

Transfer of Black Sea Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus ponticus* from Appendix II to Appendix I. Proponent: Georgia.

Summary: The Black Sea Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus ponticus* is regarded as a subspecies of the widespread Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*. However, it is difficult to distinguish from other Bottlenose Dolphins and there is controversy over its taxonomic status. It occurs in the Black Sea; range States are Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. The Bottlenose Dolphin is long-lived and has a low reproductive output, with females typically reaching maturity at five to twelve years of age and bearing a single calf, with an interbirth interval of between two and six years. The species as a whole is classified as Data Deficient by IUCN. Habitat for the dolphin in the Black Sea is highly degraded and believed to be declining further in quality. Other identified threats include incidental mortality from fisheries, commercial exploitation and possibly reduced reproductive potential owing to bio-accumulation of pollutants. The current population size is unknown but is inferred to be depleted based on harvest data. At least 112 individuals of Black Sea Bottlenose Dolphins were exported by range States between 1990 and 2001. The level of illegal trade is unclear. International trade is largely confined to specimens for aquaria. The species as a whole was listed in Appendix II in 1979; there are currently no populations in Appendix I. The Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) prohibits the deliberate taking of cetaceans, including live specimens, and has requested CITES to ban trade in this taxon. Bulgaria, Georgia and Romania are Parties to ACCOBAMS. The current proposal seeks to transfer the Black Sea Bottlenose Dolphin from Appendix II to Appendix I in accordance with Resolution Conf 9.24, Annex 1 criteria Biii) and iv) and Cii). A similar proposal was submitted for consideration at CoP 11, but was withdrawn and passed to the Animals Committee (AC) for further deliberation. Further information was presented at the 18th AC meeting, but a consensus solution has not yet been identified.

Analysis: There are insufficient data to determine whether the population meets the biological criteria of Resolution Conf. 9.24 for inclusion in Appendix I. The current size of the population is unknown; its area of distribution is estimated at something over 100 000 km², which would not appear to be restricted under the guidelines in Annex 1 of Resolution Conf. 9.24. The population is inferred to have declined, based on past exploitation and observed habitat degradation, but data are lacking and some accounts suggest that the population may currently be increasing. There is some international demand for Bottlenose Dolphins from the Black Sea. One range State (Turkey) has another population of Bottlenose Dolphins and there is doubt as to whether the two populations are genetically, morphologically or geographically isolated; it is unclear how an Appendix-I listing might be enforced.

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
<p><i>Tursiops truncatus ponticus</i> is a subspecies of <i>Tursiops truncatus</i>. Recent research has demonstrated significant variations in microsatellite allele frequencies between Bottlenose Dolphin populations of the Black Sea, Mediterranean and East North Atlantic.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Taxonomy</u></p> <p><i>The taxonomic status of the Black Sea Bottlenose Dolphin is subject to controversy with some contending that there are significant genetic and morphological differences between it and other Bottlenose Dolphin populations (Gales, 2002; Simmonds, 2002) while others contend there is a lack of evidence (Birkun, 2002a).</i></p> <p><i>In a preliminary study using mitochondrial DNA, no significant differentiation was found between the Black Sea and Mediterranean populations, but significant differentiation was found between the Black Sea and north-east Atlantic populations (Bearzi and Notarbartolo di Sciara, 2002; Natoli, 2002).</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Range</u></p> <p><i>Range States are Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine.</i></p> <p><i>Birkun (2000) contends that Bottlenose Dolphins are present in the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits and</i></p>

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	<p><i>the Sea of Marmora, and that there is no clear evidence that the Black Sea population is completely isolated from the adjacent Mediterranean population.</i></p>

IUCN Global Category

Tursiops truncatus: DD

Biological criteria for inclusion in Appendix I

A) Small wild population

(i) Population or habitat decline; (ii) small sub-populations; (iii) one sub-population; (iv) large population fluctuations; (v) high vulnerability due to biology or behaviour

There are no current data on population levels.

According to Russian estimates, the number of animals is approximately 30 000 (AC18 DOC.16.1, 2002). Birkun (2002a) regards this figure as an overestimate.

B) Restricted area of distribution

(i) Fragmented or localised population; (ii) large fluctuations in distribution or sub-populations; (iii) high vulnerability due to biology or behaviour; (iv) decrease in distribution, population, habitat or reproductive potential

The population is endemic to the Black Sea. The habitat is a narrow strip close to the shore. There are no subpopulations, but the population is divided into several distinct herds, each consisting of 60-150 animals.

Birkun (2002b) suggests that the circumlittoral waters over the shelf are the primary habitat and notes that the dolphins are mostly found in depths of not more than 200 m or located within an 8 km-wide inshore strip. This constitutes about 24-27% of the total Black Sea area or some 110 000-125 000 km².

The Bottlenose Dolphin has a low reproductive potential; females are slow to mature (sexual maturity is at five to twelve years), bear a single calf, and have long inter-birth intervals (two/three to six years). Current reproduction is undoubtedly depressed by environmental factors, including accumulation of high levels of persistent organic pollutants in their tissues.

The population can be said to be fragmented (Simmonds, 2002).

Reviewers concur that reproductive potential is intrinsically low and likely to be further depressed by anthropogenic environmental influences (Gales, 2002; Simmonds, 2002).

C) Decline in number of wild individuals

(i) Ongoing or historic decline; (ii) inferred or projected decline

The population size and status is currently unknown but is inferred to be depleted, based on harvest data and observed habitat degradation. It is unlikely that current reproduction is keeping pace with mortality and live-capture removal.

Bearzi and Notarbartolo di Sciara (2002) note that the figure for past direct killings is likely to be significantly lower than effective mortality particularly in the case of landings resulting from shootings, given that the "struck and lost" component was not accounted for.

*Systematic questioning of fishermen in 1995, 1996, 1999 and 2001 indicated that the number of *Tursiops truncatus ponticus* off the Caucasus coast of Russia and the Crimea coast of Ukraine has increased during the last ten years (AC18 DOC.16.1, 2002). Bulgaria stated that according to available data, the number of animals had increased since 1992 (AC18 DOC.16.1, 2002). Birkun (2002a) notes the methodologies used in these studies have not been reviewed.*

D) Status suggests inclusion in Appendix I within 5 years

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Trade criteria for inclusion in Appendix I

The species is or may be affected by trade

Current trade appears to be almost entirely of live animals for aquaria. During the 1990s, export from countries bordering the Black Sea expanded, and includes destinations in North and South America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. At least 112 dolphins were exported from 1990 to 2001. It would appear that significant numbers of exported animals have a high mortality rate. Commercial dolphin hunting was banned in 1966 by the former USSR, Georgia, Bulgaria and Romania and by Turkey in 1983.

The scale of captures for domestic trade and use is not known. A total of 80-120 marine mammals, mostly Bottlenose Dolphins, are currently held in dolphinarium in Russia, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria. Between 24 and 48 wild cetaceans are captured annually to replace those that die in such facilities.

The level of illegal trade of *T. t. ponticus* is unknown.

Due to the fact that the population is already depleted and the habitat is badly degraded and declining, any removals will hasten the decline of the population.

Gales (2002) remarks that the trade is almost certainly underestimated.

Exports reported by Black Sea range States in 1998 and 1999 were stable with at least 24 and 22 live specimens respectively, according to official trade data. Reported trade was zero in 2000 (TRAFFIC Europe, 2002).

Simmonds (2002) records a 1999 price quotation of USD 20 000 per animal from Zoolex in Moscow (a supplier of zoo animals).

*The Management Authority of Russia reported the following live captures of *T. t. ponticus* from the wild: 1999, 19; 2000, 16; and 2001, 28. Capture mortality was reported to be less than two percent. The following sales were reported: 1999, four to Argentina (two died in transit); 2000, two to Lithuania and six to Canada; 2001, no sales. Additionally a number of temporary exports were reported (AC18 DOC. 16.1, 2002).*

Other information

Threats

There are a large number of threats facing the Black Sea Bottlenose Dolphin including habitat alteration and degradation, pollution, coastal developments, incidental mortality from fisheries, depleted food resources, disease and commercial exploitation. Since the 1960s, many hundreds of individuals have been captured alive in the former USSR and Romania for military, commercial and scientific use.

The habitat of *Tursiops truncatus ponticus* is highly degraded and is probably declining further in quality.

*A proposal for listing the Black Sea population of *Tursiops truncatus* as Vulnerable under the IUCN Red List Criteria is currently under review by the IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group (CSG).*

Bearzi and Notarbartolo di Sciara (2002) note that mortality from past massive direct killings combined with current levels of bycatch have led to subsequent population collapse which is now likely to be preventing possibilities of recovery.

No statistics are available for incidental take in Russia, although it is thought to be small. Incidental take was estimated at ten per year on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast (AC18 DOC. 16.1, 2002).

Conservation, management and legislation

The national legislation of Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Georgia prohibits directed takes of dolphins in the Black Sea.

Bottlenose Dolphins are listed in Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and are protected under the Bern Convention to which Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania are Parties. Recommendation No. 86 of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of the Bottlenose Dolphin of the Black Sea recommends that Contracting parties to

The Black Sea population of the Bottlenose Dolphin is strictly protected in the Ukraine according to the Law on Fauna (AC18 DOC. 16.1, 2002).

Of the range States, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania (Black Sea) have joined ACCOBAMS. Ukraine is expected to accede to ACCOBAMS in 2002. There are a number of ongoing studies or projects that are not mentioned in the proposal (Birkun, 2002a).

The Black Sea Bottlenose Dolphin population is one of

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
<p>the Convention strictly enforce the prohibition of capture and keeping of these animals, support efforts to provide improved protection of this subspecies under the framework of CITES and support regional coordination of conservation efforts in the subspecies.</p> <p>The Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) entered into force in June 2001. This prohibits the deliberate taking of cetaceans, including live specimens. Action 6 of the Priorities for Implementation prepared by ACCOBAMS at MOP 1 recommends a conservation plan for cetaceans in the Black Sea.</p> <p>There are no formal programmes in the region to conserve cetacean habitat at present, although a national park including marine waters is being planned in Georgia. In addition, there are several agreements or plans designed to reduce pollution levels in the Black Sea.</p>	<p><i>the cetacean populations highlighted in the current IUCN/SSC CSG Action Plan (in press) as in need of further study to evaluate its conservation status (Reeves, 2002).</i></p>

Similar species

Tursiops truncatus ponticus is morphologically similar to *Tursiops truncatus* found in other waters. However, as animals are traded live and whole, naturally occurring identification marks as well as tagging methods could be used to distinguish dolphins originating from the Black Sea from animals from other locations.

Birkun (2002a) and Gales (2002) agree that it is difficult to distinguish Black Sea specimens from other Tursiops truncatus from the coastal waters of the Atlantic Ocean and European seas (including the Mediterranean Sea, Marmara Sea, Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits), although average and maximum sizes of Black Sea animals are smaller than those of other Bottlenose Dolphins.

Bearzi and Notarbartolo di Sciara (2002) suggest that there is a lack of specific studies on morphological or morphometric differences, hence neither their presence nor absence can be confirmed.

Although Simmonds (2002) acknowledges that Tursiops truncatus ponticus is morphologically similar to Tursiops truncatus found in other waters, he believes that the distinctive scars, nicks or fin-shapes that Bottlenose Dolphins tend to have would be adequate as individual identification marks.

Captive breeding

Black Sea Bottlenose Dolphins are often exported for the purposes of captive breeding. However, breeding success with the subspecies has been attained in only one oceanarium outside the Black Sea, in Israel.

There is no successful captive breeding of any Black Sea cetacean species within the Black Sea countries (Birkun, 2002b).

The letter from Bulgaria attached to the SS states that three live captive-bred animals were exported in 1998.

The three captive-bred live dolphins, exported from Bulgaria in 1998, were first generation offspring of dolphins originally imported from Cuba and were therefore not of the population under consideration in this proposal (Birkun, 2002a).

Other comments

Bulgaria and Romania support the proposal. Turkey has issued statement indicating that it is not in a position to comment on the proposal until national studies on *Tursiops truncatus ponticus* have been

Populations of Bottlenose Dolphins occur on both the Black Sea and Mediterranean coasts of Turkey, so that if the current proposal is accepted, Turkish populations of this species will be in two different Appendices.

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completed.	<p><i>Official responses to the CITES Secretariat indicate support of this proposal from both the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention.</i></p>

Reviewers: G. Bearzi and G. Notarbartolo di Sciara, A. Birkun, N. Gales, M. Simmonds, TRAFFIC Europe.

References:

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