MARINE MAMMALS AND BIRD POPULATIONS

MARINE MAMMALS

9.1 No new information was available to the Scientific Committee on the status of marine mammal populations. However, as recommended by the Scientific Committee at recent meetings (SC-CAMLR-XI, paragraph 6.4; SC-CAMLR-X, paragraphs 7.10 to 7.12), the USA reported that it planned to conduct aerial censuses of pack-ice seals during the 1993/94 austral summer.

THE ANTARCTIC PACK-ICE SEALS (APIS) PROGRAM

9.2 Dr Bengtson introduced a draft prospectus describing SCAR's Antarctic Pack-Ice Seals (APIS) Program (SC-CAMLR-XII/BG/20). This document was prepared following a workshop convened by the SCAR Group of Specialists on Seals in May, 1993, in St Paul, USA, and supported in part by CCAMLR. The workshop's main objectives were to discuss priority pack-ice seal research topics and to develop a plan for a coordinated, multi-national research initiative.

9.3 It was noted that although the draft prospectus was currently being reviewed by the SCAR Executive prior to being finalised, it was provided to the Scientific Committee at this time to inform CCAMLR of the results of the workshop that it had helped to support.

9.4 The APIS Program, as described in the draft prospectus, will address several research topics of direct relevance to CCAMLR, especially in relation to the CCAMLR Ecosystem Monitoring Program and the status and trends of marine mammal populations. For example, although crabeater seals have been selected as a CEMP monitoring species, implementation of CEMP activities in the pack-ice zone has been modest because of the limited availability of logistic and financial support. The crabeater seal research outlined in the APIS Program would therefore represent a valuable contribution to CEMP.

9.5 The Scientific Committee identified a number of specific topics of special interest to WG-CEMP regarding crabeater seals. These included predator/prey functional relationships, feeding ecology, and temporal and spatial distribution of seals in relation to fisheries. The potential development of behavioural, condition, or physiological indices that could be included in CEMP monitoring of crabeater seals is also an area of special interest.

9.6 Because recent census data for pack-ice seals are unavailable, it has not been possible to determine the status and trends of these populations. It was agreed that the APIS Program could

play an important role in producing information that would help to confirm whether or not crabeater seal populations had been declining in abundance in recent decades.

9.7 The Scientific Committee noted a number of general points that it suggested should be considered when implementing the APIS Program. The Program's emphasis on obtaining data from months in all seasons was felt to be important. As possible, the Program should try to ensure that studies are conducted in various geographic areas that are representative of the various sectors around the continent (e.g., between the Ross Sea and Prydz Bay as well as between Prydz Bay and the Weddell Sea). Obtaining data from sectors with different patterns of sea-ice, productivity, or oceanography will strengthen the comparisons made among different areas.

9.8 The Chairman of the Scientific Committee was requested to correspond with the Convener of the Group of Specialists on Seals during the intersessional period, advising him of those areas of particular interest to CCAMLR. In addition, Members with specific suggestions on improving the text of the draft prospectus (e.g., comments on the cross-references included in Tables 1 and 2) were encouraged to send these comments directly to the Secretary of the Group of Specialists on Seals.

9.9 The Scientific Committee welcomed the research initiative represented by the APIS Program, noting that it was likely to make a strong contribution to the work of CCAMLR, and that the Commission's attention should be drawn to this important new program. The Scientific Committee agreed that efforts should be made to ensure that close coordination and effective communication are developed and maintained with the APIS Program. To this end, Dr Bengtson was nominated to serve as CCAMLR's liaison with the APIS Program.

BIRDS

9.10 A major review prepared by Dr R. Gales for the Australian Nature Conservation Agency on the status of trends of albatross populations was available in SC-CAMLR-XII/BG/22. The review emphasised the vulnerability of albatross populations to depletion from incidental mortality due to their low reproduction rates. Attention was drawn to the paucity of data on population size and trends for a number of species. However, observations on fishing vessels both inside and outside the CCAMLR Convention Area indicate that albatrosses of most species are incidentally killed in fishing operations, and that this mortality is implicated in the decline of a number of populations. The review drew attention to the need for reliable census data for most populations and longterm studies on demography. The need for studies on diet, foraging behaviour and movement patterns was identified, along with the requirement for more detailed studies on the interactions between albatrosses and fishing vessels.

9.11 The Scientific Committee commended the author for such a comprehensive review. However, it was noted that the assertion in the document that there had been no effort by longline fishing nations, other than Japan, to apply deterrent methods failed to take account of the efforts by CCAMLR and its Members in adopting and deploying streamer lines and other measures in the longline fisheries in the CCAMLR Convention Area. The Scientific Committee endorsed the need for further studies and monitoring programs for albatross populations found in the Convention Area. A number of recommendations in the review pertinent to the Scientific Committee's consideration of incidental mortality were taken up under Agenda Item 10.