

INTERNATIONAL DOLPHIN CONSERVATION PROGRAM  
PROGRAMA INTERNACIONAL PARA LA CONSERVACION DE LOS DELFINES

**INTERNATIONAL REVIEW PANEL**

**30<sup>TH</sup> MEETING**

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**TECHNICAL GUIDELINES TO PREVENT HIGH MORTALITY DURING  
SETS ON LARGE DOLPHIN HERDS**

Encircling large herds of dolphins adds an additional risk factor to dolphin sets, and fishing captains must be aware that sets on large herds can result in disproportionately high dolphin mortality. Sets on herds of more than 3,000 dolphins comprise less than 0.2% of the total number of sets and catch of yellowfin tuna, but result in 16% of the mortalities, while sets on herds of more than 2,000 dolphins comprise less than 3% of the total number of sets and catch of yellowfin tuna, but result in over 20% of the mortalities (see Document IRP-29-14). This means that if captains avoided making sets on herds of 2,000 dolphins or more, and those sets were not replaced by sets on smaller herds, dolphin mortality would be reduced by 20%, while catches would be reduced by only 3%. If they were replaced by other sets, the reductions would not be as high. Setting on large herds should particularly be avoided when other risk factors are present, such as spinner or common dolphins in the herd and difficult environmental conditions (currents, wind, sea state) that can lead to a net collapse or gear malfunctions..

The following are guidelines for sets on large herds of dolphins:

1. Sets on herds of more than 2,000 dolphins should be avoided. Also, even with smaller herds, if there are other risk factors present, such as spinner or common dolphins in the herd, or difficult environmental conditions, the additional problems that might result should be carefully considered before the set is made.
  - a. **Before setting the net**
    - i. As with any set on tunas associated with dolphins, the set should be made when the wind is on the vessel's port bow.
    - ii. The captain, using visual observations and any electronic equipment that is available on board the vessel, should determine if a strong current is present in the vicinity. If so, it should be borne in mind that this could cause problems with the net and result in high mortality of dolphins, and the captain should consider not making the set.
    - iii. During the chase and encirclement, the size of the portion of the herd associated with the tuna should be reduced as much as possible in order to minimize the number of dolphins encircled.
2. In the event a large number of dolphins are encircled, captains should be particularly diligent in following these guidelines for avoiding potential dolphin mortality.
  - a. **After encirclement**
    - i. If not done prior to the set, the captain, using visual observations and any electronic equipment that is available on board the vessel, should determine if a strong current is present in the vicinity immediately after the herd is encircled. If a strong current is evident, the captain should consider aborting the set by releasing the bow ortza (see (e) below).
    - ii. The captain should monitor the remainder of the set from where he considers to be the best vantage point.

**b. During pursing and/or net roll**

- i. Throughout pursing at least one manned speedboat, equipped for net towing and with a 2-way radio, should be stationed in the water outside the net.
- ii. Throughout pursing and net roll, the skiff and the bow thruster should be used to maintain the wind on the vessel's port side in order to keep the net open.
- iii. Any gear malfunctions that delay pursing or net roll should be repaired with urgency.
- iv. Throughout net roll, at least two manned speedboats, each equipped for net towing and with a 2-way radio, should be stationed in the water outside the net. If the vessel carries a jet-type watercraft<sup>1</sup> (*Waverunner* or similar), this should be manned and in the water during net roll.
- v. If captured dolphins swim within close proximity to the net, one or more speedboats should circle outside the net to herd the dolphins towards the center of the net.
- vi. Net roll should be carried out as quickly as possible in order to reach the tie-down point for backdown as soon as possible.

**c. Prior to backdown**

- i. Two manned speedboats should attach their towlines to the corkline, one on the stern side and the other on the bow side of the backdown channel. Also, a third manned speedboat, similarly equipped, should be stationed outside the net in the general area of the backdown channel apex.
- ii. Rescuers, with at least one manned inflatable raft, should be deployed into the net. If the vessel is equipped with two inflatable rafts, both should be deployed with occupants.

**d. During backdown**

- i. The two speedboats should tow on the stern and bow sides of the backdown channel in order to keep it open. The third speedboat should monitor the release of the dolphins from the vicinity of the channel apex. If the vessel is equipped with a jet-type watercraft, it should also be deployed to assist in herding and rescue.

**e. Aborting sets**

If at any point during the set circumstances such as a net collapse or canopy threaten to entangle or trap large numbers of dolphins, all available speedboats equipped for towing the net should be deployed, and the captain should consider all of his options to avoid mortality, including aborting the set by releasing the bow ortza. When aborting the set, the bow ortza should be towed as far away from the vessel as possible and a sufficient number of purse rings should be detached from the purse cable to provide a wide and deep opening for the dolphins to escape. One or more speedboats (and the jet craft, if present) should circle on the stern side of the net to herd the dolphins towards the opening. An additional rescuer in the raft should be deployed near the bow ortza in the event that dolphins become entangled in the large mesh in that part of the net.

**(Note: If the ortza is released at any time during the set with the intention of releasing live dolphins, it is strongly recommended that the captain explain his reasons for aborting the set in this manner on the observer's data forms.)**

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<sup>1</sup> Although such craft are not required under the AIDCP, fishing captains that have used them during dolphin release procedures consider them a very efficient tool for herding and releasing dolphins.