

AGREEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL DOLPHIN CONSERVATION PROGRAM

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW PANEL

41ST MEETING

BUSAN, KOREA
20 JUNE 2006

DOCUMENT IRP 41-11

REVIEW OF BACKDOWN PROCEDURE

During the 39th meeting of the International Review Panel, held in June 2005, the question was raised as to whether, in sets in which very few dolphins are captured, more of them might be rescued if no backdown were performed. The Secretariat was asked to analyze this issue to assist the Parties in determining whether there would be an advantage in amending the AIDCP to allow for flexibility in performing backdown during sets with very few dolphins captured.

In order to carry out this analysis, the first requirement is a definition of what constitutes a “small” number of dolphins. The Secretariat used a limit of 20 animals, considering this to be the maximum number that might effectively be released by techniques other than backdown (*i.e.*, hand release).

To evaluate the difference in dolphin mortality between sets with and without backdown, data collected by IATTC observers from 2002-2005 were used. These four years were selected because the overall mortality rates were similar. Among the intentional dolphin sets with 1-20 dolphins captured that did not involve malfunctions during that period, there were 12 sets without backdown and 968 with backdown. The total reported mortalities for these two groups of sets were 4 and 13 animals, respectively, corresponding to an average mortality per set of 0.333 and 0.013 animals, respectively.

Given the paucity of data on sets without backdown but which captured small numbers of dolphins, the apparently higher average mortality per set (approximately 26 times), and the fundamental lack of data on the efficacy of hand release when no backdown is performed, it is recommended that no changes be made to the existing requirements regarding the use of the backdown procedure.