

## 2024 Report of the Section on Marine Birds and Mammals

The Section on Marine Birds and Mammals (S-MBM; under the auspices of the BIO Committee) was held virtually from 17:00-19:30 PDT on September 4, 2024, via Zoom, hosted by the PICES Secretariat. Patrick O'Hara and Miran Kim acted as meeting chairs. 11 members were present, representing the US, Canada, Japan, and Korea. Chinese members could not attend due to scheduling conflicts. There were no representatives from Russia.

The second meeting was held as a hybrid meeting from 14:00-17:40 HST on October 26, 2024, in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA. The current activities and next project associated with S-MBM Terms of Reference were discussed. Patrick O'Hara (Co-chair, Canada) and Miran Kim (Co-chair, Korea) called the meeting to order and welcomed members and observers. 11 Members from Canada, Korea, Japan, and the USA (S-MBM Endnote 1) attended.



Participants of S-MBM business meeting

### AGENDA ITEM 1

#### **Adoption of agenda**

### AGENDA ITEM 2

#### **Membership changes**

Dr. Yu Kanji was replaced by Dr. Kaoru Hattori.

Dr. Morohito Ito was requested to replace Dr. Yutaka Watanuki who retired last year.

AGENDA ITEM 3

**Report from participants**

1. Dr. T. Tamura, as an observer from PICES, provided a report on the 2024 International Whaling Commission (IWC/SC) meeting (S-MBM Endnote 3). PICES/ IWC observers will be changed from Dr. T. Tamura to Dr. Toshihide Kitakado (ex officio S-MBM).
2. Participants reported past and future meetings related to S-MBM activities:
  - a. Pacific Seabird Group Annual Meeting was held in February 2024 in Seattle, USA.
  - b. IWC/SC was held April/May 2024, in Bled, Slovenia.
3. S-MBM involvement with other PICES groups:
  - a. Dr. Elliott Hazen – S-CCME
  - b. Dr. P. O’Hara/K. Morgan – WG47 Observers, at-sea survey expertise
  - c. Guidance for S-MBM to play a bigger role developing the upcoming PICES Scientific Programme (post-FUTURE)
4. W9 workshop: *Puffin diet samples as indicators of forage nekton availability and community structure in the North Pacific*
  - a. Workshop/session in support of Activity Plan 2022-2025
  - b. 4 presentations
5. S7 session: *Social, economic, and ecological implications of recoveries, range expansions, and shifting distributions of marine birds, mammals, and fish.*
  - a. Workshop/session in support of Activity Plan 2022-2025
  - b. 19 oral and 3 poster presentations

AGENDA ITEM 4

**Discussion**

1. S-MBM Activity Plan, 2022-2026: *Interaction between MBMs and other ecosystem components and stressors*
  - a. Refinement of sub-themes and confirmation of phases
  - b. Submitted 1 workshop and 1 session proposal for PICES-2025 – both were successful

***S-MBM Endnote 1*****S-MBM participation list (both online and in-person meetings)**Members

Patrick O'Hara (Canada, Co-Chair)  
 Miran Kim (Korea, Co-Chair)  
 Ken Morgan (Canada)  
 Andrew W. Trites (Canada)  
 Kaoru Hattori (Japan)  
 Tstomu Tamura (Japan)  
 Yu Kanaji (Japan)  
 Morohito Ito (Japan)  
 Young-Rok An (Korea)  
 William Sydeman (USA)  
 Rolf R. Ream (USA)

Members unable to attend

Canada: Douglas F Bertram  
 China: Shuai Chen, Wei Lei, Xuelei Zhang,  
 Liyuan Zhao  
 Korea: Kyunglee Lee  
 Russia: Alexander Boltnev, Vjatcheslav P. Shuntov,  
 Andrey Vinnikov  
 USA: Elliott L Hazen

Observers

Yutaka Watanuki (Japan)  
 Kaoru Hattori (Japan)  
 JB Thiebot (Japan)  
 Hiroko Sasaki (Japan)  
 Hikari Maeda (Japan)  
 Jim Ruzicka (USA)

***S-MBM Endnote 2*****S-MBM meeting agenda**

(On-line)

17:00 September 4, 2024 (PDT; UTC-07:00)

1. Review draft agenda for upcoming S-MBM
2. Review TOR and S-MBM achievements with respect to TOR (including publications)
3. Updates on S-MBM workshop and topic session
4. PICES/S-MBM participation in conference and meetings
  - a. Pacific Seabird Group meeting
  - b. IWC
  - c. PSG position attachment on Avian Influenza
5. Review 5-year project (Action Plan) – discuss new EG proposals for PICES 2025
6. Finalize “Report/Requests for PICES 2024”
  - a. New EG proposals for PICES 2025
  - b. Capacity building event proposal
  - c. Travel support request
  - d. Extension of WG term

(In-person)

14:00 Oct 26, 2024 (HST; PICES 2024)

- I. S-MBM Membership updates
  - a. New members: Dr. Motohiro Ito/ Dr. Toshihide Kitakado

2. Updating a progress report in 5-year Action Plan
3. Proposals for PICES 2025 in Japan
4. PICES specific position statement for Avian Influenza Virus

***S-MBM Endnote 3***

**PICES Observer Report of the 2024 IWC (69B) Scientific Committee Meeting**

Tsutomu Tamura<sup>1</sup> and Toshihide Kitakado<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Institute of Cetacean Research, 4-5 Toyomi-cho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-0055, Japan*

<sup>2</sup>*Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology*

Meeting place: Rikli Balance hotel, Bled, Slovenia

Meeting date: From 22 April to 3 May 2024

Chair: Dr. Alexandre Zerbini (Brazil)

Participants: 275

National delegates: 98, Invited Participants (IP): 132, Observers: 8, Inter-governmental organizations: 3, Non-governmental organizations: 10, and IWC Secretariat: 24

The following sub-committees, working groups and *ad hoc* working group were established.

- Sub-Committees
  1. Implementation Reviews and Simulation Trials (IST)
  2. In-depth Assessment (IA)
  3. Other Northern Hemisphere whale stocks (NH)
  4. Other Southern Hemisphere whale stocks (SH)
  5. Small Cetaceans (SM)
  6. Whale Watching (WW)
  7. Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW)
  8. Conservations Management Plans (CMP)
  9. Non-Deliberate Human-Induced Mortality of Cetaceans (HIM)
  10. Environmental Concerns (E)
- Working Groups
  1. Stock Definition/DNA Testing (SD/DNA)
  2. Ecosystem Modelling Approaches (EM)
  3. Abundance Estimates, Stock Status and International Cruises (ASI)
- *Ad hoc* Working Groups
  1. Photo-ID (PH)
  2. Sanctuaries (SAN)
  3. Databases and Related Issues (GDR)

The following topics related to North Pacific whales and ecosystem were discussed at the meeting.

- In-depth assessment (IA): Sub-Committee

This Sub-Committee continued the in-depth assessment of common minke, humpback, and sei whales

in the North Pacific. An in-depth assessment includes the examination of current stock size, population trends, carrying capacity, and productivity.

1. *Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific sei whales*: The Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific sei whales integrates data from historical catches, recent abundance estimates, and mark-recapture data using a multi-area population model. A multi-area age-structured population model has been developed, based on two different stock structure hypotheses: (1) a single stock is distributed throughout the North Pacific; (2) five stocks are distributed throughout the North Pacific (Fig. 1). There was no consensus on the relative plausibility of the stock structure hypotheses. The Committee failed to find a population model which consistently integrated all available information; this was due to fundamental conflicts in the data. The Committee recommended an intersessional WG to develop a document summarizing all available information, alongside a summary of attempts to fit a population model. This work is ongoing. The committee recommended making the summary document by the end of 2024 and submitting it to both SC70 and the Journal of Cetacean Research for review.

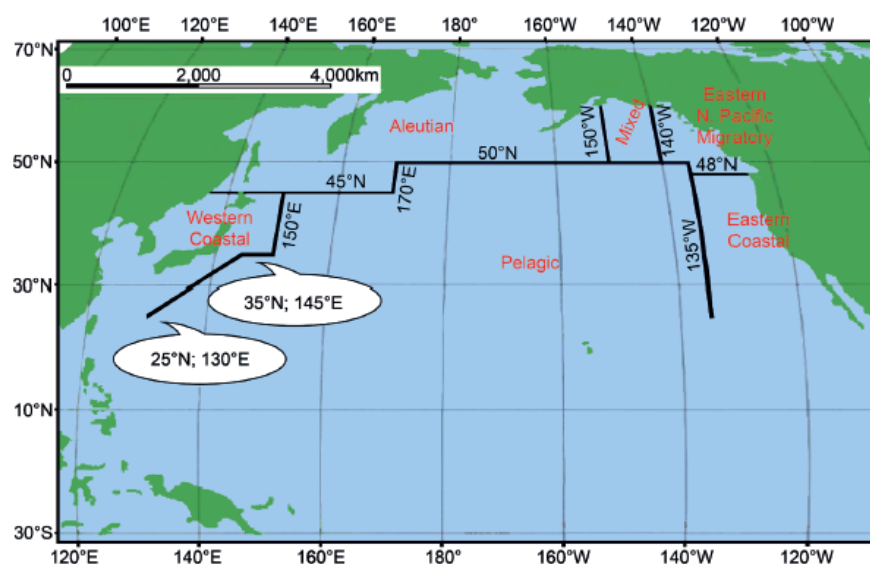


Fig. 1. The 6 sub-areas used in the Comprehensive Assessment for North Pacific sei whales.

2. *In-depth assessment of western North Pacific common minke whales*: The In-depth Assessment of Western North Pacific common minke whales considers three stock hypotheses: (1) a single J-stock west of Japan and O-stock to the east and north (hypothesis A); (2) a third Y-stock in the Yellow Sea overlapping with J-stock (hypothesis B); and (3) four stocks (Y, J, P, O) with distinct distributions (hypothesis E). Initially developed for RMP IR, the models now focus on bycatch impacts, particularly on the J-stock, following Japan's exit from the IWC. The assessment also considers Japan's domestic whaling activities.  
The Committee reiterated the need to continue the in-depth assessment of western North Pacific common minke whales with a focus on bycatch levels and the status of coastal stock(s). The Committee noted the computationally-intensive workplan and the urgency to complete this In-depth Assessment due to the potential conservation issues of bycatch on the coastal P and J stocks.
3. *Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific humpback whales*: In 2024, the Committee concludes that the In-depth Assessment of the North Pacific humpback whale is complete, pending software

validation by the Secretariat. The Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific humpback whales began in 2016 and has since involved updating input data and refining the population dynamics model. At SC69B in 2024, updated mixing rates, abundance estimates, and human-related removal data were incorporated into a revised model. The assessment showed a strong recovery of the population to over 30 000 whales by 2014, although recent declines, particularly in Alaska, were linked to a marine heatwave. While some breeding populations remain small, continued monitoring is crucial.

- **Abundance Estimates, Stock Status and International Cruises (ASI): Working Group**

This Working Group was established following discussions within the IWC Scientific Committee to formally review and agree on the status of the abundance estimates submitted to the Scientific Committee across all of the Committee's sub committees and working groups. Regarding the North Pacific, this group also deals with the evaluation of abundance estimates of several cetacean species (e.g., Sei whale, Bryde's whale, Eastern North Pacific gray whale, and humpback whale). In addition, it deals with evaluation of sighting surveys plan/results in the Okhotsk Sea and the western North Pacific.

1. The IWC-POWER (North Pacific Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research): This program is an international collaborative effort coordinated by the IWC and Japan. The project includes line transect sighting for estimating population abundance and biopsy skin-sampling and photo ID for stock structure on major large cetaceans. The project contributed to the ongoing assessment work of the Committee. In this year, the Committee received the report of the IWC-POWER Steering Group on the detailed planning for the 2024 IWC-POWER cruise (Fig. 2) and the preliminary plans for the 2025 survey. The Committee endorsed the report of the Steering Group and recommended the programme continue.

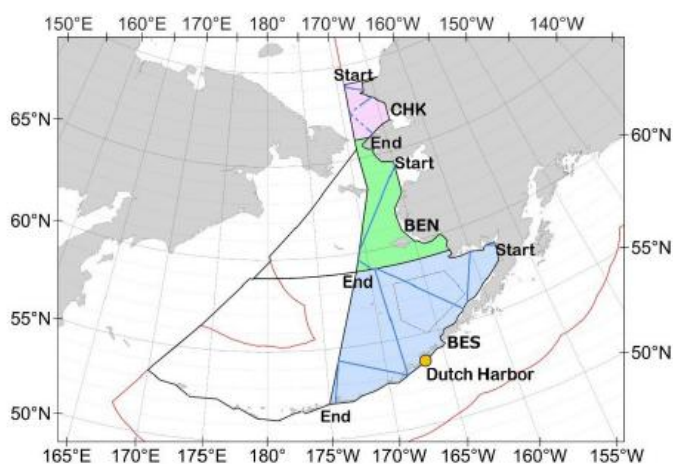


Fig. 2. The research area and strata for the 2024 cruise are shown in purple (Chukchi: CHK), green (Northern of east-Bering Sea: BEN) and blue (southern of east-Bering Sea: BES).

- **Other matters**

The SC also covered other topics such as environmental concerns, small cetaceans, whale watching, and by-catch. The Committee noted the unusual mortality of western North Pacific gray whale in the years 2019-22. The Committee plans to begin an implementation review of gray whales in 2025.

This was the final year of office for the Chair (Zerbini) and the Vice-Chair (Porter). In accordance with its Rules of Procedure, the Vice-Chair automatically becomes the new Chair (Porter). The Committee elects

Lang to be the new Vice-Chair in this meeting, and Nelson as the Vice-Chair Elect.

The 2024 Scientific committee report of IWC can download the following link.

<https://archive.iwc.int/pages/view.php?ref=22181&k=4328e9b854>

- 2026 meeting schedule

The SC is expected will move to a biennial meeting cycle starting in 2025 (SC/70A). In this meeting (SC/69B), each sub-committee developed its priorities and a biennial workplan for 2025-26.