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Non-detriment finding for sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)

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Competing interests: The authors declare no competing interests in relation to this non-detriment finding (NDF).

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Scientific name: *Physeter macrocephalus* Linnaeus, 1758

Common names: Sperm whale, spermacet whale, pot whale, cachelot, cachalot

Norwegian name: Spermhval

Type of permit: CITES Appendix I; Norwegian CITES Regulation Annex 1, list A (Norwegian reservation)

Country of export: Norway (NO)

Countries of import: Fiji (FJ) and the United States of America (US)

Purpose and source: The proposal concerns the export (purpose-of-transaction code P – Personal) of 20 sperm whale teeth from Norway (private exporter), including 10 to Fiji (private importer) and 10 to the United States of America (private importer). The teeth are of wild origin (Source code W) and declared as collected in the 1960s.

For Appendix I species (Norwegian Cites Regulation Annex 1, list A) it is required to establish that export will not be detrimental to the survival of that species, in compliance with CITES Article III. In the Norwegian CITES Regulation (Lovdata, 2018) the criteria for export from Norway are described in Chapter 2, Section 5.

Note that Norway has made a reservation to the Appendix I-listing of *Physeter macrocephalus* (06.06.1981). It is, however, regulated as list A (see above), unless trade involves other countries that have made a reservation against the Appendix I listing of *P. macrocephalus*.

VKM has adopted the definition of detriment, cf. Conf. 16.7 (Rev. CoP17) suggested by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Scientific Authority:

1. Harvest that is not sustainable.
2. Harvest that harms the status of the species in the wild.
3. Removal from the wild that results in habitat loss or destruction, or that interferes with recovery efforts for a species.

Conclusion

VKM concludes that the export of 10 pre-convention teeth from Norway to Fiji and 10 from Norway to the United States of America will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.

The conclusion is based on the following factors:

- Whaling of sperm whale ceased in Norway in 1971, and the teeth in question are likely to have been collected prior to 1971. In this case the regulation as described in Chapter 3, Section 11 'Previously acquired specimens (pre-Convention)' of the Norwegian Cites Regulation applies.

1. Biological information

Nomenclature note

Physeter macrocephalus was previously listed as *Physeter catodon*. It was subject to a nomenclature change in 2010, following taxonomic changes adopted at CoP15 (UNEP, 2025).

Distribution

The sperm whale is distributed in nearly all marine regions deeper than 1,000 meters and that are not covered by ice. Males are usually observed at higher latitudes than females and calves (Taylor et al., 2019).

Life history

The information on generation time, fecundity, and mortality of sperm whales is uncertain (Taylor et al., 2019). Whaling was predominantly targeted at males, which caused a gender bias that is assumed to have long lasting effects hindering population growth (Whitehead, 2002).

Role in the ecosystem

The primary prey of sperm whales are deep water squids. Calves may be attacked by killer whales and large sharks (International Whaling Commission, 2025).

2. Population trend

The overall population trend is unknown. An assessment estimated a 67% reduction from the pre-whaling population (Whitehead, 2002); however, the exact size of this decline remains uncertain. It is also unclear whether the post-whaling population has increased or decreased due to missing historical data (Taylor et al., 2019).

3. Conservation status

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Taylor et al., 2019): Vulnerable (VU A1d), but the species was last assessed in 2008 and needs updating. On the Norwegian Red List (Norsk Rødliste for arter 2021, Eldegard et al., 2021), the species is assessed as NA ('not suited'), as no reproducing population is found in Norwegian waters.

4. Threats

The major threat to sperm whales post-whaling appears to be entanglement in gillnets and other fishing gear (Taylor et al., 2019). Ingestion of marine debris and ship strikes are also causes of human-induced mortality of the sperm whales (International Whaling Commission, 2025). High levels of some contaminants have been found in sperm whale tissues (e.g., Nielsen et al. 2000), but the effect on population level health is unknown. The effect of noise is also uncertain (Taylor et al. 2019).

5. Conservation and management measures:

International legislation

The International Whaling Commission manages sperm whale populations under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, however many range states are not members of the International Whaling Commission (Taylor et al., 2019). Sperm whales are listed in Appendix 1 of the Convention on Migratory Species, in CITES Appendix I (with reservations by Palau, Iceland, Japan, and Norway), and in Annex A of the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations (UNEP, 2025).

Conservation measures

International legislation (see above) regulates whaling and trade in whales and derivatives providing indirect conservation by alleviating anthropogenic pressures.

6. Trade/use

Legal

The large-scale commercial fishing of sperm whale has ceased in 1980s, but smaller scale fishing occurs in Japan and Indonesia (Taylor et al., 2019).

There is a considerable international trade in sperm whale specimens, primarily in teeth (tabua) and carvings (scrimshaw) (CITES Trade Database, 2025).

Illegal

Sperm whale teeth are known to be illegally traded as ivory substitutes and as tabua (Baker et al., 2020).

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