

**Voluntary National Cetacean Conservation Report
Submitted to the Conservation Committee by the Government of Argentina**

1. Legal developments (laws, regulations and other regulatory measures related to cetaceans):

In compliance with the provisions of Decree No. 167/08 that regulates the provincial Law 5714 for the conservation of the southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*) in Chubut Province, a "Whale Watching Advisory Committee" was created to propose improvements to whale watching operations and works to ensure the long term conservation of the species and the sustainable development of the activity in Puerto Pirámide, Península Valdés. This Committee, that is chaired by the authority of application and comprise representatives of licensed whale watching, government and nongovernmental organizations, has adopted their rules of procedures on April, 2011. The Instituto de Conservación de Ballenas is one of the members of the Committee as representative of civil society.

Specific objectives of the Advisory Committee are:

- To establish a channel for public participation to help and advise the responsible authority for implementing policies that ensure the protection of the species and its habitat, and the sustainable development of whalewatching.
- To represent all public and private stakeholders involved in whalewatching activities and to be a consulting body for all the parties requiring advice.
- To develop and propose actions to improve whalewatching service in the area of jurisdiction of the province of Chubut.

2. Information on whale watching

2.1 IWC whale watching workshop

The Whale Watching Workshop was held in Puerto Madryn, from 3 to 5 November 2011. It was supported by the Governments of Australia, United States, the Province of Chubut and the NGO WSPA. Thirteen countries attended the workshop and its conclusions are relevant as a base for the development for the 5 years Strategic Plan of the IWC. Three key elements were identified (1) research and assessment; (2) management; and (3) capacity building and development. These elements will provide countries in building sustainable whale watching industries. The report of this workshop is submitted to this IWC meeting as IWC/63/CC6.

2.2 Whale watching operations

Provincial Law 5714 for the conservation of the southern right whale was enacted in Chubut Province in 2008. This law regulates whalewatching at Península Valdés. Based on the new guidelines in this regulation, Instituto de Conservación de Ballenas updated the information in its whalewatching guide. ICB distributed 40,000 copies of this guide to tourists in 2010, with support from the Administration of the Península Valdés Natural Protected Area and World Heritage Site. This cooperation between a governmental agency and an NGO (ICB) allowed to improve the educational aspects of whale-watching at Península Valdés and to increase the visitors' awareness and involvement in the conservation needs of right whales and their habitat.

3. Current Government Programs Related to Cetacean Conservation

3.1 Research Projects

In August-October 2010, the Instituto de Conservación de Ballenas from Argentina in cooperation with Ocean Alliance / Whale Conservation Institute from USA conducted the 40th field research season of the Right Whale Program in the Natural Protected Area Peninsula Valdes in Chubut province. All research projects were conducted under official Permit 43/2010 from Dirección de Fauna y Flora Silvestres and Permit 223/2010 from Subsecretaría de Turismo y Areas Protegidas from Chubut.

Began in 1970, this program is the longest continuous study of a large whale based on following the lives of known individuals. Its main objective is to monitor the status of the right whale population in the breeding areas of Península Valdés.

During 2010 aerial surveys conducted on September 25 and 26, 2010, the total southern right whales counted were: 477 (including 214 calves).

The main research and conservation achievements of this program include among others:

- 40 years of continued scientific data about the biology of the southern right whale in Argentina, documenting a population increase from 400 whales (1970) to over 6.000 (2010).
- 2.700 photoidentified individuals, with over 150.000 photographs taken.
- Examination of 428 right whales that died during a series of high mortality events from 2005-2010. Presentation of results of 7 years of analyses to a March 2010 meeting of the International Whaling Commission convened at Puerto Madryn to examine all possible causes for die-offs of right whales.
- A comparative analysis (in progress) of the nutritional value of copepods and krill (the Patagonian right whales predominant prey types) along the Patagonian Shelf and off South Georgia to determine whether low krill abundance could be causing the high mortality of right whales. This includes Fatty acid analyses of the blubber of calves that have died at Peninsula Valdes since 2003 to determine the proportion of copepods and krill in their mother's diet.
- 16 years of continued monitoring of the frequency of gull attacks on the whales at Península Valdés (since 1995).
- Documenting long-range movements of right whales including the movement of whales up to 4.424 km.
- Determining the genetic differentiation of the Patagonian population of right whales from other species of right whales in the northern hemisphere and from populations of southern right whales found off South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.
- Finding that Patagonian right whales have fewer calves than expected following years of low krill abundance on their feeding ground off South Georgia, indicating that whales could experience reproductive failures if krill abundance declines in response to global warming.
- Conducting the first study to determine the effects of swim-with-whale programs on the behavior and movements of southern right whales.
- Discovering that right whale calves inherit their foraging locations from their mothers and thus could have difficulty in dealing with regional changes in prey abundance.
- Determining the foraging patterns of individual whales by measuring changes in the stable carbon isotopes ratios in the baleen of right whales that die at Peninsula Valdes.
- Finding evidence of nutritional stress caused by environmental variability by studying the inter-annual differences in the stable isotope ratios of mothers and their calves over a three year period. (Valenzuela et al. 2010).
- A record of human impacts on this whale population: ship collisions, entanglements, effects of tourism.
- Over 60 scientific publications and presentations at meetings can be found at <http://www.icbargentina.com.ar/downloads/Listado%20publicaciones%20ICB-WCI.pdf>

4. Current threats to Cetacean Conservation and Management Measures Taken/Proposed

4.1. Bycatch

The First Workshop for Development of a National Plan of Action to reduce interaction between Marine Mammals and Fisheries will be hosted by Secretaría de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sustentable, and Subsecretaría de Pesca y Acuicultura from 13-15 June 2011. Representatives from the governmental agencies, researchers, NGO's will attend this workshop.

4.2 Strandings

The Southern Right Whale Health Monitoring Program (SRWHMP) at Peninsula Valdes, Chubut, Argentina began in 2003 with support from the US National Marine Fisheries Service. The program is a collaboration between local NGOs, research centers, and governmental agencies. The Program operates as a collaboration of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Whale Conservation Institute/Ocean Alliance (WCI/OA), Instituto de Conservación de Ballenas (ICB), Fundación Patagonia Natural (FPN) and Fundación Ecocentro. The objective of this program is to collect baseline information about southern right whales at Península Valdés. For this purpose, regular land and aerial surveys are conducted between June and December in search of whale carcasses, which later undergo forensic examinations. However, since mortality numbers increased dramatically in 2007, the Program has been overwhelmed. In addition, most of the whales (61 percent) that reach the coast are in an advanced state of decay, which challenges our capacity to observe any possible evidence of cause of death. Therefore, the ability to improve the Program's capacity to monitor larger areas of the whales' habitat, and having a dedicated, full-time team on the ground, are critical for accessing better samples to find answers, and for informing the long-term monitoring of this southern right whale population.

At least 319 right whales died in Península Valdés since 2007. While there has been speculation about probable causes (such as harmful biotoxins, disease, environmental factors, or lack of food), no single cause has yet been determined. In 2010, the International Whaling Commission recognized the urgent need to address these high mortalities and convened a workshop of experts in Argentina to explore potential causes and impacts, and develop research and response recommendations. The main recommendation was that the Southern Right Whale Health Monitoring Program should reinforce its current activities to ensure high-quality samples are collected from whale carcasses for cause-of-death investigation.

The main objectives of the SRWHMP for the 2011 and 2012 southern right whale breeding seasons are to (1) enhance local reporting and monitoring capacity, (2) reduce the time from carcass detection to examination, and (3) boost ongoing necropsy and sampling efforts.

4.2 Ship Strikes

On 3rd August 2010 the container ship “Langeness” (161m length and flag from Antigua and Barbuda) collided with a southern right whale in the vicinity of Almirante Storni pier, Puerto Madryn, Patagonia Argentina. The Prefectura Naval Argentina (PNA) investigated this event. The PNA developed and implemented Disposicion Madr, RIA N° 069/09 and later modified by Disposición Madr, RIA N°80/10 to reduce ship strikes with southern right whales in the nursery ground of Peninsula Valdes, Patagonia Argentina. Its aim is to prevent further collisions. For more information IWC/61/CC12rev.

In order to reduce this kind of event, meetings will be sought in this regard between the PNA, Administración Portuaria Puerto Madryn, Dirección de Flora y Fauna of province of Chubut, NGO's, Nautical Club and pilots in the area, looking to achieve the best possible solution.

Of the 55 dead southern right whales examined in 2010 in Argentina by the Southern Right Whale Health Monitoring Program (SRWHMP) operating in Península Valdés and surrounding area, 1 adult female (080310PV-Ea05, 14.9 m total length, found in Playa Cormoranes, Golfo Nuevo) had a 6 m long linear cut on its left dorso-lateral area. Another adult female and one juvenile male had possible evidence of a cut on their bodies, but the advanced state of decomposition of the carcasses prevented a better diagnostic.

5. Cooperation Programs

Panama: The Fondo Argentino de Cooperación Horizontal (FO AR) in collaboration with the Universidad Marítima Internacional de Panamá (UMIP) and the Autoridad Panameña de Turismo (ATP) will develop a cooperation program in Panama. This program will be focus on capacity building and training activities on whale watching for tour operators, fishermen and scientists from Pedasí and Bocas del Toro. This is part of the program developed in Panama by FOAR since 2006.