

WESTERN GRAY WHALE ADVISORY PANEL  
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**Reply from Russian MNR to IWC Commissioners' letter  
regarding Lebedinskoye seismic survey 2010**

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Deputy Minister

The protection of the Okhotsk-Korean population of the gray whale

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation has examined the appeal of the commissioners of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Germany, Mexico, Monaco, New Zealand, USA and the International Whaling Commission of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2010 about the protection of the Okhotsk-Korean (western) population of the gray whale and reports.

The gray whale is entered in the Red Book of the Russian Federation and is under special protection. The conservation of the western population of the gray whale is one of the priorities of Minprirody Rossii and Rosprirodnadzor. All work carried out on the exploration and exploitation of reserves of useful/commercial minerals in marine environments inhabited by the gray whale is under the close attention of Minprirody Rossii and organisations within its jurisdiction.

In the middle of the 1990s, when the exploitation of oil and gas deposits on the shelf of Eastern Sakhalin began, Russian scientists carried out continuous monitoring of the western population of the gray whale with the financial support of the companies 'Sakhalin Energy' and 'Exxon Mobil Neftegaz'. The results are discussed and published annually in the media of mass information, including the internet site of Minprirody Rossii. Scientists from various countries, including the USA and Japan, and also representatives of Russian and international non-government organisations, such as WWF and IFAW, take part in the observations of the behaviour and distribution of gray whales around Eastern Sakhalin.

In order to improve the coordination of scientific research an Interdepartmental Working Group devoted to the conservation of the Okhotsk-Korean population of the gray whale (further referred to as MRG) was created in Minprirody Rossii in 2009. The composition of MRG includes representatives of government departments (literally 'organs of state power'), scientific organisations and oil-exploration companies, including the company 'RN-Shel'f-Dal'niy Vostok'.

At the third meeting of MRG which took place on 13<sup>th</sup> May last year (?), a report by the company 'RN-Shel'f-Dal'niy Vostok' was presented about planned seismic prospecting on the Lebedinskiy licensed section. As a result of the discussion of this paper the attention of the company representatives present at the meeting was drawn to the need for additional measures to protect the gray whales, whose feeding ground practically coincides with the region of the planned seismic prospecting.

It should be noted that the oil company 'Rosneft' and its subsidiary 'RN-Shel'f-Dal'niy Vostok' carry out their activity in accordance with Russian legislation. When preparing for the work on the Lebedinskiy licensed section the programme of seismic prospecting went through all necessary procedures and agreements in federal organisations of executive power, including state ecological expert inspection, which, in accordance with Federal Law of 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1995 No. 174-FZ 'About ecological expert inspection', includes independent experts. The programme of

seismic prospecting was approved by the Federal Fishery Agency. Public hearings carried out on the island of Sakhalin preceded the state ecological inspection of the seismic prospecting project. The positive conclusion of the state ecological inspection is confirmed by order of Rostekhnadzor of 19<sup>th</sup> May 2010 no. 396.

Based on the conclusions of the state ecological inspection the acoustic effect which will be exerted on the whales is considered to be acceptable. In order to mitigate the effect of seismic prospecting on the gray whales as much as possible, the operating company 'RN-Shel'f-Dal'niy Vostok' envisages special measures, including reducing the power (output) of the source of the acoustic signals, putting the emitter deeper, below the level at which the whales swim, drastically reducing the duration of seismic prospecting, monitoring the behaviour of the whales during the time the geophysical vessel is present in their feeding area and other measures. It is envisaged that seismic prospecting will be cease immediately if the whales show signs of anxiety or stop feeding.

On the basis that the company 'RN-Shel'f-Dal'niy Vostok' has taken into account the recommendations of the state ecological inspection, and also plans to carry out additional measures to protect the gray whales while they are feeding around Eastern Sakhalin, to the extent of ceasing seismic prospecting in the case of actual danger to the whales, we consider that there are no weighty reasons for taking cardinal measures against this company, including recalling the licence or postponing the work until 2011.

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