Blue Whale Skeletan near Aglachewadi, near Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary, Raigad District, Maharashtra

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Whale, *Balenoptera musculus* (Linnaeus,1758) is the largest living animal on earth . The Blue whale *B. musculus is* a common species along the coast of India (Jones, 1953 ; Danial, 1963; Kewalramani, 1969).

Blue Whale classified under Order Cetacea and Family Balenopteridae (Wilson and Reeder,1993) . As per IUCN redlist (www.iucnredlist.org), it is endangered species, CITES places it in Appendix I (www.CITES.org), while Wildlife Protection Act,1972 in India lists it in Schedule II. Marine mammals found off the Maharashtra coast have also been listed (Somasekharan and Jayaprakash (1987, and Bhatnagar, 2012).

A Blue whale (*Balenoptera musculus*) skeleton (as per the displayed information on site) has been mounted near Aglachewadi (18.57790 degree N,072.91771 degree E) at an altitude of 18m , about 30 Km from Phansad Wildlife sanctuary in Raigad district of Maharashtra. Its details are

As per the information displayed at the site , the calf of the whale got injured because of collision with a vessel in the sea and was washed ashore. James and Soundaraian (1984) summarized the information on the whales washed ashore along the Indian Coast and discussed the probable reasons for their stranding.

Lal (1992) drew an interesting relationship between length of the whales of *B. musculus* washed ashore and their latitude. He inferred that calves of the whales were found nearer to the equator indicating its breeding there. He derived an equation –

$$Y = (-) 2.11 + 0.99X$$

Where X= total length and Y= Northern latitudes.

Therefore, using the above equation, the outcome is 12.88 degree N, which is near to equator , indicating that the whale in question came from an area nearer to the equator. The marine vessels need to be made aware about the risks that the plying vessels may sometimes create for the whales keeping in view of their zoogeographic distribution and also particularly the fact that equator and nearby is a breeding area for the whales migrating to the warmer waters for breeding during winter season. It may also be noted that equator and nearby area is a route for major shipping lanes. Mortality of whales resulting from collision with vessels is likely underestimated and under-documented because: many carcasses sink after death, carcasses may drift offshore or be carried offshore by outbound ships and whales may wash ashore in remote areas where they may go unreported (sanctuaries.noaa.gov/protect/shipstrike/pdfs/poster.pdf).

Action has been taken in this matter e.g.Sanctuaries along the west coast of the USA , particularly Cordell Bank, Gulf of the Farallones, Monterey Bay, and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuaries, have undertaken policy and management actions to protect whales from ship strikes (Sanctuaries.noaa.gov/protect/shipstrike/policy.html), some of which are : Modifying Shipping Lanes, Santa Barbara Channel,Traffic Separation Scheme Amendment,Vessel Speed Reduction Incentive Initiative, Seasonal Whale Advisories .

It may be noted that apart from physical injury sonar and other noise also causes harm to whales and marine life in general. Several whales died on Canary Island beach when a multilateral military exercise took place there offshore. The Spanish government banned the routine use of military sonar there after the incident. The ICRW (International Convention on Regulation on Whaling) has a scientific commitee and resolution passed by it urge action to regulate noise in sensitive whale habitat. (NRDC,2005, http://www.nrdc.org/wildlife/marine/sound/sound.pdf).

Therefore, it may be concluded that marine environment has to be regulated in a way to conserve whales (and marine life in general) and at the same time sustain other anthropogenic activities such as shipping and military use. Organization such as International Whaling Commission (concerned with whaling in the seas), and International Maritime Organization (concerned with shipping regulation around the world) through its Marine Environment Protection Committee and relevant international legal instruments of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) such as Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) may take up appropriate measure(s) in this direction

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