

Appendix F. Executive Summary of the ICES SGBYC 2009 Final Report

1 Executive summary

The Study Group for Bycatch of Protected Species met at the ICES building in Copenhagen from 19–22 January 2009. Simon Northridge (UK) chaired the meeting, which was attended by 21 participants from 11 countries.

The Study Group examines the monitoring, assessment and mitigation of the incidental capture of protected species. It also coordinates activities conducted under EU Council Regulation 812/2004 on cetacean bycatch, including observer programmes and bycatch mitigation trials, and it reviews annual reports from member states that address the obligations of Regulation 812/2004 and collates data provided in these and other reports with the aim of providing an overview of bycatch levels of protected species impacted in and around the ICES Area.

The meeting addressed the terms of reference (Annex 2) in turn and much of the work was completed in subgroups with regular plenary updates and review of the draft report sections in plenary.

The SG collated data from Member States' Annual Reports on 812/2004 for the year 2007, but noted again that it had not received reports from almost half of the relevant member states, that some had been only in their native languages, and that only three had followed a standard format for reporting. This made a thorough review impossible, and made compiling the data difficult. The Study Group also made suggestions for improvements should the Regulation be revised, and again recommended that Member States supply reports in a standardized format and with an English translation or summary.

The Study Group also reviewed pilot projects and scientific studies conducted under Regulation 812/2004. Many of the required pilot projects had not been addressed. Most of the scientific studies addressed a variety of issues about the use of pingers to minimize cetacean bycatch. The Study Group also considered the proposed plans and recent studies conducted to address bycatch mitigation of protected species in the wider Atlantic region.

The Study Group considered ways in which wider collaboration with other interested parties might be promoted in the ICES Area and adjacent waters, and endorsed a proposal from NAMMCO's Scientific Committee to hold a joint workshop on bycatch monitoring and assessment.

The SG endorsed an online electronic database coordinated by the New England Aquarium in Boston as a suitable medium and clearing house for reports of mitigation trials that have been undertaken, whether successful or not, as a resource for the wider research community.

In considering data that have been collected by discard sampling programmes in EU member states under the Data Collection Regulations, the SG agreed that these datasets hold valuable information on the occasional bycatch of protected species including mammals, turtles and birds. The SG recommended better coordination between ICES expert groups to ensure that these data were made best use of in assessing bycatch of protected species and in planning future monitoring programmes for protected species bycatch.

The SG also designed a preliminary database to hold bycatch and fishing effort data from nations that conduct bycatch monitoring programmes, with the aim of being able to provide synoptic bycatch assessments at an international level and across fishing fleets rather than solely than at a national level. Populating the database with

data from recent bycatch monitoring schemes will be carried out intersessionally. The SG recommended that the proposed data schema should be considered by the EC in the adoption of any standard EU reporting format for reporting under the 812/2004 regulation.

The Study Group reviewed recent research directed toward understanding the mechanisms and potential solutions for protected species bycatch in gillnets. Much of the discussion was centred on small cetacean bycatch in gillnets, but the group agreed that there was much that is still unknown about the factors that increase bycatch probability, and that this ignorance impedes the development of novel mitigation measures.

The Study Group proposed a revised terms of reference for 2010 and proposed meeting in Copenhagen in early February 2010.