

Further Analysis of 2002 Abrolhos Bank, Brazil Humpback Whale Strandings Coincident with Seismic Surveys

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Abstract

A paper, “Are seismic surveys responsible for cetacean strandings? An unusual mortality of adult humpback whales in Abrolhos Bank, northeastern coast of Brazil” (Engel et al. 2004), was presented to the 2004 International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee. It presented strandings data for the northeastern coast of Brazil, the areas where seismic surveys were conducted in 2002, and an overview of the IBAMA efforts to establish guidelines for the seismic activities in the Brazilian coast. While the paper concluded that a scientific correlation between increased adult humpback strandings and seismic surveys along the east coast of Brazil can not be established, the authors nevertheless suggest that seismic surveys be suspended offshore from the Abrolhos Bank region (Bahia and Espírito Santo States) during the humpback whale breeding season from July to November.

The geophysical industry has compiled data on all seismic surveys conducted off the Brazilian coast from 1999 to 2003. It has further conducted an independent analysis of this seismic activity over a 5 year period around the 2002 season as well as the location of the 8 adult humpback whale mortalities noted in Engel et al. 2004 relative to coincident seismic activity. In this poster session the geophysical industry will present details of these data and analyses and will examine the major premises of Engel et al. 2004 against them. It will offer an examination of the scientific literature quoted in Engel et al. 2004 in support of its conclusions as well as how this literature was used, and will draw conclusions about what lessons the 2002 humpback mortalities should offer managers considering mitigations of seismic activity.