WESTERN GRAY WHALE ADVISORY PANEL **JPTF**

JOINT PROGAMME TASK FORCE

REPORT OF THE JOINT PROGRAMME TASK FORCE

11-12 FEBRUARY 2013

IUCN, GLAND

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CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

AIS	Automated Information System
ENL	Exxon Neftegas Limited
FRC	Fast Rescue Craft
IBM	Institute of Marine Biology
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWC	International Whaling Commission
IWG	Interdepartmental Working Group (MNR)
MMO	Marine mammal observer
MNR	Ministry of Natural Resources of Russian Federation
POI	Pacific Oceanological Institute
SOLAS	International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea
SSU	Sakhalin State University
WGWAP	Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel
WGWAP-12	12th meeting of the Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel

1 INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

The meeting of the Joint Programme Task Force was held at IUCN Headquarters, Gland, Switzerland, from 11-12 February 2013, under the chairmanship of Randall Reeves.

The list of participants is given as Annex A. Task Force members Vladimirov and Tsidulko joined parts of the meeting by phone, and Koen Broker (a Sakhalin Energy contractor) answered questions on the biopsy component of the programme by phone during the meeting.

1.1 Chairman's opening remarks

The Joint Programme Task Force was established by the WGWAP pursuant to issues raised under Item 3.5 in the report of WGWAP-12. Sakhalin Energy's presentations at that meeting had led the Panel to understand that the Company was contemplating changes to logistics that would significantly affect at least two aspects of the Joint Programme: the dedicated vessel-based surveys of the Offshore feeding area and the gray whale photo-identification effort. In response, the Panel established this ad hoc task force with the following remit: "… to verify, to the Panel's satisfaction, that the Joint Programme in 2013 will meet the same scientific objectives to at least the same level and degree as was intended by the 2012 programme and in addition will not compromise the Panel's ability to provide advice on the potential impacts of the South Piltun development."

Regarding the potential South Piltun development, Evans advised the Task Force that Sakhalin Energy shareholders had not supported the drilling of an appraisal well in 2014, that new activities potentially affecting gray whales would unlikely begin before 2017, and that the earliest start of production, if development goes ahead, would be in approximately the 2022-2024 timeframe. Therefore, the Task Force agreed to focus only on the initial part of its remit during this meeting. However, it stressed that the overall review of future monitoring planned for WGWAP-13 (see below) would consider this and other potential future activities thoroughly in the context of data needs.

Reeves emphasised that the Panel did not expect this to become a standing task force. Rather, it was assumed that the task force would meet only once, after which it would report back to the Panel and then be dissolved. It was nevertheless recognised that, as discussed under Item 12.1 of the WGWAP-12 report and mentioned in recommendation WGWAP-12/027, there is an expectation for the Panel and Company to engage in an in-depth discussion of 'strategic planning for Sakhalin Energy's future gray whale monitoring and research' at the next Panel meeting, and it is possible that a task force approach will be taken to further such discussion following WGWAP-13.

1.2 Available documents

A single document was provided in advance for consideration by Panel members of the Task Force on a confidential basis. This was an unofficial translation of the planned scope of work for the 2013 Joint Programme as submitted to Russian authorities in December 2012. Considerable, supplementary information was provided in presentations at the meeting by Evans and Vladimirov, with a focus on any projected changes from the recent programme and the implications of these.

1.3 Adoption of Agenda

The adopted agenda is given as Annex B.

2 BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW PROVIDED BY SAKHALIN ENERGY

Evans provided the following background and overview of Sakhalin Energy's current plans for the 2013 gray whale research and monitoring Joint Programme. The Task Force discussions of each individual component can be found in the subsequent agenda items.

Sakhalin Energy, together with Joint Programme partner Exxon Neftegas Ltd (ENL), are responding to requirements of MNR/IWG to be transparent about the relevance and cost structure of the component parts of the Gray Whale scientific monitoring programme conducted annually offshore Sakhalin. In addition, Shareholders and the Russian Party continuously review the budget of the programme and are seeking cost and vessel utilisation efficiencies.

These requirements have led both Companies to review the logistics arrangements for the programme in 2013 and future years. Historically the programme has been conducted from a single vessel – originally the R/V

Oparin and in recent years, the R/V *Igor Maximov*. Depending on a single vessel meant that each component of the programme had to compete for time and focus. This often resulted in weather dictating which part of the programme was conducted and when, as well as competition between components for prioritisation. It also meant that cost transparency for each component was impossible as the work was under a single collective lump sum.

After reviewing all logistics arrangements, it became clear to the Companies that increased efficiencies regarding the research programme were possible. By using vessels that are either owned or under contract to Sakhalin Energy, it is possible to employ dedicated platforms for each component of the programme, thus allowing improved logistics, cost reductions and the cost transparencies that the Regulator (Rosprirodnadzor) and Russian Party are seeking. This is important for the annual programme approval process.

The Companies have considered all elements of the programme and have proposed changes to the programme logistics, whilst maintaining the scientific content and preserving continuity of the data sets. The proposal described herein results in no reductions in 2013 in terms of the data expected to be acquired or effort to be undertaken on each program component. In fact, it provides opportunities to improve the overall programme.

2.1 Shore-Based Distribution

The shore-based distribution field programme remains essentially unchanged from 2011 and 2012. Two teams are established to work from the Northern (Pioneer) Camp and the South Piltun Temporary Field Camp. Scientists are recruited under contract from Sakhalin State University (SSU). The programme has operated in recent years from 1st August to 30th September and this is the plan in 2013.

Sakhalin Energy is investing in new accommodation modules (started in 2012, completion 2013) which will reduce the need for complex mobilisation/demobilisation work. As a consequence, the companies are tendering the new mobilisation/demobilisation scope and camp services.

The scientists who are based at the South Piltun Temporary Field Camp generally have time available to them most mornings. This is because of the imbalance in numbers of stations between North and South programme components. Consequently there is an opportunity to (1) train behaviour specialists as a morning activity and (2) acquire shore-based photos as was done in 2011.

2.2 Vessel-based Programme

The Companies have proposed essentially the same vessel-based scientific programme as in 2011 and 2012, except it will be implemented from multiple vessels. The vessels for 2013 components are as follows:

1. Benthic: The R/V *Pavel Gordienko* (based in Vladivostok Port) will be used for the benthic programme. IBM specialists will work with FERHI (the vessel owners) and the work will be undertaken under the existing Sakhalin Energy contract. Two periods of data collection (July and September) will allow for focussed benthic sampling. This approach is supported by IBM scientists as it augments the existing dataset and allows a "snapshot in time" data acquisition period in September. This is seen as an improvement on recent benthic data acquisition. Mobilisation of the scientists will be either from Vladivostok (home port of the vessel) or through Korsakov (when bunkering is done). The autonomous at-sea capability of the *Pavel Gordienko* is up to 35 days, which provides ample time for achieving the desired data collection goals.

2. Acoustic: Sakhalin Energy has 3 supply vessels (operating out of Kholmsk Port in the SW of the island). These vessels – *Pacific Endeavour*, *Endurance* and *Enterprise* – were used for acoustic buoy deployment in 2011 and 2012. In 2013 they will also be used for buoy deployment and retrieval. Scientists from Pacific Oceanographic Institute will conduct the work as in previous years.

3. Vessel-based Photo-ID/Biopsy: A number of options were considered by the Companies for conducting the 2013 photo-ID programme. The Companies had considered switching this programme to a shore-based operation. However, as mentioned in the WGWAP-12 report, the Panel objected to this proposal, fearing that the spatial coverage previously obtained from the vessel-based programme would be lost and that the number of days of effort would be reduced due to weather. The Panel also considered that a shore-based Joint Programme effort would largely duplicate the activities of the Russia/US photo-ID team based at Piltun Lagoon lighthouse. The Companies have re-evaluated this programme and found three different ways of keeping it vessel-based, the most practical of which is to run the programme from the OSR vessel or the Standby vessel in the vicinity of the offshore platforms. The vessels involved operate from Kholmsk port, allowing good mobilisation and

demobilisation. The PA-A and PA-B platforms will be used for any vessel-to-vessel or platform-to-vessel transfers. A programme of up to 90 days (July-September) should be manageable. IBM will remain the contractor for this work.

The proposed programme has the added advantage of operating early in the season, when there are likely to be more opportunities for photographing mother/calf pairs and obtaining biopsies from them.

4. Distribution – Offshore: Sakhalin Energy's crew change ('Polar' fleet) vessels are proposed to be utilised to conduct offshore distribution surveys. These vessels operate out of Kaigan port during the summer. They provide a highly stable viewing platform, with excellent forward and lateral visibility from the bridge. They will operate at survey speeds of up to 12 km/hr (but see Item 4.3, later). The MMOs from SSU will be mobilised for full-day distribution surveys out of Nogliki camp where they are based. The crew change vessel MMOs will be supplemented by an experienced member of the Distribution Team in order both to both ensure consistency of data acquisition and to provide training.

Each Sakhalin Energy crew change vessel has two boats (one 6 m and one 4 m, both with twin inboard/outboard diesel engines) that will be available for use by the Joint Programme. Each vessel also has a Safety Officer and a Sakhalin Energy safety programme in place. ENL will maintain ownership of the contracts for scientists (IBM and POI). Altogether, this new arrangement brings flexibility in scheduling and mobilisation because the vessels are in the field all season (June-November).

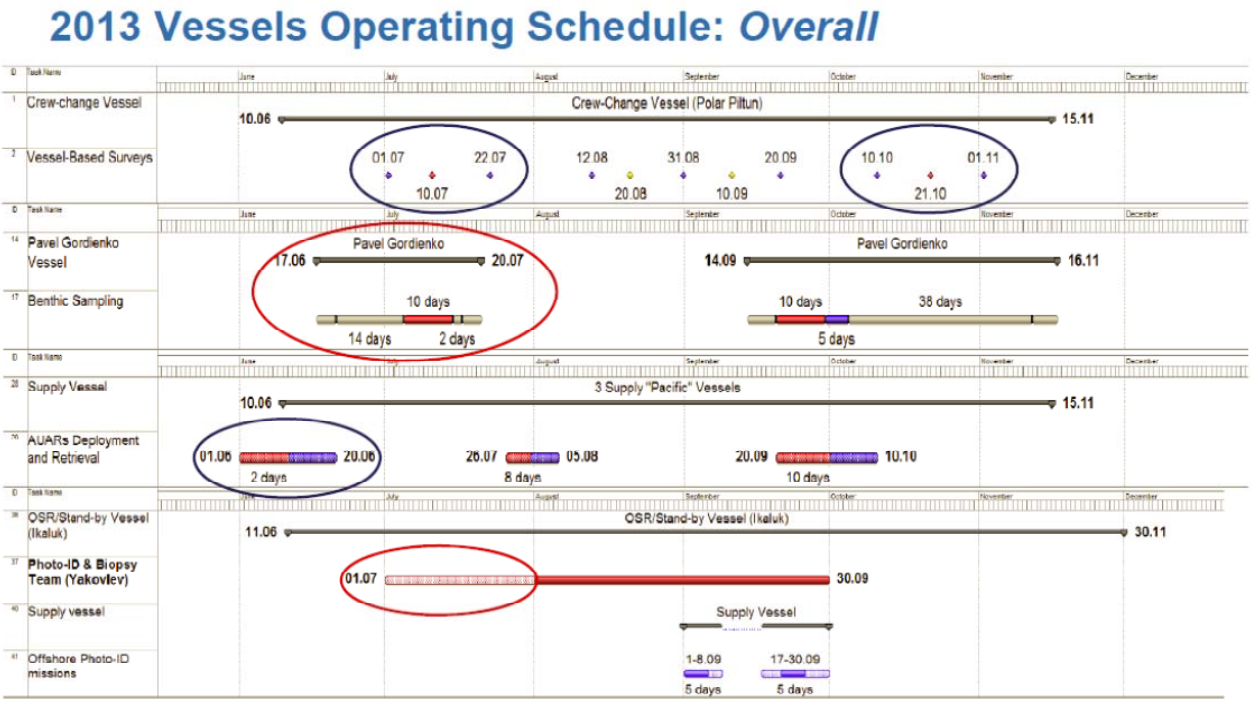

Fig. 1. Vessel schedule for the proposed 2013 Joint Programme; circles represent new 'opportunities' provided by the proposed programme changes.

3 SHORE-BASED DISTRIBUTION

The Company reported that the methods, location and effort for this component of the programme would remain unchanged from 2011-2012 in 2013. Data will be collected from 1 August to 30 September using two 3-person teams, one covering six pre-defined stations in the south and one covering seven pre-defined stations in the north. For the first time, oversight of and support for the 2013 shore-based distribution surveys will be through SSU but consistent scientific supervision will remain.

3.1 Training

Evans reported that synchronisation of coverage of the two areas (north and south) so that the two teams arrive at their respective southern and northern stations simultaneously means that the southern team generally starts effort at about 11a.m. or noon. The Company sees this available time as an opportunity to train observers in behavioural monitoring and shore-based photo-ID. This training would fall outside the scope of the Joint Programme and thus be a Sakhalin Energy-only initiative.

Recalling the Panel's views (as expressed at WGWAP-12) on training behavioural observers, the Task Force **strongly supports** the Company's plans for training. The Task Force noted that this training is valuable for a number of reasons, including: (1) development of qualified staff to conduct future behavioural research (i.e. theodolite tracking, scan sampling and focal follows) in line with what has been done in the past during case-specific events (e.g. seismic surveys and construction activities) and (2) supplementation of the small-boat photo-ID effort with shore-based photographs, particularly of mother-calf pairs that often remain close to shore.

3.2 Timing of the field effort

Recalling previous Panel discussions, the Task Force considered the issue of the temporal coverage of the onshore study. The August-September study period does not provide early-season data on whale distribution. Such data have been a key component of mitigation measures for seismic surveys, especially the decision to start activities as early in the season as possible. They are also relevant to understanding the potential impacts of any activities that take place before 1 August. Early-season data have not been collected under the Joint Programme since 2007. The Task Force concluded that for this year (2013), the August-September schedule is acceptable, but it also stressed the importance of examining the value of adjusting the schedule of field effort in 2014 and beyond to obtain more early-season (June-July) data so that better mitigation advice can be provided with respect to early-season activities in the future.

3.3 Adding behavioural information to the distribution team reporting sheets

Evans commented that the scientists involved in the Moscow State University integrated analysis had pointed out that benefits could be gained from adding knowledge of whale behaviour (e.g. feeding or travelling) to the distribution data. He therefore suggested that two columns, one to denote feeding and one travelling, might be added to the existing data form.

In discussion, the Task Force indicated that it was not always easy to determine the behaviour of whales, especially at a distance, and incorrect categorisation would be misleading in analyses. Recognising the potential value of behavioural information, the Task Force **recommends** that guidelines for determining behavioural states, including an 'undetermined' designation, be developed by those experienced in the previous behavioural work at Sakhalin. Any guidelines should be tested as part of a feasibility study in 2013. This could be done in conjunction with the above-mentioned shore-based behavioural/photo-ID training.

3.4 Height of observation stations

The Task Force discussed whether measurement of the height of each shore station was part of the general protocol at the start of each season. The Company noted that this had been done periodically (e.g. in 2010 and 2012 when the difference was found to have been small, around 5 mm) but not every year. According to Vladimirov, large differences would not be expected unless a station has been lost (e.g. due to storms). The Task Force noted that taking such measurements had been a routine part of the work of the behaviour teams in the past.

Given the importance of knowing shore station height to estimate sighting distances from shore, the Task Force **recommends** that the height be measured in a standardised way (recognising the value of the method used by the Company in 2012, with reference to the geodetic datum) for each shore station each season, at least for the next few years to investigate levels of change. A new measurement must be taken if a station is lost.

3.5 Conclusion

The Task Force **agreed** that the provisions for the shore-based collection of data were adequate for 2013 and referred to its recommendations above on training, collection of behaviour data by distribution teams and the measurement of station height.

4 OFFSHORE DISTRIBUTION

A better understanding is needed of the offshore distribution of gray whales (including the Offshore feeding area) for, among other things, developing activity-specific mitigation measures (e.g. for seismic surveys). The Panel had expressed its concern at WGWAP-12 (see report) that the offshore distribution surveys might be cut from the programme.

The Task Force was pleased to receive confirmation that the Joint Programme intended to continue carrying out offshore vessel surveys in 2013.

4.1 Vessels/number of surveys

The crew change vessel *Polar Piltun* will be available for these surveys. According to current plans, surveys will take place on Mondays within the period from the beginning of July to the end of September. If circumstances (e.g. poor weather) prevent a survey from proceeding on a Monday, it will be rescheduled for another day. The overall period of vessel availability (1 July to 30 September) will be greater than that in 2012 (31 July to 8 October).

The Task Force noted that the crew change vessels are modern, stable vessels capable of speeds up to 30 knots, with good manoeuvrability and stopping distances. The visibility from the bridge (6m asl) is slightly better (higher) than that of the previously used vessel, *Igor Maximov*.

A minimum of seven offshore surveys, two Piltun surveys and two Arkutun-Dagi surveys (i.e. 11 surveys in total) are planned, and more could be undertaken based on information on the distribution of the animals obtained during the season. For comparative purposes in 2010, two surveys were completed off Piltun, four in the Offshore feeding area, two in Arkutun-Dagi and two off Molikpak (10 in total). In 2011 only two offshore surveys were completed and in 2012 two surveys were completed off Piltun, six in the Offshore, one in Arkutun-Dagi and one in Piltun-Astokh (11 in total).

The Task Force was pleased to learn of the possibility of surveys occurring earlier in the season (i.e. July) off Piltun. It **recommends** that a Piltun survey be carried out at least once, and **requests** that the Company investigate surveying twice, during that period (July), particularly given the need to obtain data from early in the season to assist with the development of seismic survey mitigation as discussed above. Data for the June/July period in the seasons 2002-2005 were instrumental in development of the 2010 Astokh 4D seismic survey Monitoring and Mitigation Programme.

4.2 Observers/sighting protocols

The surveys will be conducted using the same protocols as in previous years. Four trained marine mammal observers will be on board, one of whom will be from IBM and act as survey leader. The survey leader will have experience in previous offshore distribution surveys. Provision of MMOs will be under the supervision of SSU.

The Task Force noted that the proposed protocols in the planned scope of work included collection of the following information on vessels within the survey area:

> *'positions, time of sighting, distance to, and azimuth of all vessels seen within the visibility range will be recorded following the procedure used to record the positions of the gray whales'.*

The Panel has noted in the past (e.g. WGWAP-12 report) that it would be valuable to have information on the numbers and types of vessels (including notation of those fishing in the area) operating within the Sakhalin area as these could have effects on gray whales.

The Task Force **agreed** that the priority of the surveys must be the collection of cetacean data. However, it **recommends** that the Company investigates ways to obtain information on the types of vessels, in addition to the data already being collected. This should include (a) discussing this data need with the skipper and crew of the survey vessel as they may be able to provide such information to the MMOs and (b) investigating whether AIS or similar data can be collected automatically. Of course, collection of such data must not be allowed to compromise the cetacean component of the work. The Task Force noted that names of vessels should not be required.

4.3 Areas to be covered/tracklines

There was considerable discussion within the Task Force regarding survey design. In general, the areas to be covered are as in previous years. The Panel had previously recommended that the surveys be extended eastwards and this had been done beginning in 2011. However, given the requirement to complete a survey in a single day, the extension made it necessary to reduce the number of transects and increase the distance between them (e.g. see discussion in WGWAP-12 report). Surveys had been conducted at 7 knots given the limitations of the vessel used.

In the light of the improved vessel specifications for 2013, and noting that cetacean surveys elsewhere have been successfully undertaken at speeds of 12 knots (e.g. the IWC's SOWER and POWER programmes in the Antarctic and North Pacific), the Task Force **recommends** that, if after consultation with the vessel skipper it is determined to be acceptable (from the perspective of vibration and noise) for the vessel to travel comfortably at 12 knots, the tracklines be redesigned to provide optimal coverage within a day at that survey speed (note that this can best be achieved within the program DISTANCE[1]).

4.4 Conclusion

The Task Force was pleased that the Joint Programme would continue include vessel-based distribution studies, noting their value to both scientific and mitigation work. It **agreed** that the logistical and scientific provisions were adequate for the 2013 season and in some ways an improvement over previous years. It drew attention to its recommendations above on early-season surveys off Piltun, searching speed and track design and the collection of data on vessel types.

5 BENTHIC STUDIES

The Task Force noted that a number of concerns had been raised at WGWAP-12 in relation to the benthic sampling programme as carried out in 2011 but also recognised that the 2012 programme had been consistent in methodology and effort with previous years. At WGWAP-12, the Company had given the Panel assurance that the Joint Programme would continue the benthic sampling programme in 2013 in a manner consistent with previous years (2011 excepted). It was reported at this Task Force meeting that the R/V *Pavel Gordienko* would be available for dedicated benthic sampling for two periods, one in July and one in September. Evans reported that a member of the IBM field team led by Dr. Fadeev and the two companies' Programme leads had inspected the facilities onboard the *Pavel Gordienko* in Vladivostok in January 2013 and found it to be better equipped than the previous vessels to support their work. All parties also recognized the considerable benefit of having a vessel available on a dedicated basis for ample periods of time to complete the sampling grid.

5.1 Conclusion

The Task Force welcomed these developments and encouraged the Company to proceed as planned with this component of the Joint Programme. It **recommends** that discrete sampling efforts be made in both July and September as this could provide a unique opportunity to compare conditions early and later in the open-water season.

6 ACOUSTIC STUDIES

The Task Force was informed that there will be no changes to the acoustic programme other than logistical changes. The logistics of buoy deployment, maintenance and retrieval will be undertaken by the supply "Pacific" vessels, *Endeavour, Endurance* and *Enterprise* as appropriate. It was noted that the facilities (e.g. winches) on these vessels are better than those of the previous vessel. The 'Pacific' vessels will be available from the middle of June to the middle of November. The acoustic programme will be undertaken by POI as in previous years.

[1] http://www.ruwpa.st-and.ac.uk/distance/

6.1 'Control' buoy

At WGWAP-12, there had been some discussion as to whether the location of the present 'control' buoy was appropriate given the noise levels reported from it (due primarily to the activities of other companies). The Task Force was informed that the data from the buoy were subsequently reviewed in detail by POI, JASCO and a Russian acoustic specialist (Drs Rutenko, Racca and Petnikov) at a meeting in Vladivostok. Their conclusion was that the location is still credible and able to serve as a control station when there are no activities of other operators. In addition, it was noticed that there is insufficient information on the areas and timing of the activities of other operators to determine whether and where there might be a better location. Finally, they noted that the compatibility of new datasets with the datasets from previous years would become an issue if the location of the 'control station' were changed.

The Task Force **agreed** that this should be considered fully at NTF-4. However, for the purposes of the present review, it made no suggestions for a change in the location of the 'control' buoy for the 2013 season.

6.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Task Force **agreed** that the arrangements for the acoustic component were satisfactory for 2013 when compared to previous years.

7 PHOTO-ID AND BIOPSY STUDIES

7.1 Presentation of plans for the 2013 field season under the Joint Programme

Sakhalin Energy outlined the following plan for photo-ID and biopsy studies in the 2013 season under the ENL/Sakhalin Energy Joint Programme. The plan had been substantially revised relative to the proposals presented at WGWAP-12.

The photo-ID team (which will also collect biopsies) can be mobilised for three months in 2013 from the beginning of July until the end of September (see Fig. 1). It will operate from the OSR/Stand-By vessel *Ikaluk*, which services the PA-A and PA-B platforms. The photo-ID team onboard the *Ikaluk* will consist of four or five small-boat crew, two MMOs and one safety officer. During good weather the *Ikaluk* will sail to the boundary of the Piltun Feeding Area (PFA) and deploy a small boat. It is envisaged that the photo-ID team will primarily use the FRC (Fast Rescue Craft: a water jet propulsion Maritime Partner aluminium-hulled boat equipped with twin inboard diesel engines) which is certified in compliance with the SOLAS Convention. This will increase the safety of the photo-ID team. There will also be a RHIB (4-stroke outboard-powered rigid-hulled inflatable) onboard the *Ikaluk* in case the FRC is found to be too noisy or unmaneuverable to work with gray whales, especially for biopsy sampling which requires a relatively close approach. Sakhalin Energy does not permit the deployment of Zodiac-type inflatable boats from its vessels.

The *Ikaluk* must stay within 90 minutes response distance from either platform. This limits its range to a 45 km section of the PFA. The photo-ID boat can operate in that zone supported by the *Ikaluk*, plus in two further sections 15 km to the north and to the south of this zone, supported by the *Ikaluk*'s FRDC (which itself must remain within 10 nm of the mother-ship under IMO rules). In total this makes a 75 km section of the PFA accessible to the photo-ID team, which covers most of the PFA except the far northern portion.

If information is received on persistent aggregations of whales in the northern portion of the PFA, the photo-ID team will use a vessel of opportunity to go to the north for 1-2 days. The vessel of opportunity will be one of the 'Pacific' vessels carrying cargo to the platforms.

Pacific vessels will also be used for at least two 5-day sorties to the Offshore feeding area to photograph gray whales. In all such cases the photo-ID team will be supported by a Pacific vessel as mother-ship.

In 2013 the photo-ID team will try to obtain 20-30 biopsies (depending on permit allowance). The main objectives of collecting biopsies are to examine stable isotopes, hormones and population structure as well as determine the sex of individuals. The emphasis will be on obtaining biopsies from whales not previously sampled, to the extent possible (see section 7.2.2 below).

The photo-ID team will work under a contract with ENL, but the agreement between Sakhalin Energy and ENL will ensure equal access to the data as before. Similar conditions will apply to the biopsy data to be collected this year.

There are no plans to include satellite tagging in the above logistics but the Joint Programme has committed to provide matching funding up to US$300,000 for tagging if it can be organised and conducted by an outside party.

7.2 Discussion and Task Force comments

7.2.1 Photo-ID

The Task Force welcomed the revised plan, which involves a greater research effort relative to previous years (e.g. in 2012 only 22 days of photo-ID effort were realised) and covers the concerns expressed at WGWAP-12. Being vessel-based, the programme has the potential to allow IBM researchers to work with whales that are beyond the reach of the Russia-US team. The earlier start should increase the potential to identify mother-calf pairs, which are of particular importance to the population assessment. The plan appears to make efficient use of the available logistical resources.

The Task Force noted the plan to change, primarily for reasons of safety, the photo-ID vessel platform from a Zodiac equipped with a 4-stroke outboard used in the past, to the water jet-propelled FRC. The Task Force recalled the difficulties encountered by the satellite tagging team in 2010 in approaching whales with a similar, although not identical, type of FRC boat. It strongly suggested that the FRC be field-tested by the IBM photo-ID team to determine (1) its suitability for collecting identification images, (2) its suitability for collecting biopsies and (3) its effect on the approachability and behaviour of whales. The Task Force emphasised the importance of this three-part evaluation because while suitable photographs and/or biopsies might be obtained from the FRC, it could nevertheless result in undesired behavioural changes in the whales being photographed and decreased approachability over the course of the 2013 field season. It was agreed that each of these three factors could only be properly evaluated in the field while working with whales. The Task Force emphasised the importance of having the RHIB readily available as a backup in the event that the photo-ID team determines that the FRC is hindering their research. It also encouraged Sakhalin Energy to measure underwater sound levels produced by the FRC and RHIB at both cruising and 'whale approach' speeds so that they can be compared.

The Panel had recommended (WGWAP-12/024) that the question of overlap/complementarity between the data collected by the Joint Programme (IBM) team and the Russia-US team be examined again. The last time this was checked (in 2007), considerable complementarity was found (e.g. individual whales were often seen by one team in years when they were missed by the other team). In view of the substantial revisions to the IBM dataset since then, the Task Force **requests** that Cooke update this comparison in the context of the joint population assessment that is currently in progress. If this reveals a high degree of overlap, then the implications should be considered when planning future field seasons.

7.2.2 Biopsies

The Task Force noted the several different uses for biopsy samples (including individual identification, sex determination, population structure, fatty acid analysis, pollutant analysis) and **recommends** that in the future the objectives be more clearly specified so that criteria for selecting whales for biopsy can be elaborated. In the meantime, the Task Force supports the intention to try to collect samples only from whales not previously biopsied (see recommendation WGWAP-12/026), because these one-time samples are at least sufficient for determining sex and for genetic studies. The Russia-US catalogue includes information on which whales have been sampled by that team, and the Task Force **recommends** that the IBM photo-ID team make use of this information.

Recognition of whales in real time in the field (for example for tagging/biopsy purposes) has to date depended on persons who have been involved both with the photo-ID fieldwork and the photo-matching work in the lab. It was unclear to the Task Force to what extent field workers in the IBM photo-ID team had been involved in photo-matching, and therefore how feasible it would be for the IBM team to recognise individual whales in the field. In any event, calves of the year are priority targets for biopsy.

The Task Force re-emphasised the importance of reliably linking each biopsy to individual identification photographs or video, and clearly recording cases where the link is uncertain for any reason (see recommendation WGWAP-12/025). This is true both for whales already in the photo catalogue and for any new whales. In the case of calves of the year, it is particularly beneficial to also have photo records of their mothers at the time of sampling: such data have been very useful for population assessment.

The Company assured the Task Force that appropriate field and laboratory protocols are in place for collecting, handling and analysing the biopsies and associated data, and that a number of qualified scientists from institutions studying marine mammal tissues (e.g. Texas Tech University, University of Alaska Fairbanks) were working on this project. The protocols include precautions to avoid contamination of samples.

7.2.3 Related matters

As explained at WGWAP-10, Sakhalin Energy can no longer support 'out-of-area' research such as photo-ID work in Kamchatka. Vertyankin conducted some photo-ID work in Kamchatka in 2012, until a student lost the project camera in the sea. The Panel has emphasised the importance of the photo-ID work in Kamchatka and expressed the hope that alternative funding can be found for it to continue.

7.3 Conclusion

The Task Force concluded that the planned 2013 photo-ID programme appears to make efficient use of available resources, and as such it can be expected to provide spatial and temporal coverage that equals or exceeds that achieved in recent seasons. Concern was expressed about the suitability of the FRC for obtaining identification photographs and biopsies, and field testing and evaluation was regarded as an essential aspect of the field effort in 2013. In order to minimise disturbance to the whales, the Task Force also urged co-operation between field teams to ensure that whales were not subject to more than one vessel operating in close proximity. The Task Force also: (a) reiterated the importance of conducting an updated analysis of the overlap/complementarity between the Russia-US and IBM field teams' photo-ID datasets, (b) recommended that the objectives of the biopsy programme be clearly specified in the future, (c) expressed support for the principle of focussing biopsy effort on whales that have not been biopsied previously and (d) reiterated the importance of reliably linking each biopsy to individual identification photographs or video, and clearly recording cases where the link is uncertain.

8 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

The Task Force welcomed the information supplied by Sakhalin Energy on the latest plans for the 2013 Joint Programme and concluded that the proposed changes will achieve at least the same levels and types of data collection as in 2011 and 2012. In a number of respects, it seems clear that the changes in logistics (e.g. availability of vessels for dedicated work on various programme components) will result in improvements in the ability to collect data.

The Task Force commends the Company for its efforts to address the concerns expressed in the WGWAP-12 report related to the 2013 Joint Programme. In reaching its conclusions, the Task Force reiterates the importance of constructive in-depth discussions beginning at WGWAP-13 concerning strategic planning for Sakhalin Energy's future gray whale monitoring and research efforts in the light of information learned from the programme to date (including information gaps) and the likely future operations of companies within the Sakhalin area.

ANNEX A. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel

Justin G. COOKE
Greg DONOVAN
Randall R. REEVES (Chairman)
Grigory TSIDULKO (participated remotely)
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Sakhalin Energy Investment Company Ltd.

Richard EVANS
Alexey VLADIMIROV (participated remotely)

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Anete BERZINA
Tatiana SAKSINA
Sarah HUMPHREY (Rapporteur)

ANNEX B. FINAL MEETING AGENDA

2013 JOINT PROGRAMME TASK FORCE MEETING

11-12 February 2013, IUCN HQ, room Think Tank A, Gland, Switzerland

11 February 2013

1 INTRODUCTORY ITEMS		
08:00	**1.1** Chairman's opening remarks	R.Reeves
	1.2 Adoption of agenda	R.Reeves
2 OVERVIEW FROM SAKHALIN ENERGY ON PROCESS TO DATE, CURRENT PLANS, AND INTENTIONS FOR COMING MONTHS BEFORE 2013 FIELDWORK BEGINS		
	2.1 Overview	R.Evans
	2.2 Questions & Discussion	
09:45	*Break*	
3 OVERVIEW OF 2013 PLANNING AND SAKHALIN ENERGY FLEET		
10:00	**3.1 Onshore Distribution studies**	
	3.1.1 Overview	R.Evans with A.Vladimirov on the phone
	3.1.2 Questions & Discussion	
	3.2 Offshore Distribution studies	
	3.2.1 Overview	R.Evans with A.Vladimirov on the phone
	3.2.2 Questions & Discussion	
	3.3 Benthic studies	
	3.3.1 Overview	R.Evans with A.Vladimirov on the phone
	3.3.2 Questions & Discussion	
	3.4 Acoustic studies	
	3.4.1 Overview	R.Evans with A.Vladimirov on the phone
	3.4.2 Questions & Discussion	
	3.5 Photo-ID studies	

	3.5.1 Overview	R.Evans with A.Vladimirov on the phone
	3.5.2 Questions & Discussion	
12:00	*Lunch*	
4 DISCUSSIONS ABOUT 2013 PROGRAMME DESIGN, INTEGRATION AMONG COMPONENTS, MAXIMIZING SCIENTIFIC OUTPUT, OPPORTUNITIES AND POTENTIAL WEAKNESSES		
13:00	**4.1 Onshore Distribution studies**	
	4.1.1 Questions & Discussion	
	4.2 Offshore Distribution studies	
	4.2.1 Questions & Discussion	
	4.3 Benthic studies	
	4.3.1 Questions & Discussion	
15:00	*Break*	
15:15	**4.4 Acoustic studies**	
	4.4.1 Questions & Discussion	
	4.5 Photo-ID studies	
	4.5.1 Questions&Discussion	
17:00	*Adjourn*	

12 February 2013

5 PREPARATION AND ADOPTION OF THE REPORT		
08:00	**5.1 Discussion on outstanding issues from the first day**	
9:45	*Break*	
10:00	**5.2 Summarizing the Task Force position and proposals for recommendations**	
12:00	*Lunch*	
13:00	**5.3 Preparation of the Report**	
15:00	*Break*	
15:15	**5.4 Adoption of the Report, communication to the full WGWAP**	
17:00	*Adjourn*	