

Response Statement - Humpback Whale, North Pacific population

December 8, 2011

Common Name: Humpback Whale, North Pacific population

Scientific Name: *Megaptera novaeangliae*

Status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC): Special Concern

How the Minister of the Environment intends to respond to the assessment: The Minister of the Environment will forward the COSEWIC re-assessment of the Humpback Whale, North Pacific population, to the Governor in Council (GiC) within three months. This species is currently on the *List of Wildlife Species at Risk* (Schedule 1) under the *Species at Risk Act* as Threatened. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will consult with the government of British Columbia, Aboriginal peoples, stakeholders, and the public on whether or not the Humpback Whale, North Pacific population, should have its Schedule 1 status of Threatened changed to Special Concern.

Once a species has been assessed by COSEWIC, further steps must be undertaken before it is added to Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*. For more information on this process, please view [The Species Listing Process Under SARA](#).

Reason(s) for status designation provided by COSEWIC: Although this recovering population is no longer considered to be Threatened, it is not yet secure. It was depleted by commercial whaling but has increased substantially since becoming legally protected from whaling in 1966. A basin-wide study in 2004-2006 resulted in an estimated abundance of 18,000 animals (not including first-year calves) in the North Pacific and an estimated rate of increase of 4.9 to 6.8%/year. Research conducted between 2004-06 indicated that about 2,145 whales (not including first-year calves) were present seasonally in British Columbia waters where they were increasing at around 4%/year. Current numbers are still considerably smaller than the minimum of 4,000 animals that must have been present off the west coast of Vancouver Island in 1905 given the numbers removed by whaling in the early 1900's. This population in the eastern North Pacific continues to face several threats including noise disturbance, habitat degradation (especially on the breeding grounds), entanglement in fishing gear or debris, and ship strikes.

Occurrence: Pacific Ocean

Competent Minister(s):

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans

Minister responsible for the Parks Canada Agency

Province(s) and territory (territories) to be consulted:

British Columbia

Applicable federal legislation: Protected under the federal *Marine Mammal Regulations* under the *Fisheries Act*. Habitat protected under section 35 of the *Fisheries Act*.

Conservation activities underway: The North Pacific population of Humpback Whale has been listed as Threatened under SARA since 2005. Ongoing activities include mitigation of acoustic disturbance and research into the effects of contaminants, acoustic thresholds, and vessel traffic. There is also ongoing enforcement of the *Marine Mammal Regulations* under the *Fisheries Act* and dissemination of the "Be Whale Wise" guidelines.