

VKM assessment:

Non-detriment finding for sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)

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Competing interests: VKM Panel on CITES declares no competing interests in relation to this NDF.

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Scientific name: *Physeter macrocephalus* Linnaeus, 1758

Synonym: *Physeter catodon* Linnaeus, 1758

Common name: Sperm whale, cachelot, cachalot, pot whale, spermacet whale

Norwegian name: Spermhval

Type of permit: CITES Appendix I (Norwegian CITES Regulation Annex I, List A).
Countries of Import: Republic of Fiji (FJ) and the Commonwealth of Australia (AU)
Country of Export: Norway (NO)

Purpose and source: The proposal concerns the export of 19 sperm whale teeth (source code W) from Norway to Fiji (17 teeth) and Australia (two teeth) (purpose-of-transaction code P).

For Appendix I species (Norwegian Cites Regulation Annex 1, list A) it is required to establish that exports will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in question, in compliance with CITES Article III. In the Norwegian CITES Regulation (Lovdata 2018) the criteria for import to Norway are described in Chapter 2, Section 4.

As the teeth in question were collected in the period 1960-70 the regulation is described in Chapter 3, Section 11. On 'Previously acquired specimens (pre-Convention)' of the Norwegian Cites Regulation.

Note that Norway has made a reservation to the Appendix I-listing of *Physeter macrocephalus* (06.06.1981). It is, however, regulated as list A, (see above) unless trade involves other countries that have made a reservation against the Appendix I listing of *P. macrocephalus*.

VKM has adopted the definition of detriment, cf. Conf. 16.7 (Rev. CoP17) suggested by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Scientific Authority (<https://www.fws.gov/international/pdf/archive/workshop-american-ginseng-cites-non-detriment-findings.pdf>):

1. Harvest that is not sustainable.
2. Harvest that harms the status of the species in the wild.
3. Removal from the wild that results in habitat loss or destruction, or that interferes with recovery efforts for a species.

Conclusion

The 19 teeth from *Physeter macrocephalus* were landed by Norwegian whaling vessels in the period 1960-1970 (that is, prior to the CITES listing of order Cetacea in 1979). The capture location of the whales remains unknown, however, it is likely that they were caught in international waters and the country of origin used is therefore Norway.

The export of 19 pre-convention *Physeter macrocephalus* teeth from Norway to Fiji and Australia for personal purposes will not be detrimental to the future survival of the species.

1. Biological information

Distribution

The sperm whale is distributed in nearly all marine regions deeper than 1,000 meters and not covered by ice. Males are observed at higher latitudes than females and calves (Taylor et al., 2019).

Life history

The information on generation time, fecundity, and mortality of sperm whales is uncertain (Taylor et al., 2019). Whaling was predominantly targeted at males and the resulting gender bias is assumed to have long lasting effects hindering population growth (Whitehead, 2002).

Role in the ecosystem

The primary prey of sperm whales are deep water squids. Calves may be attacked by killer whales and large sharks (International Whaling Commission, 2023).

2. Population trend

Unknown. A 67% reduction from the pre-whaling population has been estimated (Whitehead 2002), but this is uncertain, and it is unknown if the post-whaling population has increased or declined (Taylor et al., 2019).

3. Conservation status

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Taylor et al., 2019): Vulnerable (VU A1d);
Norsk Rødliste for arter 2021 (Eldegard et al., 2021): NA, as no reproducing population is found in Norwegian waters.

4. Threats

The major threat to sperm whales post-whaling appears to be entanglement in gillnets and other fishing gear (Taylor et al., 2019). Ingestion of marine debris and ship strikes are also causes of human-induced mortality (International Whaling Commission, 2023).

5. Conservation and Management measures:

International legislation

The International Whaling Commission manages sperm whale populations under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling.
Sperm whales are listed in Appendix 1 of the Convention on Migratory Species and in Annex A of the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations.

National legislation

NA

Conservation measures

NA

6. Trade/use

Legal

There is a considerable international trade in *Physeter macrocephalus*, primarily in teeth and carvings (scrimshaw) (CITES Trade Database, 2023).

For 2023, Fiji has a quota of 225 teeth (Species+, 2023).

Illegal

Sperm whale teeth are known to be traded as ivory-substitutes (Baker et al. 2020).

References

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- Species+ (2023) Species+, developed by UNEP-WCMC and the CITES Secretariat, is a website designed to assist Parties with implementing CITES, CMS and other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Species+ provides a centralised portal for accessing key information on species of global concern. Quotas for sperm whale *Physeter macrocephalus* is available at:
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