

Prop. 12.3 (Georgia) Transfer of the Black Sea population of the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus ponticus*) from Appendix II to Appendix I.

SSN VIEW: Support Adoption of Proposal

- Population is significantly threatened by degradation of its environment, including pollution, coastal development, invasive species and fisheries interactions.
- Numbers exported almost doubled between 1995-1998 compared with 1990-1994.
- Transfer to Appendix I is supported by relevant intergovernmental bodies having a function in relation to the species.
- Threats to the population and its habitat have been comprehensively highlighted by international experts and acknowledged by the Range States.
- It is unlikely that reproduction is keeping pace with current mortality and live-capture removal.
- Although the transfer would result in a “split-listing” of the bottlenose dolphin species, this population is geographically and genetically distinct.

THE POPULATION MEETS THE BIOLOGICAL CRITERIA IN ANNEX 1 TO RESOLUTION CONF. 9.24

The Black Sea bottlenose dolphin meets several of the biological criteria in Resolution Conf. 9.24, Annex 1, due to its small population size, fragmentation of its population, declines in the quality of its habitat, historical over-exploitation, threats from extrinsic factors, and decreasing reproductive potential.

The primary current threat to the Black Sea bottlenose dolphin is habitat loss and a decline in habitat quality. The ecosystem of the Black Sea has been highly changed and disturbed. This is primarily due to extensive pollution, coastal development, disturbance caused by extensive vessel traffic, over-fishing and the impacts of introduced species. The ecosystem is also affected by global changes such as climate change and increased UV-B radiation.

The Black Sea, as an enclosed water body with limited water exchange and slow circulation, is especially vulnerable to pollution. The input of nutrients from agriculture and sewage has caused eutrophication and widespread algal blooms. Dolphins, as top predators, are uniquely at risk from pollution. Very high concentrations of certain contaminants have been reported in the bodies of dolphins in the Black Sea, making them especially vulnerable to reproductive disorders and infectious diseases. Recent mass-mortalities of dolphins in the Black Sea have been associated with the degraded state of their environment, especially exposure to chemical pollutants.

Female bottlenose dolphins are slow to mature (sexual maturity at 5-12 years of age), bear a single calf, and have long inter-birth intervals (2-3 years). The dolphins are reported to live predominantly in small and isolated inshore groups based around a cooperative social structure – both of these factors make removals extremely disruptive. It is also unlikely that current reproduction, undoubtedly depressed by environmental factors, is keeping pace with current mortality and removal of live animals for the captive display industry, which traditionally targets young females.

Sharp declines in both the abundance and range of fish species, on which bottlenose dolphins feed in the Black Sea, have been recorded. These declines have been attributed to both environmental pollution and over-fishing. Bottlenose dolphins are also susceptible to entanglement in fishing gear.

Heavy hunting is believed to have caused a significant decline in the three Black Sea cetacean species in the 20th century. Up to four million cetaceans are believed to have been killed. Commercial dolphin hunting was banned in 1966 by the former Soviet Union, Georgia, Bulgaria and Romania, and by Turkey in 1983, although poaching is reported to continue.

THE POPULATION MEETS THE TRADE CRITERIA

The population is clearly affected by trade and, although the number of live specimens traded is relatively small, exports must be viewed in relation to the size of the population and its ability to withstand these and other removals.

Worldwide demand for bottlenose dolphins for the captive display industry is high and growing, and the Black Sea population meets a significant proportion of this demand. WCMC data document the export of at least 112 Black Sea bottlenose dolphins between 1990 and 2001. However, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) is aware of additional exports that have not been documented by the countries involved in the trade. This brings the number of animals in trade during this period to at least 120.

The trade figures show that exports are increasing. Between 1990 and 1994 a total of 38 specimens were reported to have been exported from Range States (an average of 7.6 animals per year), while between 1995 and



1998, 54 specimens are reported to have been exported (an average of 13.5 animals per year). Exports of live specimens to non-Parties to CITES (for example, Bahrain, Kuwait and Syria in 1997 and 1998) are increasing.

Mortality during capture, transport and captivity of Black Sea bottlenose dolphins is high. Out of 70 exports documented in detail by WDCCS during the 1990s, 32 animals are confirmed dead.

In addition to capture for international trade, and losses due to environmental impacts, unknown numbers of dolphins are removed from the Black Sea annually for national use in range states, including for human therapy programmes, military training and to replace animals dying in national captive display facilities.

SPLIT-LISTING IS NOT A PROBLEM

Although the transfer would result in a “split-listing” of the Black Sea bottlenose dolphin from the rest of the species, this is unlikely to result in enforcement problems.

The population of bottlenose dolphins in the Black Sea is geographically distinct from the rest of the species and recent studies show that it is also genetically distinct: an analysis of samples of bottlenose dolphins from the Black Sea recently compared with animals from the Mediterranean and East North Atlantic showed statistically significant genetic variations between the populations. Differences of the magnitude shown suggest that it is possible to distinguish Black Sea bottlenose dolphins from those in the Mediterranean and Northeast Atlantic.

PROPOSAL IS SUPPORTED BY OTHER RELEVANT ORGANISATIONS

In November 2001, the Standing Committee to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) adopted a Recommendation (No.86), that Contracting Parties strictly enforce the prohibition of capture and keeping of Black Sea bottlenose dolphins, support efforts to provide improved protection in the framework of CITES and support regional co-ordination of conservation efforts.

The Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), which entered into force in June 2001, bans the deliberate taking of cetaceans, including live specimens. The first meeting of the Parties, in February 2002, adopted Resolution 1.12 which calls for more action to prohibit the deliberate taking and keeping of Black Sea bottlenose dolphins and calls upon CITES Parties “to provide better protection to this population by *inter alia* upgrading it to Appendix I”.