



*“Working within CITES for the protection and conservation of species in international trade”*

## Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin

### *Tursiops aduncus*

AC23 Doc. 8.5.1 (Israel) Selection of Solomon Islands population of *Tursiops aduncus* for inclusion in the review of significant trade

SSN View: SUPPORT INCLUSION IN THE REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT TRADE

#### **Biological status:**

- **Distribution:** Documented from Cape Agulhas in southeastern South Africa and along the rim of the Indian Ocean, including the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and the Indo-Malay Archipelago eastward to Solomon Islands. Not known to occur in any offshore regions.
- **Population:** Typically form discrete, localized, resident subpopulations numbering between 8 and 200 animals. Very little, if any, exchange of individuals between adjacent populations means they are potentially genetically isolated; this may impede recovery if removal rates exceed natural recruitment rates. There are no peer-reviewed published scientific studies on the population size of *Tursiops aduncus* in the Solomon Islands, making it impossible to evaluate the impact that removals would have on these populations.
- **Threats:** Near-shore distribution makes this species susceptible to environmental degradation, direct exploitation, and conflict with inshore fisheries.

#### **Trade status:**

- More than 100 *Tursiops aduncus* were captured for export from waters around Solomon Islands in 2003, with nearly as many believed to have been captured there in 2007. Solomon Islands exported 33 dolphins to Mexico in 2003, 28 dolphins to the United Arab Emirates in 2007, and has proposed to export an unknown number to Singapore. Solomon Islands has established a national export quota of 80 live dolphins (AC 23 Doc. 8.5).
- Based on the lack of information on the status of *Tursiops aduncus* in Solomon Islands region, coupled with observations in other sites that indicate that populations consist of small, discrete groups, it is plausible that the proposed capture of at least 80 dolphins annually in addition to the recent removal of 200 individuals may represent a very serious risk to the conservation status of this species in coastal Solomon Islands waters.
- The IUCN CSG has long cautioned against the capture and removal of dolphins from wild populations *“unless that specific population has been assessed and it has been determined that a certain amount of culling can be allowed without reducing the population’s long-term viability or compromising its role in the ecosystem.”*
- In response to the 2007 exports, the IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group stated that *“we are not aware that any credible, peer-reviewed studies of bottlenose dolphins have been undertaken in the Solomon Islands since 2003. Accordingly, we have not changed the conclusion we reached in 2003 that a non-detriment finding under CITES is not possible for these populations, and that exports should not take place.”* (emphasis added)

## **Chronology:**

**May 15, 2003:** CITES Management Authority of Mexico requests advice from the CITES Secretariat in regard to export permits issued by Solomon Islands for the export of 120 bottlenose dolphins.

**July 2003:** First reports of capture of a large number of live dolphins in Solomon Islands appear in the press.

**July 21, 2003:** Twenty-eight wild-caught bottlenose dolphins exported from Solomon Islands to Mexico.

**July 30, 2003:** CITES Secretariat issues a statement that it recommended to Mexico that it seek confirmation from Solomon Islands that the export permits were valid, and to seek information about the non-detriment finding. Pending the receipt of the requested information, the Secretariat recommended that the imports not be allowed. The Secretariat reported that Mexico received a response from Solomon Islands but the information had not yet been provided to the Secretariat. The Secretariat concludes that if evidence was received indicating that the requirements of CITES had not been met, the Secretariat would not hesitate to recommend rejection of export permits issued by Solomon Islands.

**September 2003:** The IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group (CSG) and IUCN Veterinary Specialist Group conduct a site visit to Solomon Islands, and conclude that *“no scientific assessment of the population-level effects of the removals of bottlenose dolphins in the Solomon Islands was undertaken in advance of the recent live-capture operations. It stated that “without any reliable data on numbers and population structure of bottlenose dolphins in this region, it is impossible to make a credible judgment about the impacts of this level of exploitation.”*

**May/June 2007:** Reports of large numbers of live dolphins being captured in the Solomon Islands.

**June 13, 2007:** The IUCN CSG advises the CITES Secretariat and Solomon Islands in June 2007 that it is *“... not aware that any credible, peer-reviewed studies of bottlenose dolphins have been undertaken in the Solomon Islands since 2003”* and that *“a non-detriment finding under CITES is not possible for these populations, and that exports should not take place.”*

**October 2007:** Solomon Islands exports 28 dolphins to the United Arab Emirates. Dolphin mortality in the sea pens and during or after transit to Honiara Airport is documented.

**October 15, 2007:** In response to concerns expressed about the legality of Solomon Islands dolphin export, the Secretary-General issues a statement indicating that the Secretariat *“has not been presented with any evidence which demonstrates that non-detriment findings are not being adequately made before exports are authorized”* and that the Secretariat *“has received no evidence to demonstrate that trade ... will have a detrimental impact upon wild dolphin populations.”* Consequently, the Secretariat concludes that there is no justification to take steps to halt the trade, but reiterates the claim that if evidence was presented that justified a halt in trade, the Secretariat would certainly act.

**November 21, 2007:** SSN and World Wildlife Fund issue a rebuttal to the Secretary-General's October 15, 2007 statement explaining that Solomon Islands dolphin exports were not legal under CITES since no adequate scientific data is available to validate the making of a non-detriment finding (available at [http://www.ssn.org/Documents/news\\_articles\\_SI\\_exports\\_EN.htm](http://www.ssn.org/Documents/news_articles_SI_exports_EN.htm)).

## **Conclusion:**

SSN strongly supports inclusion of *Tursiops aduncus* in the Review of Significant Trade:

- Non-detriment findings, should “be based on the scientific review of available information on the population status, distribution, population trend, harvest, and other biological and ecological factors, as appropriate...” (Resolution Conf. 10.3)
- SSN is in agreement with the IUCN CSG that inadequate data exist to support a valid non-detriment finding.
- Inclusion in the Review of Significant Trade will assist Parties in the implementation of the Convention.