which asks fishermen to: 1) try to release gray whales alive when they are found in a set-net or other fishing gear; and 2) report immediately to FAJ via the competent prefectural government when gray whales are sighted. The leaflet was distributed to governments of all coastal prefectures on May 27, 2010, accompanied by documented instructions from Director of the Far Seas Fisheries Division, FAJ, which requests them to draw fishermen's careful attention to this issue and to share sighting information of gray whales, if any, with FAJ and governments of neighboring prefectures in a prompt manner, explaining the situation of the western North Pacific gray whales and reminding that catch (including by-catch) of gray whales and sale/possession of their products is prohibited under the Fisheries Resources Protection Act.

As the continuation of its educational programme, and as a follow-up to the discussions made at the 62<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of IWC/SC, FAJ is now engaged in updating the Manual for Coping with Stranding of Cetaceans. The 157-page manual deals with various aspects, such as legal, administrative and technical, related to coping with entrapment/entanglement and by-catch as well as

stranding of cetaceans. However, because it was published in October 2004, the present version of the manual does not reflect the prohibition of catch, sale and possession of gray whales under the Fisheries Resources Protection Act, which entered into force on January 1, 2008. An updated version, which will definitely reflect the prohibition and other developments related to the issue of cetacean stranding/by-catch in general, is scheduled to be published in the latter half of the year 2011, and FAJ plans to take the opportunity of distributing the updated manual to draw attention of related fishermen and officials of prefectural governments to the issue of the western North Pacific gray whales.

Table 1. All known or reported gray whale occurrences around Japan since 1955 to present (till of April 2011).

Date dd/mm/yy	From which waters	Pacific side ?	Juvenile?	N	Source	
					Status	Reference
16/03/1955	Toyama (Toyama Bay) 36.41N-137.12E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Entanglement	Nambu <i>et al.</i> (2003)
10/06/1959	Off Kii-Ohshima, Kushimoto, Wakayama 33.29N-135.55E	Pacific	?	1	Sighting	Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970)
02/02/1968	Off estuary of Kumano River. Shingu, Wakayama 33.43N-136.02E	Pacific	Juvenile 9.0m female	1	Unknown*	Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970)
??/04/1970	Toyama (Toyama Bay) 36.41N-137.12E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Entanglement	Nambu <i>et al.</i> (2003)
27/03/1982	Off Toba (Ise Bay), Mie 34.28N-136.53E	Pacific	Juvenile**	1	Sighting	Furuta (1984)
25/04/1985	Off Taiji, Wakayam 33.34N-136E	Pacific	Juvenile	1	Sighting (through TV)	Kasamatsu and Ishikawa (1990)
25/01/1990	Kohzu, Kanagawa 35.16N-139.13E	Pacific	Juvenile 8.0m male	1	Beached	Kasamatsu and Ishikawa (1990)
Middle/04/ 1993	Off Izu-Ohshima, Tokyo 34.30N-139.30E	Pacific	Juvenile	2***	Sighting	Mochizuki, Mori and Ishikawa (p.c.)
07/04/1995	Toyokoro, Obihiro, Hokkaido 42.35N-143.32E	Pacific	Juvenile 9.5m female	1	Beached	Sawamura and Kimura (p.c.)
16/05/1996	Suttu, Hokkaido 42.45N-140.10E	Sea of Japan	Adult	1	Entanglement	Fisheries Agency
02/03/1997	Matunami, Kashiwazaki, Niigata 37.24N-138.34E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Beached (skull only)	ICR (2005)
22/07/1997	Off Kumanoura, Saga, Kochi 33.06N-133.09E	Pacific	Juvenile	2	Sighting	Kato and Tokuhiko (1997)
19/03/2002	Miyazaki beach, Miyazaki 31.50N-131.27E	Pacific	Juvenile Est. 7.7m	1	Beached	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2003)
06/05/2003	Off Shizuoka (Suruga Bay), Shizuoka 35.00N-138.46E	Pacific	Juvenile, 9-10m	2	Sighting	Shizuoka TV Asahi
11/05/2005	Tomiyama (Tokyo Bay), Chiba 35.04N-139.49E	Pacific	Juvenile, 7.81m	1	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2005)
15/07/2005	Enoshima, Onagawa Miyagi 38°23'N - 141°37'E	Pacific	Cow (12.79m) Calf (7.75m)	2	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2006)
18/01/2007	Sanriku, Ofunato, Iwate 39°09'N - 141°54'E	Pacific	Female 9.19m	1	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2007)
01/08/2007	Nishikioka, Tomakomai, Hokkaido	Pacific	Female 12.33m	1	Beached	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2008)
04/11/2009	Off Owase, Mie 33°52'N - 136°10'E	Pacific	Juvenile, Ca. 6 – 7 m	1	Sighting	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2010)

\*: Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970) reported as “Dead might be caused by the wound made by someone during the evening of the day”.

\*\* : Furuta (1984) estimated animal length to be 12m, but photographs of the animal clearly indicates much smaller length indicating juvenile.

\*\*\*: There was an alternative that one additional animal was seen in adjacent waters.

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