

## MARINE MAMMAL AND BIRD POPULATIONS

### Status and Trends of Populations

7.1 The SCAR Group of Specialists on Seals and the SCAR Bird Biology Subcommittee in 1988 provided CCAMLR with a review of the status and trends in Antarctic seabird and pinniped populations. It is intended that the results of an updated review will be presented to the Scientific Committee in 1992.

7.2 As requested by the Scientific Committee at its 1990 meeting, the Secretariat has provided the SCAR groups with copies of the previous summaries and instructions regarding the formats in which the updated population review should be presented to CCAMLR.

7.3 The Scientific Committee noted that the IWC Scientific Committee will be undertaking a comprehensive review of baleen whales in the Southern Hemisphere, to be completed in 1993.

### Workshop on Southern Elephant Seals

7.4 A workshop on southern elephant seals was held in Monterey, California, from 22 to 23 May 1991. The workshop received financial support from CCAMLR and SCAR. Dr Bengtson summarised the workshop report (SC-CAMLR-X/BG/3).

7.5 A review of stock abundance and trends indicated that southern elephant seal populations are declining in the Indian and Pacific Ocean sectors of the Antarctic. Simulations based on recent demographic rates suggest that the South Georgia stock may also be declining, but there is no direct evidence of such a decline based on census data.

7.6 The workshop provided an opportunity to draw together the most recent and complete data on population trends, life history aspects, and demographic parameters. These were summarised in Tables 1 and 2 of the workshop report (SC-CAMLR-X/BG/3).

7.7 Regarding the potential causes of past and present population trends, various factors were identified as possibly being responsible for causing declining populations. Although it was agreed that several of these were not likely to be relevant, other factors deserve further investigation to determine to what extent they may be involved in population declines. The workshop concluded that at present, it is not possible to identify with confidence the factor or

factors (e.g. predation, disease, ecological or climatic change, competition for prey with commercial fisheries) that have caused southern elephant seal populations to decrease so precipitously over the past 50 years.

7.8 Concerning possible fisheries interactions, the workshop concluded that there is as yet no evidence to suggest that finfish fisheries activities in the Convention Area have played any causal role in the population decrease of southern elephant seals.

7.9 The Scientific Committee agreed that the workshop had succeeded in fulfilling its terms of reference and producing a very useful report. Although no conclusive evidence was found pertaining to the causes of the population declines, the workshop identified several areas of priority research for future investigations. It is expected that the results from these studies will contribute significantly to the process of stock assessment and interpreting changes in stock size of southern elephant seals in the context of ecosystem processes.

#### Pack Ice Seal Censuses

7.10 Survey data from the early 1980s have raised questions about the possibility that crabeater seal population abundance may have declined dramatically during the 1970s. SCAR has identified the urgent need for additional surveys of pack ice seals in order to help answer these questions, and has called on national programs to undertake such surveys as a matter of priority.

7.11 Similarly, over the past several years the Scientific Committee has urged Members' national programs to conduct censuses of pack ice seals when opportunities arise to stage aerial surveys from icebreakers (SC-CAMLR-VII, paragraph 6.7; SC-CAMLR-IX, paragraph 6.4).

7.12 In response to these requests, several Members indicated that they are taking steps to initiate surveys of crabeater and other pack ice seals. South Africa has committed funding and ship time to conduct annual surveys in each of the next three to five years in the pack ice zone adjacent to Queen Maud Land; these surveys will complement focussed studies on Ross seals near the Filchner Ice Shelf. The United States Delegation reported that the US hopes to conduct aerial censuses of pack ice seals from an icebreaker during the 1992/93 austral summer. Japan indicated that they are seeking a possibility of initiating censuses of pack ice seals in the near future; these studies would be conducted together with studies utilizing satellite technology.