

**Australian Marine Mammal Centre**  
**Final Report**  
(subclause 9 and Schedule Item 5 of the Funding Agreement)

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- **Project No.** – 09/44 (45)
- **Title** - Blue Whale Workshop 2010
- **Chief Investigator** – Margie Morrice
- **Organisation** – Blue Whale Study Inc.

**Activity Period – 28 May – 29 October 2010**

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**1. Activity Summary**

A clear summary of approximately 500 words outlining the work undertaken and any significant findings (for publication on the Department's web site)

The workshop was conducted over three days (see attached Workshop Report).

Day 1 - The Sub-Tropical Convergence Expedition Workshop was intended to discuss and form a consensus on survey goals, design and data collection methodology using the combined expertise of the group. Discussion was structured around a few key planning elements and their opportunities and constraints i.e. background and research questions, data collection techniques, survey track, data synthesis and data modelling. This was led by the expedition organisers Pete Gill (BWS) and Curt Jenner (CWR), and facilitated by Barbara Musso (DEWHA). Some of the main consensus points of the workshop were the importance of the expedition, its goals and proposed outcomes, and the need to develop long-term data management and funding strategies. Participants agreed that the expedition will provide new knowledge of blue and other threatened 'large' whale species (e.g. southern right, sei whales) in this extensive and unknown region. It will also highlight areas of potential development activity, and linkages between these Indian Ocean systems with the Antarctic, and south-east Asian and Australian waters.

Day 2 - The main goals identified for Day 2 were sharing of information and ideas, and developing future research collaborations, within the framework of strategic needs for the recovery of blue whales that aggregate in the Indo-Pacific region. Through collaborative discussion and a form of consensus, a framework was created for blue whale research at least for the next five years. A formal name was agreed for the group, the Indo-Pacific Blue Whale Research Consortium, to assist in collaborative research efforts and communication between research groups. The research program areas developed on the day (population for pygmy blue whales in the Australasian region, population identity and connectivity, habitat selection and distribution, and current and emerging

threats) would become a foundation on which to guide discussion with potential funding bodies and develop funding applications.

Day 3 - Facilitated by Chandra Salgado Kent, the day was dedicated to the trial of the Southern Hemisphere Blue Whale Catalogue (SHBWC) and feedback on its use to the developers i.e. Centro de Conservación Cetacea in Chile through Bárbara Galletti. Bárbara gave an overview of the current status of the development and trial of the catalogue, made possible with funds from the IWC in 2008/2009. Bárbara clarified that the IWC is dedicated to fund work over 2 years, where the first year is for regional comparisons (by June 2011), and the second is for inter-regional comparisons. A number of catalogue-specific items were agreed upon by the group as needing consideration, and Barbara will work with the group and her IT specialists to resolve these. Tracking the health of individual whales was also discussed and Curt Jenner agreed to work with the group and other researchers worldwide to develop health indices.

## 2. The Outcomes/Objectives

### List of the Project Objectives

- Plan multidisciplinary large whale surveys of longitudinal sectors of the Sub-tropical Convergence.
- Test the trial version of the SHBWC.
- Carry out preliminary photo-ID matching within the Australasian Node of the SHBWC.
- Report on current research outcomes and initiatives.
- Develop short to medium term research priorities and collaborations that will complement Commonwealth and IWC needs.

### The degree to which the Activity has achieved each of the objectives

The Blue Whale Workshop achieved all of the above aims except preliminary photo-ID matching for the SHBWC. Most of the research groups within the Australasian region still have work to do on their catalogues before uploading images onto the SHBWC, and the SHBWC was still in its last phase of development. The time was therefore spent discussing solutions to some of the perceived issues with the catalogue structure and process.

## 3. Appropriateness

### The appropriateness of the approaches used in the development and implementation of the Activity

This workshop represented a wholly collaborative effort by the blue whale research community in the Indo-Pacific region. Australian blue whale researchers have come together a couple of times over the last 10 years to discuss research ideas and progress. With increasing collaborations across the Southern Hemisphere, and particularly within the Indian Ocean with other research groups and industry, the scope of blue whale research (particularly blue whale ecology, movements and connectedness) in this broader region has increased considerably in the last few years. Under this growing research environment, two particular projects needed a level of communication and agreement that could not easily be achieved remotely. It was decided to hold a research workshop for planning of the Sub-Tropical Convergence (STC) Expedition and to progress development of the Southern Hemisphere Blue Whale Catalogue (SHBWC). This then gave the group the opportunity to

also discuss research frameworks required to draw together each group's research priorities, in the context of current management needs and increasing industry activity.

The group agreed to take on the organisation of the workshop and secure funds as they were advised the Australian Government was not able to provide complete funding, or to coordinate the workshop. The group then made a collaborative effort to seek sufficient funds to allow the workshop to occur over three days, including participant costs. In the end 50% of funds were provided by the Commonwealth, and the remaining by the oil and gas industry (Beach Energy Ltd., ConocoPhillips Australia, Fugro Multi Client) and all the participants' research groups' internal funds (both independent and university).

In terms of workshop approach, the effort was shared across the group. It was agreed to seek an independent Chair for Days 1 (STC) and 2 (Research Programs), and delegated organisers for each day then worked with the Chair (Dr Barbara Musso, DEWHA) and other group participants to plan an approach for each day. In general the main goal for each day was to maximise participant engagement and contribution in an informal environment, under the guidance of clear aims and purpose. It is believed that this highly collaborative approach was very appropriate to achieve the goals set for the workshop, and that it enabled enduring outcomes of the workshop to be achieved.

#### **4. Effectiveness**

##### **The degree to which the Activity has effectively met its stated objectives**

The investigators of this project not only believe that the workshop achieved everything it had planned, but also set up a framework for successful outcomes into the future. The newly named Indo-Pacific Blue Whale Research Consortium (IPBWRC) provides the opportunity for the group to endure. Research coverage for the IPBWRC currently includes waters around Australia, Sri Lanka and South Africa, and ocean regions within south-east Asia, Indian Ocean, south-west Pacific Ocean and the Antarctic. The IPBWRC has already grown to include colleagues from South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States of America, with opportunities to meet again being provided by conferences for the Australian Marine Science Association and the Marine Mammal Society.

This future framework for blue whale research in this broader region is also being fuelled by much good will by these researchers. Feedback from participants has been extremely positive. They enjoyed the opportunity to get together and achieve a number of outcomes, and in general feel positive about future collaborative efforts as many have been working either independently or in small groups.