

INTERNATIONAL DOLPHIN CONSERVATION PROGRAM

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW PANEL

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IMPACTS OF CHANGING THE MINIMUM SIZE OF VESSELS REQUIRED TO CARRY OBSERVERS

For many years, following the procedures established originally by the US National Marine Fisheries Service to sample the national fleet, as required by US legislation, observers have been placed only on purse-seiners of more than 363 metric tons (400 short tons) carrying capacity. This limit was chosen mainly because vessels of lesser capacity rarely or never set on dolphins, and the cost of placing observers on such vessels would not be justified by the small amount of data obtained. One of the logistic limitations was that smaller vessels did not have the space to carry the number of speedboats that were thought necessary to encircle herds of dolphins. This number was known to vary: in areas new to the fishery on dolphins, a single speedboat may be sufficient, whereas in areas with a long history of this fishery a large number of speedboats is needed. Prior to the fishery on dolphins being restricted, there was no reason for smaller vessels not to record sets on dolphins, but these historical logbook data showed that these vessels made very few such sets.

In view of recent reported sightings of smaller vessels fishing on dolphins, and the capture of such a vessel, the IRP requested an assessment of the potential impacts of assigning observers to these vessels.

The table shows fishing activity in the EPO by purse-seiners of 300 to 490 m³ of well volume between January 1, 2000, and June 30, 2002. The volume equivalent to 363 metric tons of carrying capacity is 425 m³. However, the carrying capacities, in metric tons, of some small vessels appear to be unusually low, so the current division between vessels required to carry observers and those not required to carry observers is 491 m³.

Capacity (m ³)	Vessels	Trips	Days at sea	Trips/ year	Days/ year	Average trip (days)	Cumulative totals	
							Trips	Days
300-319	3	93	1865	37	746	20	93	1,865
320-379	4	78	2021	31	808	26	171	3,886
380-439	3	56	1656	22	662	30	227	5,542
440-490	5	62	2002	25	801	32	289	7,544

The average trip length for vessels currently carrying observers is 43.1 days, compared with 24.4 days for the smaller vessels.