PSI2009/450
Investigating Whale and Dolphin (Cetacean) Diversity in the Pacific Islands Region

Cara Miller
University of the South Pacific / Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, PO. Box 228, 0000 Suva, Fiji
cara.miller@wdc-s.org

There is a limited understanding of distribution, conservation status, and habitat of cetacean species’ within the Pacific Islands Region (PIR). To address this knowledge gap an examination of pertinent peer-reviewed journals, field surveys, museum stranding records, internal reports, anecdotal sightings and communications, and whaling ship accounts was undertaken. Each record was verified for accuracy and reliability, consistency with current taxonomic designations, and geographic location. This process confirmed that at least 30 different cetacean species are present in the PIR and also produced diversity checklists for each Pacific Island Country and Territory (HCT). Overall it was found that sperm whales were the most widely reported species, while both spinner dolphins and humpback whales also had a relatively high number of records. In contrast only a small number of reports of such species as the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin and several types of beaked whales were found. A relatively high number of species were available for both Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, while a limited number were found for the Pitcairn Islands and Wallis and Futuna. However, it’s important to note that these findings are strongly constrained by spatial and temporal variability in research effort. These limitations also make it plausible that as yet unreported species may be present in the PIR. These first listings of PICT-specific cetacean diversity are intended to assist national management plans and initiatives, as well as demonstrate the need for increased research and capacity building efforts. Furthermore, this work has been progressed to provide relevant background material for discussions related to the Convention of Migratory Species Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the PIR. This agreement currently has 11 PICT signatories and represents the largest oceanic area designated for cetacean protection in the world.

Number of words in abstract: 293
Keywords: Cetacean - Diversity - whale - dolphin
Technical area: Ecosystems, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development
Special session: Not specified
Presentation: Oral presentation preferred
Special equipment: No special equipment