

WESTERN GRAY WHALE ADVISORY PANEL  
6<sup>th</sup> Meeting

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ENGLISH

**Carcass Survey Report 2008**  
Submitted by: SEIC



# MARINE MAMMAL CARCASS SURVEY

2008

## CLOSE-OUT REPORT



YUZHNO-SAKHALINSK

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sakhalin Energy Investment Company Ltd (SEIC) has implemented a *Marine Mammal Protection Plan* to reduce the threat to marine mammals in the area of its operations off the north east coast of Sakhalin Island.

In 2006, the Interim Independent Scientists Group (IISG) recommended that SEIC search for and investigates whale carcasses along the northeast coast of Sakhalin Island. At their meeting in St Petersburg, April 2007, the Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel (WGWAP) provided further specification that SEIC has implemented during 2007 and 2008. This report presents the findings of the 2008 surveys.

## 2. SURVEY METHODS

### 2.1 Crew-Change Flights

Beach carcass surveys using existing helicopter crew-change flights were conducted daily, depending on the weather.

There were usually several crew-change flights per day between Nogliki and the Piltun area (PA-A and PA-B platforms), and between Nogliki and the Lunskeye area (LUN-A platform).

In 2008, the non-dedicated survey (using existing crew-change flights) started on 1 June and extended until 23 November. A total of 151 flights between Nogliki and the Piltun area, and 25 flights between Nogliki and the Lunskeye area took place during that period (Table 1).

**Table 1. Crew-change flights that participated in beach carcass surveys.**

Month	№ of flights	
	Nogliki – Piltun	Nogliki – Lunskeye
June	22	8
July	15	0
August	10	3
September	36	2
October	34	0
November	34	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>25</b>



The flight crew of the helicopters were briefed by Marine Mammal Observers (MMOs) on the characteristics of whale carcasses for the search. A form was provided to the crew to record the location, date, and other details of any carcasses observed from the helicopter. The form also included instruction on who should be contacted if a whale carcass was sighted.



**Figure 1. Helicopter MIL-8-MTV.**

## 2.2 Dedicated Survey Flights

During 2008, dedicated surveys were carried out once a month from July to November<sup>1</sup>. The dedicated surveys were carried out using an MIL-8-MTV helicopter that is normally used for crew transfers (Figure 1). These surveys were conducted with two Marine Mammal Observers (MMOs) onboard, one on each side of the aircraft, and covered the northeast coast of Sakhalin from Nogliki to Okha (Figure 2).

Specific recommendations by GWAP for dedicated helicopter surveys were:

- *Flight (ground) speed: 80-100 knots (148-185 km/hr).*
- *Flight altitude: 1500 ft (450 m). Although this is above the optimal height, it should preclude serious disturbance to near-shore living whales as well as nesting birds and hauled-out pinnipeds. The smallest gray whales expected during summer and autumn in this region would be 6-7 m long and they should be at least moderately detectable from 450 m.*
- *Flight path: Where the terrain permits, a flight path along the land-side (ca. ¼ mi [0.4 km] from the beach) is preferred. However, it is essential that the beach be kept in sight and therefore in areas such as the Piltun feeding ground, where dunes, hills and cliffs might obscure a high-and-dry carcass, it may be necessary to fly directly along, or just offshore from, the waterline. In this circumstance, it will be especially important to avoid sharp turns and rapid changes in power that cause more sound to enter the water.*

<sup>1</sup> Dedicated survey flights were conducted on 7.07.08, 10.08.08, 7.09.08, 12.10.08 and 16.11.08



- *Flight coverage and regularity: This should follow the guidance given in the reports of the IISG and WGAP 1 (e.g. expand coverage to include areas north of Piltun Lagoon, entire east coast to be covered at least twice per season, Piltun feeding area to be covered biweekly from July-October).*

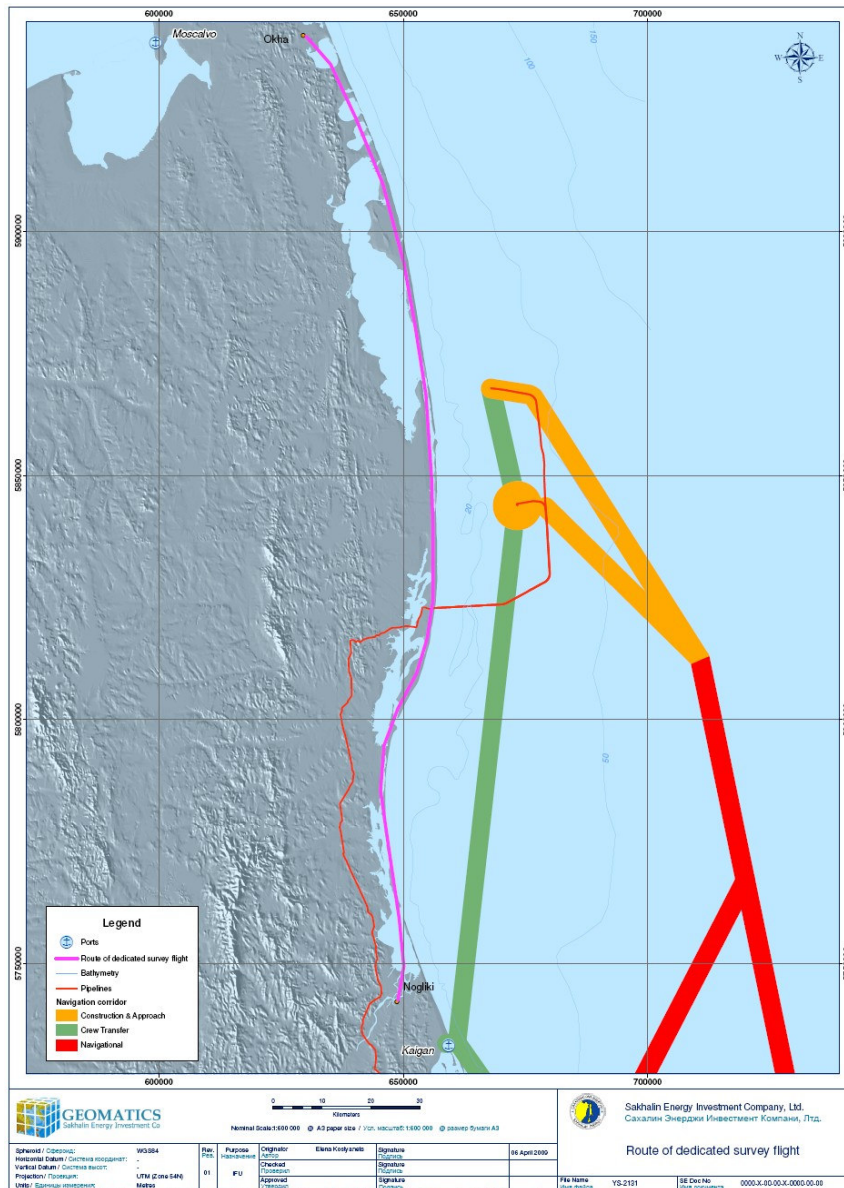


Figure 2. Route of dedicated survey flights.



### **2.3 Flight Survey Equipment**

Standard helicopter equipment was used during the surveys, including an accurate radar altimeter, GPS navigation system, headphones, respirators, survival equipment and clothing. In addition, MMOs on the dedicated survey flights were equipped with their own global positioning system (GPS) devices (Garmin eTrex Legend Cx) and digital cameras.

### **2.4 Other Survey Activities**

#### **2.4.1 Onshore Behavioural and Distribution Teams**

Members of SEIC's Onshore Behavioural and Distribution Teams study the behaviour, distribution, and abundance of western gray whales from a number of onshore monitoring points located along the northeast coast of Sakhalin Island. The team members travel between monitoring stations by vehicle. During their activities, the team members also look out for dead or injured marine mammals. The team is equipped with GPS devices and digital cameras.

#### **2.4.2 Marine Mammal Observers**

As part of SEIC's Marine Mammal Protection Programme, MMOs are located aboard key vessels (crew-change boats and research vessel in 2008) engaged in SEIC activities. The MMOs main task is to look out for marine mammals and to alert the shipmaster so that collisions can be avoided. In performing these duties, the MMOs also record sightings of dead or injured animals.

### **2.5 Response Procedure for Sightings**

Local wildlife trustee agencies are central to response procedures because the responsibility and authority for protecting wildlife lies with those agencies. This means that any response to the finding of carcasses should be conducted with the pre-authorization of the relevant agencies. Taking into consideration the authority and responsibilities of relevant agencies, SEIC's response procedure during this field season was as follows:

1. Helicopter crew who locate an injured or dead marine mammal shall report this to the aviation manager, who in turn informs the HSE Emergency Response Coordinator (HSE-EC) on duty.
2. The HSE-EC contacts the MMO Coordinator, who in close cooperation with the logistics leader on duty and with the Nogliki camp supervisor shall arrange transportation of marine mammal specialists to the site.
3. In the case of a dedicated survey, the helicopter shall land at the site of the injured or dead animal.
4. The marine mammal experts shall investigate the carcass or injured animal, including species identification, photo and video work, sex, length, weight, and body condition. Initial coordinates are also checked.



5. After examination of the animal, the findings are recorded on a Marine Mammal Mortality/Injury Form and submitted together with pictures to the MMO coordinator in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk.
6. The findings are to be reported to relevant SEIC management and local authorities.

### 3. FINDINGS

No injured animals were found during 2008. No carcasses were found by the regular crew-change flights, by the vessel-based MMOs, or by the onshore teams.

Only one carcass of marine mammal found during the dedicated helicopter surveys in 2008. A dead Minke whale was found in an advanced state of decomposition (Figure 3). The location of this carcass is indicated in Figure 4.



**Figure 3. Carcass of dead Minke Whale.**

More carcasses were found in previous years. In 2007, five carcasses (spotted seal, beluga whale, Cuvier's beaked whale) were found by onshore teams, by vessel-based MMOs, and by dedicated helicopter surveys. In 2006, five carcasses (Minke whale, Baird's Beaked whale, Killer whale, spotted seal, and one ringed seal) were found by ground and air crews.

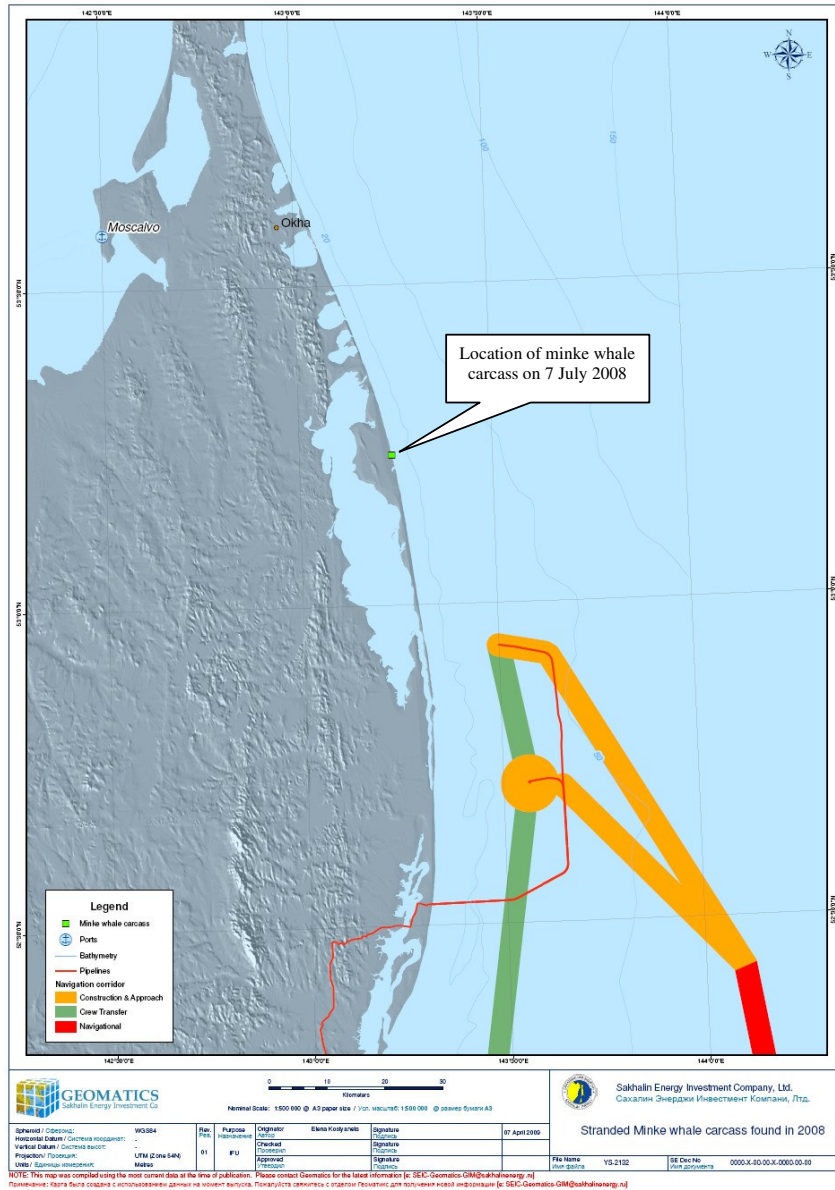


Figure 4. Stranded Minke Whale carcass found in 2008.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

- No dead or injured western gray whales were found during 2008; no dead or injured WGW were found by SEIC teams in 2006-2007 either.
- One carcass of Minke whale was found in 2008. There was no evidence that cause of death was related to human activity.

**MARINE MAMMAL MORTALITY - INJURY REPORT, JULY 07, 2008**

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<b>Species and location details</b>
Common name: Minke whale
Genus: <i>Balaenopteridae</i> Species: <i>Balaenoptera Acutorostrata</i>
Site description: Sakhalin, east coast. Piltun

<b>GPS coordinates:</b> 53.14.044 143.14.401
<b>Vessel (if applicable):</b>
<b>Sighting conditions:</b> dead whale found by helicopter
Floating? No
Stranded? Yes

Date of initial observation: 2008 July 07
Date of examination: 2008 July 07
Condition: Advanced Decomposition

