



COSEWIC
Committee on the Status of
Endangered Wildlife in Canada

COSEWIC
Comité sur la situation des
espèces en péril au Canada

17 December 2013

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq
Minister of the Environment
Les Terrasses de la Chaudière
10 Wellington Street
Gatineau, Québec
K1A 0H3

Dear Minister Aglukkaq,

I am writing in response to the referral of the assessment of the North Pacific population of Humpback Whale back to the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) for further consideration (Canada Gazette Part 1, July 2012).

The rationale and supporting documentation for the species referral was received from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) on 5 December 2012. During the public consultation some species experts suggested that data on the structure of designatable units (DUs) for this population had not been considered by COSEWIC. In their opinion, these data supported the division of the population into two units, rather than the single unit that was assessed. If correct, the status of each of the resulting two DUs could be different than the status of Special Concern assigned to the single DU in May 2011, in which case, COSEWIC would have to reassess this population as per Section 24 of the *Species at Risk Act*.

In response to the referral back to COSEWIC, I asked the Marine Mammals Specialist Subcommittee (SSC) to carefully consider the evidence provided to COSEWIC and determine if it could lead to a change in species status.

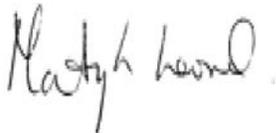
Following a review of the information provided by DFO, the SSC determined that there is no clear evidence to support the division of the North Pacific population of Humpback Whale into two DUs and, therefore, no reason to reassess this species. A summary of the rationale for their recommendation to COSEWIC is attached to this letter.

COSEWIC reviewed the recommendation from the Marine Mammals Specialist Subcommittee at its November 2013 Species Assessment Meeting and agreed that there is no clear evidence to support the division of the North Pacific population of Humpback

Whale into two DUs and, therefore, no reason to conduct a reassessment at this time.

Please feel free to contact me, if you have any questions regarding this decision.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marty L. Leonard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Marty L. Leonard
Chair, COSEWIC
Department of Biology
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia

c.c. - The Honourable Gail Shea, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.
Sue Milburn-Hopwood, Director General, Canadian Wildlife Service

Rationale for maintaining a single designatable unit for the North Pacific population of Humpback Whale

There is currently no clear evidence to support the division of the Humpback Whale population off Canada's Pacific coast into two Designatable Units (DUs). Available information on movements and site fidelity in B.C. waters suggests a gradual demographic transition of individuals from north to south along the coast. There is no indication of an abrupt change in regional movement patterns that might reflect or signify a boundary between potential DUs. Similarly, there appears to be a steady latitudinal transition in migratory destinations of Humpback Whales along the coast, from predominantly Hawaiian migrants in the north to predominantly Mexican migrants in the south. Again, there is no evidence of an abrupt change in migratory destination that might represent a population division (DU identification) within BC waters. Finally, the significant differences in genetic structure of whales in the Southern BC–Northern WA and NBC regions described from the "SPLASH" study may be driven largely by non-random geographic sampling. The transition in mtDNA haplotype frequencies along the coast may represent a cline, which would be consistent with the patterns of site fidelity, regional movements, and changes in migratory destinations. In summary, the Humpback Whale population off the Canadian west coast does not meet any of the COSEWIC guidelines used to recognize multiple DUs.