

Report on the Progress of Management Plan  
Implementation for  
**Sowerby's Beaked Whale**  
*(Mesoplodon bidens)*



2026

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For copies of the recovery document, or for additional information on species at risk, including Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) status report, and other related documents, please visit the [Species at Risk Public Registry](#).

**Cover photo:** Sowerby's Beaked Whale by Marina Milligan.

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## Preface

The *Species at Risk Act* (S.C. 2002, c.29) (SARA) requires the competent minister(s) to monitor and report on the implementation of recovery documents (that is, recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans) for species at risk. These reports must describe the progress made towards the species' recovery or conservation<sup>1</sup>.

The Minister of Fisheries is the competent minister for aquatic species at risk. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has prepared this progress report.

Reporting on the progress toward implementing recovery documents includes reporting on the collective efforts of the competent minister(s), provincial and territorial governments, and all other parties involved in carrying out actions that contribute to the species' recovery or conservation.

As stated in the preamble to SARA, success in the recovery and conservation of species at risk depends on the commitment and cooperation of many contributors, and will not be achieved by DFO, or any other jurisdiction, alone. All Canadians are invited to join in supporting and implementing the recovery document, for the benefit of the species and Canadian society as a whole.

## Acknowledgements

The progress report was prepared by regional recovery planners within DFO. The progress toward species conservation described in this report would not have been achieved without the partnerships and contributions of many individuals and organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> "Recovery" applies to species listed under SARA as threatened, endangered or extirpated, which require a recovery strategy and one or more action plan(s). "Conservation" applies to species listed under SARA as special concern, which require a management plan.

## **Executive summary**

This report summarizes the progress made by DFO and its partners towards implementing the management plan for Sowerby's Beaked Whale between 2017 and 2022. For more information on the contents of this document, please contact the Species at Risk Program ([dfc.ncrsara-leprcn.mpo@dfc-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:dfc.ncrsara-leprcn.mpo@dfc-mpo.gc.ca)).

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# 1 Sowerby's Beaked Whale (*Mesoplodon bidens*)

SPECIAL CONCERN

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and its partners have made progress towards the implementation of the conservation measures identified in the [Management Plan for the Sowerby's Beaked Whale \(\*Mesoplodon bidens\*\) in Canada](#), through the actions undertaken between April 2017 and December 2022 to support the conservation of the Sowerby's Beaked Whale. The management plan provides detailed information on the species, its threats, its needs, management objectives, and conservation measures.



Photo credit: Marina Milligan

This progress report is part of a series of documents for this species that should be taken into consideration together, including the management plan. Refer to the [Sowerby's Beaked Whale species profile](#) on the [Species at Risk Public Registry](#) for more information and related documents.

## 1.1 Progress towards meeting the management objectives for the Sowerby's Beaked Whale

Management objectives establish, to the extent possible, the conditions that are necessary for the conservation of the species. The management objectives for the Sowerby's Beaked Whale are to:

- maintain a stable Sowerby's Beaked Whale population throughout its range in Atlantic Canadian waters
- quantify and mitigate the effects of identified threats on the population

Three broad strategies were identified in the management plan to meet the management objectives for the Sowerby's Beaked Whale. During the reporting period, conservation actions were undertaken by DFO and its partners under each broad strategy. Some key achievements are described below.

### Broad strategy 1: research and monitoring

- The management of Sowerby's Beaked Whale information was enhanced through the creation and maintenance of various databases. This included

updates to the Whitehead Lab (Dalhousie University) Sowerby's Beaked Whale photo-identification catalogues and DFO's regional cetacean sightings databases (for example, MacDonald et al. 2017), as well as the creation of a DFO passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) metadata database and a beaked whale tissue/DNA database developed in partnership with multiple academic institutions

- PAM effort increased range-wide for beaked whales, including additional stationary recorders and towed-array surveys along the Scotian Shelf edge and around Newfoundland and Labrador. Recordings will continue to be analyzed for the presence of Sowerby's Beaked Whale, which has contributed to better understanding of species distribution (for example, Stanistreet et al. 2017; Delarue et al. 2018) and threat response (for example, Stanistreet et al. 2022)
- Sowerby's Beaked Whale vocalizations were quantitatively described (Clarke et al. 2019; Visser et al. 2022), which contributed to improving the effectiveness of PAM for the species
- The Sowerby's Beaked Whale mitochondrial genome was sequenced, which will facilitate studies of population structure (Einfeldt et al. 2019)
- A preliminary analysis of injuries and scars was conducted using the Whitehead Lab's Sowerby's Beaked Whale photo-identification catalogues for 2010, 2013, 2015 and 2016. Annual proportions of photo-identifications that had evidence of anthropogenic interactions (for example, entanglement) ranged from 0% and 8%. These findings were summarized in an internal report (Renaud 2017)
- DFO, the United States National Marine Fisheries Service, and other organizations participated in twice-annual beaked whale-focused meetings to discuss and coordinate fieldwork and research activities occurring in the western North Atlantic, and promote sharing of beaked whale data

## **Broad strategy 2: management**

- The noise mitigation and monitoring measures in the "Statement of Canadian Practice with respect to the Mitigation of Seismic Sound in the Marine Environment" were reviewed through a DFO Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) process to inform an update to the statement (DFO 2020). This update is underway and is expected to include recommendations for enhanced measures that could benefit Sowerby's Beaked Whale
- The DFO Marine Mammal Response Program supported regional response networks in the implementation of their mandates. This involved responses to 9 Sowerby's Beaked Whale incidents across Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. When feasible, necropsies were performed and samples were collected (McAlpine et al. 2023)

- Amendments to the Marine Mammal Regulations came into force in 2018, and included mandatory reporting of accidental contact between a vessel or fishing gear and a marine mammal, as well as minimum approach distances

### Broad strategy 3: engagement and public outreach

- Offshore cetacean incident reporting procedures were publicized by DFO and partners through Annual Notices to Mariners, the distribution of reporting and identification materials, and the delivery of cetacean identification and incident response training to relevant ocean users
- DFO and partners developed public outreach materials on Sowerby's Beaked Whale including a [video](#) on identifying and reporting the species, fact sheets, activity books, puzzles, bookmarks, and stickers, which were distributed at events such as World Oceans Day and at the Sable Island National Park Reserve visitor centre

Achievement of the management objectives is evaluated using progress measures. Table 1 provides an overview of the status of progress measures as of the end of the reporting period. Progress measures that were partially met or not met are discussed in the “Key knowledge gaps and future priorities” section below.

**Table 1: Status of progress measures for Sowerby's Beaked Whale for the period 2017 to 2022.**

Progress measure	Status <sup>2</sup>
Databases have been kept up-to-date and organized.	Met, ongoing
The beaked whale photo-identification catalogue has been advanced.	Met, ongoing
Range-wide survey effort has increased.	Met, ongoing
A preliminary estimate of population size and distribution has been determined.	Met, ongoing
Scientific studies on species biology and behaviour have been conducted and the results have been published or otherwise made available for the purposes of implementing conservation measures.	Met, ongoing

<sup>2</sup>**Met:** the performance indicator has been met and no further action is required.

**Met, ongoing:** the performance indicator has been met, but efforts will continue until such time the population is considered to be recovered.

**Not met:** the performance indicator has not been met, and little to no progress has been made.

**Partially met, underway:** the performance indicator has not been met, but there has been moderate to significant progress made.

Progress measure	Status <sup>2</sup>
Opportunities to observe Sowerby's Beaked Whale (SBW) responses to threats, particularly noise, have been sought out and taken when possible.	Partially met, underway
SBW vocalizations have been identified and described.	Met
Ambient noise levels have been evaluated in known habitat areas.	Partially met, underway
Threats have been better quantified.	Partially met, underway
Visual detection methodologies have been optimized to address species-specific detection challenges.	Not met
Training modules for at-sea observers have been expanded and updated to include more SBW information.	Partially met, underway
Necropsies have been conducted when applicable, and tissue samples have been collected and stored.	Partially met, underway
Noise mitigation measures have been reviewed and enhanced as needed in response to new scientific information.	Partially met, underway
A needs assessment has been conducted to determine whether additional management action is necessary to mitigate the other identified threats to SBW.	Not met
The regional marine mammal response networks are able to successfully carry out their mandates.	Met, ongoing
Inter-departmental government coordination and communication on SBW conservation has occurred.	Not met
SBW and threat mitigation information has been communicated to relevant First Nations, other Indigenous organizations <sup>3</sup> , and stakeholders regularly.	Not met
Offshore cetacean incident reporting procedures have been widely distributed.	Partially met, underway

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<sup>3</sup> Referred to as Aboriginal organizations in the management plan.

Progress measure	Status <sup>2</sup>
Collaborative stewardship opportunities have been sought out and pursued as appropriate.	Partially met, underway
SBW information has been included in outreach materials.	Met, ongoing

## 1.2 Key knowledge gaps and future priorities for the Sowerby's Beaked Whale

While much progress towards meeting the management objectives for this species has been made, there remain many knowledge gaps that must be addressed before certain progress measures can be met. Over the next reporting period, DFO will continue to work with partners to maintain progress and focus on advancing areas where the progress measures were not fully met. Of particular importance is the understanding and quantification of threats, so that the need for mitigation measures can be assessed. Work is already underway to advance knowledge of threats; for example, through a review and analysis of fishery interactions recorded by the At-sea Observer Program, vessel traffic monitoring on the Scotian Shelf, and analysis of microplastics in the Gully Marine Protected Area.

## 2 Concluding statement

During the reporting period, progress was made toward implementing the conservation measures identified in the management plan for Sowerby's Beaked Whale.

DFO remains committed to the recovery and conservation of all aquatic species at risk. The work that has been initiated and completed to date has built a strong foundation for the continued management of Sowerby's Beaked Whale. DFO and its partners will continue to work towards the achievement of the management objectives for Sowerby's Beaked Whale, and welcome the participation of additional partners.

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