

WHALES: avoiding collisions prevents damage to ships, and injuries to passengers, crew and whales.



Advice to help avoid collisions with whales

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has developed a guidance document for minimising the risk of collisions between ships and whales. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) is also working to address the issue.

1 Passage planning

Minimising the risk of collisions with whales can become a regular part of planning a passage. The best way to reduce risk is to avoid areas with the most whales. Planning well in advance may allow an area to be avoided with minimal additional passage time. If it is not possible to avoid known areas of high whale density, then try to plan to slow down in these areas. There is good scientific evidence that the risk to whales is substantially less from ships travelling at 10 knots compared to 15 knots or more.

In some areas coast guards may be able to provide information on locations of recent whale sightings and likely high density areas.

2 Keeping watch

Large ships have little ability to avoid whales which surface directly ahead of them. However, watch officers should be aware of what action they should take if whales are seen. Large whales can often be seen at distances of several miles and seeing one whale is often a strong indication that there are likely to be others in the area. Modest course alterations away from sightings can reduce collision risk with other individuals in the same aggregation. Having a dedicated observer scanning ahead with binoculars will help to detect whales at greater distances. Keep as far from whales as possible and do not approach closer than a quarter of a mile unless unavoidable.

Smaller ships, including sailing vessels, are more likely to be damaged by collisions with whales and should be prepared for direct avoidance manoeuvres. Watch officers should be on high alert if any whales are sighted. Consider reducing speed in poor sightings conditions as well as in response to seeing whales.

3 Reporting incidents

More information helps understand the problem and the factors that affect collision risk. All reports of collisions are valuable and can help avoid these incidents in the future. Please report any whale struck, stuck on the bow, carcasses observed at sea, significant or abnormal sightings such as whales in unusually large numbers, to the appropriate coast guard or maritime authority. Use the International Whaling Commission (IWC) template to report on any collision incident at www.iwc.int/ship-strikes or email shipstrikes@iwc.int.

4 Measures available through the IMO and national legislation

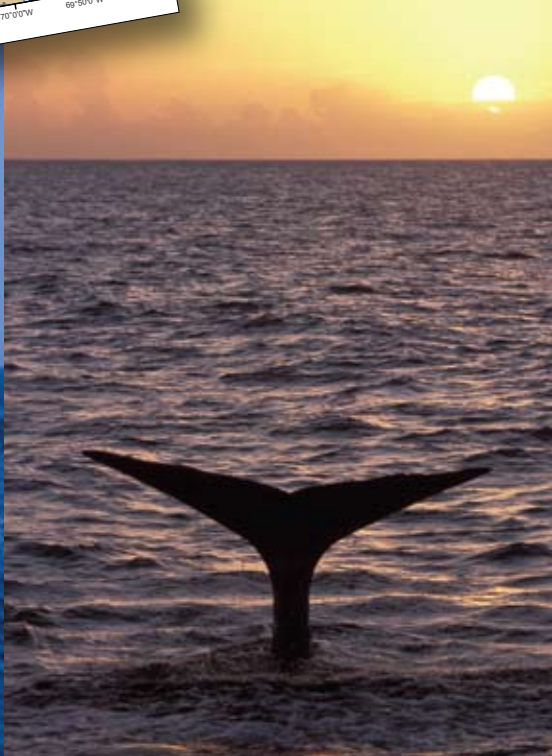
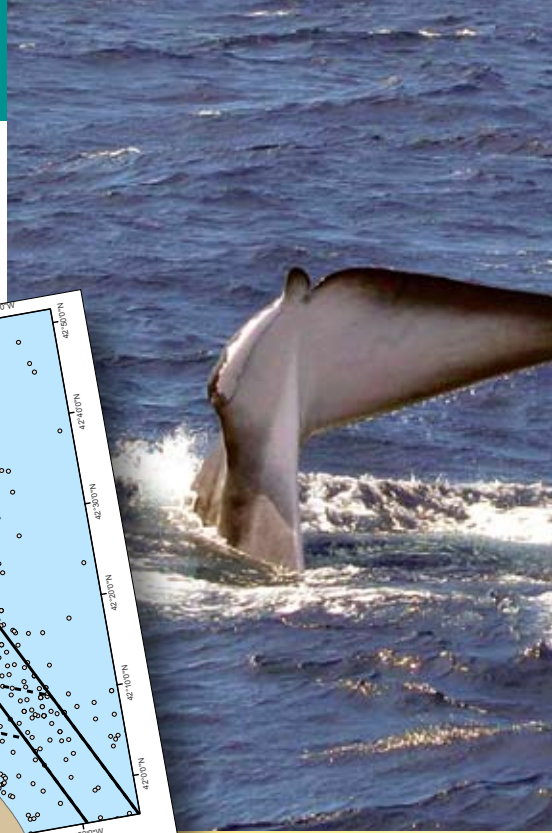
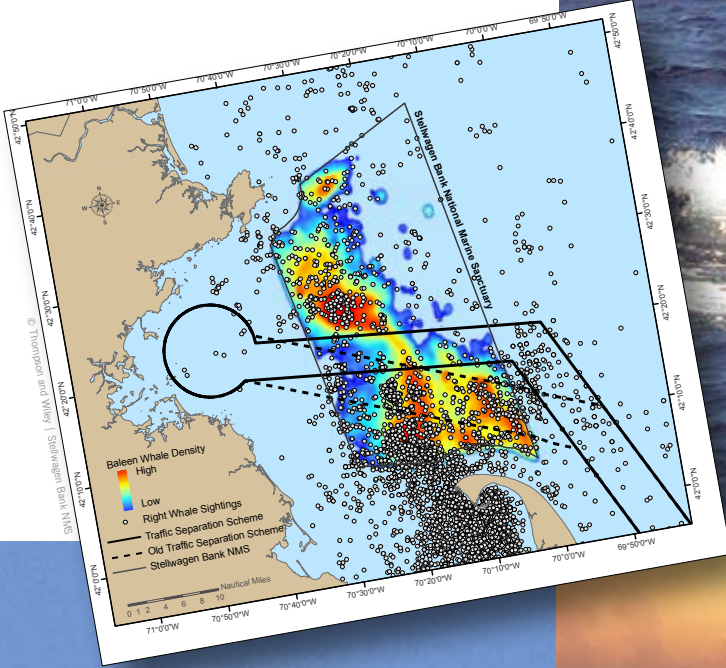
In some waters, measures have been taken to minimize the risk of collision with whales. These measures include the re-alignment of Traffic Separations Schemes, the creation of Areas To Be Avoided, Mandatory Ship Reporting Systems, Advisories to Mariners and speed restrictions.

5 Scientific research

There is no simple solution to the problem of ship strikes. Scientists are looking at ways of modelling distribution patterns of whales and ships to identify high risk areas, developing autonomous off-shore buoys that listen for whales, and systems for relaying information from observations of whales to mariners.

Photos © IFAW

The approaches to Boston harbour cross an important area for right and other whales. Risk has been reduced by moving shipping lanes slightly to avoid high density areas.



Letter from the Belgian IWC Commissioner



From the office of the Belgian IWC Commissioner

The Government of Belgium first produced this leaflet in 2009. At that time, the chair of the IWC Ship Strikes Working Group and Belgian Commissioner to the IWC, Alexandre de Lichtervelde, noted that there was a growing awareness and concern over the worldwide problem of collisions between ships and whales.

In some incidents there has been serious damage to the ship. Severe or even fatal injuries to passengers have occurred involving hydrofoil ferries, whale-watching vessels and recreational craft. In many collisions, a whale struck by a ship is killed or left severely injured. Although collisions often go unnoticed, information gathered from the incidents that are witnessed is critical to solving the problem.

Since 2005, ship strikes with whales, dolphins and porpoises have been a priority issue for the work of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Belgium is leading the process in order to (1) increase awareness; (2) compile information on ship strike incidents; (3) identify measures to reduce the number of ship strikes, and (4) obtain acceptance of these measures by the maritime sector. A key tool to use is the ship strikes database accessible through the IWC website. It is critical that the maritime industry and the public assist and provide the data needed to inform decision-making that will reduce risks in the future.

Sadly, Alexandre de Lichtervelde passed away in 2011. The Government of Belgium remains committed to this work and is pleased to have supported the second edition of this leaflet.

Frédéric Chemay
IWC Commissioner, Belgium



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This leaflet is available in six languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish)

Front cover photos: blue whale surfacing near container ship © NOAA/CINMS; sperm whale © IFAW

Please report any collisions with whales to the IWC

www.iwc.int/ship-strikes

e-mail: shipstrikes@iwc.int

or contact your local ship strikes co-ordinator or whale stranding network.



The production of this leaflet was co-ordinated by the International Fund for Animal Welfare which has been involved in addressing the problem of ship strikes since 1998