

Density and distribution of cetaceans within the Antarctic pack ice

Projectdata

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Project description

Information on distribution and density of cetaceans in Antarctic waters is limited. Especially the ice-covered parts of the Southern Ocean are poorly studied, as only few ships can penetrate into the ice and conduct population assessments. As a member of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) Germany aims to help the management and protection of whales. Different species of whales are still being hunted, especially the Antarctic minke whale (*Balaenoptera bonarensis*). Population estimates on which catch limits today are based on vary a lot. A putative decline in numbers over the past decades is argued to be due to minke whales utilising the ice covered waters more than in previous years and them thus being less available during population assessments not penetrating into the ice. But evidence is still lacking.

In recent years, Germany has been collecting valuable data on the occurrence of cetaceans in the Southern Ocean, especially in ice-covered waters. Vessels that could penetrate into fully ice covered waters were used as a platform for dedicated cetacean surveys. Within this project, these data are used to model distribution and abundance of whales in relation to sea ice parameters. Relationships of whale densities and various environmental parameters such as depth, ice cover, distance to coast or ice edge are analysed in order to identify boundaries and magnitudes of cetacean densities in relation to sea ice cover.

Results are regularly presented to the IWC as base line data for decisions for management and protection.



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