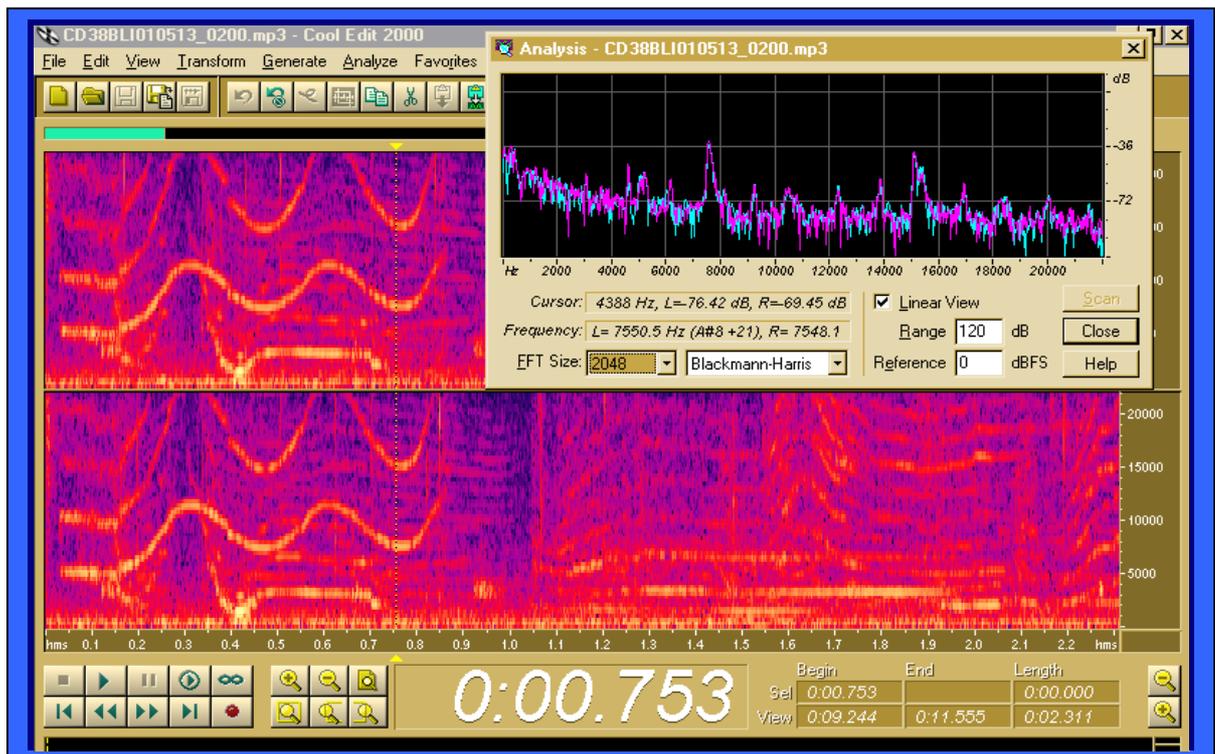




# Cetaceans and Seabirds of Ireland's Atlantic Margin

## Volume III

### ACOUSTIC SURVEYS FOR CETACEANS



COASTAL & MARINE RESOURCES CENTRE  
ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE  
CORK



# **Irish Petroleum Infrastructure Programme (PIP)**

## **Cetaceans and Seabirds of Ireland's Atlantic Margin**

### **Volume III**

#### **ACOUSTIC SURVEYS FOR CETACEANS**

**Natacha Aguilar de Soto \***

**Emer Rogan \*\***

**Oliver Ó Cadhla \***

**Jonathan C.D. Gordon †**

**Mick Mackey \***

**Niamh Connolly \***

**\* COASTAL & MARINE RESOURCES CENTRE,  
ERI, University College Cork,  
Naval Base, Haulbowline,  
Cobh,  
County Cork.  
IRELAND**

**\*\* DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY, ECOLOGY & PLANT SCIENCE  
Environmental Research Institute,  
University College, Lee Maltings,  
Prospect Row, Cork.  
IRELAND**

**† SEA MAMMAL RESEARCH UNIT  
Gatty Marine Laboratory,  
University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews,  
Fife KY16 8LB.  
SCOTLAND**

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## SUMMARY

The island of Ireland and its marine waters are home to a wide variety of cetacean and seabird species. This report presents detailed findings from research conducted under the Petroleum Infrastructure Programme set up by Ireland's then Department of the Marine and Natural Resources in 1997. The initial three-year *Cetaceans & Seabirds at Sea* research programme, which commenced in 1999, has now been completed and is presented in three volumes under the title "Cetaceans and Seabirds of Ireland's Atlantic Margin".

### **Volume III: Acoustic Survey for Cetaceans along Ireland's Atlantic Margin.**

The volume presented here summarises the results of a cetacean acoustic monitoring programme that, between July 2000 and September 2001, was carried out to complement visual surveys for cetaceans. This acoustic research was made possible by a grant to University College Cork from the Petroleum Affairs Division of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources for necessary hydrophone equipment.

Acoustic methods greatly enhance information on cetacean distribution, allowing approximately three times more survey-line coverage than visual surveys alone. This is particularly important when just one cetacean observer is stationed on board the survey vessel.

The results of the acoustic survey programme are summarised below:

- A total of 90 days of effective acoustic survey were completed, 85 days along Ireland's Atlantic Margin between July 2000 and July 2001.
- This report presents the first analysis of 1,190 hours survey time, under a sampling protocol measuring 20 seconds of acoustic monitoring every 2 minutes. Detections of cetacean species were contained in a total 238.42 hours of recording over a total survey track-length of 14,478.98km.
- The towed hydrophone array was first deployed during the *SIAR* survey, conducted over a three-week period in July-August 2000. This intensive visual and acoustic survey was conducted in the deep waters of the Rockall Trough and extended to continental shelf waters to the west of Ireland (*see* Volume II). A total of 1,873.3km of track-line were surveyed acoustically and visually, and an additional 781.8km of track-line was covered using acoustic methods alone. This resulted in 210 acoustic encounters.
- Acoustic surveys in Ireland's Atlantic Margin were also carried out on board the Irish Naval Service vessel L.E. *Eithne* and on the National Seabed Survey vessels S.V. *Bligh*, and S.V. *Siren*. Since all of these ships were originally constructed as naval vessels, they were designed to minimise noise production and thus constituted good platforms for acoustic monitoring.
- A total of 249.8km of track-line was surveyed acoustically aboard the L.E. *Eithne*, 10,952.98km on the S.V. *Bligh* and 511.50km on the S.V. *Siren*. The average towing speed during acoustic surveys was 8.5 knots, while the maximum towing speed was 16 knots.
- These surveys resulted in 671 acoustic encounters with at least seven odontocete species recorded. These included detections of Cuvier's beaked whale (possibly the first record of this species' pulsed vocalisations), sperm whale, long-finned pilot whale,

bottlenose dolphin, common dolphin, striped dolphin and white-sided dolphin, plus other unidentifiable vocalisations. The total number of recordings by species were as follows: 110 sperm whale encounters, 124 long-finned pilot whales, 435 dolphin species and two beaked whale encounters.

- Other underwater noise was also detected during surveys for cetaceans, most notably a seismic survey off northwest Ireland that was recorded 490km away from the seismic source. This and other monitoring confirmed the wide-scale zone of influence of seismic activities. Other man-made noise, from shipping, fishing vessels, the Corrib Field drilling platform and ambient sources, was also detected.
- Trial survey data showed that acoustic monitoring of cetaceans is possible near seismic vessels and could be helpful in mitigating the impact of intense man-made sound on cetaceans.
- During the acoustic survey programme several regions were identified as areas of potential importance on the basis of their higher relative abundance of cetaceans. These include (i) continental slope areas to the west and northwest of the Porcupine Shelf and (ii) at an approximate latitude of 57° N, (iii) waters overlying the Feni Ridge, (iv) the Porcupine Seabight and (v) an unnamed canyon approximately situated at 53° 30' N, 19° 0' W.
- Acoustic recordings from waters > 1500m depth indicated a higher presence of cetaceans than expected, based on background data and suggested that the Rockall Trough is a potentially important habitat for deep-diving species such as sperm whales. The distribution of such cetacean species may indicate the presence of oceanographic or physical features that have a wider biological significance, e.g. submarine canyons, areas of high benthic biomass, spawning sites, etc.
- The acoustic survey results represent an important contribution to the information gathered under the overall research programme. The data gathered served to strengthen and expand information on cetacean distribution collected by visual survey methods, while new areas such as cetacean vocal behaviour and the influence of man-made sound in the Irish marine environment were also explored.
- Further laboratory analysis is recommended in order to extract and examine information from the collected dataset and to further explore the biological and management significance of findings to date.

# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

Information on cetacean populations in the Atlantic waters off western Ireland have historically been sparse and, until now, surveys were conducted in a few selected areas (*see* Evans, 1990; Leopold *et al.*, 1992; Gordon *et al.*, 1999). The latter study, which occurred off County Mayo in 1993, combined acoustic and visual methods and, although relatively small in scale, the study demonstrated how acoustic monitoring could greatly improve the detection rate for odontocetes (toothed cetaceans). More recently, detections collected remotely from bottom-mounted military hydrophones situated on the Atlantic Margin have become available (Clarke & Charif, 1998; Charif *et al.*, 2001). These studies summarised data on the vocalisations of fin, blue and humpback whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*, *B. musculus* and *Megaptera novaeangliae*) over twelve and 24-month periods and yielded important findings on seasonal distribution of these large whales in Irish waters.

Against this backdrop of relatively limited information, a study was formulated as part of an overall drive to deliver detailed scientific information on the physical and biological resources of the Irish Atlantic Margin and its hydrocarbon exploration areas. The acoustic survey programme presented here represents the first consistent study of its kind in offshore Irish waters and formed part of the three-year *Cetacean & Seabirds at Sea* project undertaken by the Coastal & Marine Resources Centre at University College Cork. The research was performed on behalf of the Rockall Studies Group (RSG) and Porcupine Studies Group (PSG) under the Petroleum Infrastructure Programme set up in 1997 by Ireland's Department of the Marine and Natural Resources (Murphy, 2001).

Under the overall *Cetaceans & Seabirds at Sea* project, a number of parallel studies were conducted. These consisted of (i) "Seabirds-at-sea" sighting surveys; (ii) Cetacean sighting surveys, and (iii) Acoustic surveys for cetaceans. These are presented in three volumes under the title "Cetaceans and Seabirds of Ireland's Atlantic Margin". The present volume focuses on the results of the acoustic project, which studied a range of species from dolphins to medium and large toothed whales. This volume contributes to our knowledge of poorly studied species, which are difficult to survey due to their intrinsic evasive behaviour and the inaccessibility of their habitats. In conjunction with Volume II it may provide sufficient data to contribute to a more comprehensive picture of cetacean distribution in the waters of Ireland's Atlantic Margin.

## RATIONALE

Cetaceans are almost always difficult subjects to view at sea. This is particularly the case when sea conditions are sub-optimal, when visibility is poor, and at night. However, many species make loud and distinctive vocalisations and can often be detected more readily using passive acoustic systems rather than by visual means. There are a number of generic advantages to using an acoustic approach in combination with visual methods to detect cetaceans at sea:

1. For some species the acoustic range of vocalisations can be measured and predicted more precisely than the visual range. Underwater acoustics is a sophisticated and well-developed branch of science. If the source level of the vocalisations is known, the propagation conditions can be modelled and noise level measured to enable prediction of the range at which the vocalisations can be detected. It is often possible to calculate range directly using arrays of hydrophones (Greene & McLennan, 1996). In contrast, there is little theoretical understanding of the complex factors that affect a human observer's ability to

detect cetaceans visually. An observer's ability to detect animals can often vary with subtle changes in physical conditions, sometimes in unexpected ways.

2. Acoustic range is less affected by meteorological conditions than is visual range. The range at which cetaceans can be spotted is reduced rapidly with a deterioration in sea conditions. Consequently, visual surveys for cetaceans are rarely continued under sea states exceeding Beaufort force 3 to 4. Although the level of background noise increases with sea state, and this masking noise can reduce the range of detection in acoustic surveys, the effect is measurable and resultant range reductions are predictable. In practice, therefore, acoustic surveys can usually continue in higher sea states than visual surveys.
3. Acoustic range covers 360° around the survey platform. Most visual surveys are conducted in a -90° to +90° sector in front of the vessel. Using the standard methodology combining seabird and cetacean visual observation (*see* Vols. I & II), the range for visual observations classified as "on transect" is confined to 300m (0.16nm) in a 90° arc in front of and to one side of the survey vessel.
4. Many cetacean species can be detected acoustically at a greater range than they can be seen particularly when small research vessels are being used as observation platforms. The range at which cetaceans can be seen or heard varies from species to species and with the sophistication of the acoustic equipment being used. For example, dolphins can be detected at ranges of up to 2km and sperm whales can be reliably heard at ranges of 5-9km using simple hydrophones (Jonathan Gordon, University of St. Andrews, *unpubl.*) while Sparks *et al.* (1993) reported detecting sperm whales at ranges of 18km using a towed linear array. Some of the large baleen whales can be heard with near-surface hydrophones tens of kilometres away (Clark & Fristrup, 1997).
5. Acoustic surveys are less onerous than visual surveys. Searching for whales and dolphins is both physically and mentally demanding, and requires constant vigilance by experienced observers. Furthermore, observers have to be rotated regularly and rested in order to maintain performance levels. Consequently large field teams are required, which incurs a greater logistical and financial burden.
6. Acoustic monitoring can be conducted 24 hours a day without any restriction due to daylight. In contrast, sighting surveys become impossible in poor light conditions and at night. Most cetaceans are thought to continue vocalising both day and night, although allowances may have to be made for diurnal variation in acoustic output.
7. A complete and permanent record can be made of acoustic survey cues. A high quality CD recording provides a remarkably full record of the acoustic information within the band of sensitivity. This is then available for further analysis and can be reanalysed in the future if techniques improve.
8. There is a great potential for automation of data collection and detection. Modern digital processing techniques allow aspects of acoustic analysis, such as distinguishing, classifying, counting and timing vocalisations, to be performed automatically (Potter *et al.*, 1994; Gillespie, 1997; Chappell & Gillespie, 1998). While laboratory or field verification of detections is necessary in order to detect positive and negative error incurred by software-automated triggers, two distinct advantages stem from automating the initial detection process. Firstly, it further reduces the amount of human effort required to conduct a survey. Secondly, and most importantly, it removes sources of human error associated with an individual's ability to accurately detect all vocalising animals in the surrounding environment.

## ACOUSTICS AND CETACEAN POPULATION ECOLOGY

An understanding of cetacean vocal behaviour is relevant to many aspects of cetacean ecology:

### ▪ **Animal abundance and distribution**

Although traditional methods for estimating cetacean abundance rely on visual methods, acoustic information may assist in the development of models to predict the occurrence and number of animals in an area. It may be important to know, for example, the vocal behaviour for deep-diving species in order to determine the relative detectability of such species by visual means. Vocal dialects and signature calls can be used to identify species, populations and even distinct groups of animals within populations (e.g. Deecke *et al.*, 2000; Miller & Bain, 2000).

The use of acoustics allows for a relatively non-invasive method to determine the degree of isolation of a population or its relatedness to other sub-populations. Furthermore, age and sex-related segregation can be studied by vocal means for some species. For example, the mechanism of sound production in sperm whales described by Norris & Harvey (1972) allows for the calculation of the size of the vocalising individuals (Gordon, 1991), which itself is related to their age and sex.

### ▪ **Behavioural ecology**

Since sound is theoretically the most important sense for cetaceans and an animal's activity at a given moment may be related to its vocal behaviour, it may be possible to identify aspects of a species' ecology by its vocalisation patterns. For example, three known behavioural categories of sperm whales (i) feeding, (ii) travelling and (iii) socialising, can be identified by the animals' vocal pattern. Several studies have been carried out which correlate the click rhythms of sperm whales with various activity categories. Thus the vocalisation patterns incorporating distinctive "creaks" by sperm whales have been used to identify areas of enhanced feeding activity (Drouot *et al.*, 2000; Jacquet *et al.*, 2001), allowing the use of cetaceans as potential bio-indicators.

### ▪ **Conservation ecology**

There are many conservation issues to which cetacean acoustics may make a contribution. While the responses of cetaceans to waterborne noise are very variable, for example, it has been shown that some species such as pilot whales and bottlenose dolphins increase their rate of vocalisation during periods of significant anthropogenic disturbance (Rendell & Gordon, 1999; Scarpaci *et al.*, 2000), while, in contrast, sperm whales may become silent (Watkins, 1986). In spite of the complexity of the discipline, acoustics can play a major role in understanding and mitigating against the effects of man-made noise and other impacts from human activity (e.g. to solve conflicts between cetacean and fisheries -- Notarbartolo di Sciara & Gordon, 1997; Culik *et al.*, 2001) by presenting a very useful tool with which to study the animals in their natural environment.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF CETACEAN SOUNDS

Cetaceans rely on sound as their main sense for communication, navigation, prey detection and capture. Other functions such as individual animal recognition (via "signature" whistles) or prey immobilisation have been strongly suggested by some researchers.

Cetaceans have evolved anatomical features in order to produce particular signals (*see* Evans, 1987; Richardson *et al.*, 1995) Perhaps the most relevant of these is the development of a complex system of nasal sacs through which air circulates for sound production. Sounds are produced by the passage of air in the form of small bubbles through tight, myo-elastic structures near the blowhole called the "monkey lips". The sounds produced are divided into

three categories. These are (i) tonal frequency modulated calls; (ii) pulsed modulated sounds, and (iii) broadband frequency clicks. Tonal calls are used primarily for communication and individual recognition purposes. They include a great variety of sounds, such as whistles, squeals, moans, etc. Pulsed modulated sounds are also used for communication. Finally, echolocation clicks act as a powerful echo sounder with high resolution to assist in navigation and in the identification and location of prey underwater.

Not all cetaceans have the same acoustic abilities. Species of sperm whale (Family *Physeteridae*) and porpoises (Family *Phocoenidae*) use clicks for communication purposes, since they do not produce tonal sounds. In contrast, the use of echolocation has not been found in baleen whales (mysticetes), although short sound pulses have been recorded in the presence of some species such as grey whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*) and minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) (Evans, 1987). Further research is required on this subject.

TABLE 1. Frequency range and source level of the vocalisations for the most common odontocete species occurring in the study area.

Species	Sound type	Dominant Frequencies (kHz)	Source level dB re 1µPa at 1m
Sperm whale ( <i>Physeter macrocephalus</i> )	Click	<0.1 - 30 <sup>E, R</sup> 2-4 & 10-16 bands <sup>R</sup>	160-180 <sup>R</sup> 220 <sup>M</sup>
Long-finned Pilot whale ( <i>Globicephala melas</i> )	Whistle Click	1-8 <sup>R</sup> , 2.8-4.7 <sup>E</sup> 1-18 <sup>R</sup>	No data available
Atlantic White-sided dolphin ( <i>Lagenorhynchus acutus</i> )	Whistle Clicks	8.2-12.1 <sup>E</sup>	No data available
White-beaked dolphin ( <i>Lagenorhynchus albirostris</i> )	Squeal	8-12 <sup>E</sup>	No data available
Short-beaked Common dolphin ( <i>Delphinus delphis</i> )	Whistle Chirps, barks	2-18 <sup>R</sup> , 4-16 <sup>E</sup> 0.5-14 <sup>R</sup>	No data available
Bottlenose dolphin ( <i>Tursiops truncatus</i> )	Whistle Click Bark	0.3-24 <sup>R</sup> , 4-20 <sup>E</sup> 0.2 to >300 <sup>E</sup> 0.2-16 <sup>E</sup>	125-173 <sup>R</sup>
Harbour porpoise ( <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> )	Click	41-160 <sup>E</sup>	100 <sup>R</sup>

(<sup>E</sup> reviewed in Evans, 1987; <sup>R</sup> reviewed in Richardson *et al.*, 1995; <sup>M</sup> Møhl *et al.*, 2000)

Typical sounds produced by odontocetes (toothed whales, dolphins and porpoises) are mainly clicks, which are intense broadband pulses, and whistles, which are narrow band-frequency modulated sounds, usually with harmonics. The maximum detection distance of cetacean vocalisations depends on the intensity at which they are emitted by the animals and the frequencies that are used (high frequencies are absorbed at shorter distances than are low ones). The relative position of the listener also influences the maximum distance at which the sounds can be perceived, since clicks are highly directional. Tonal sounds themselves also influence directionality, although to a lesser extent (Kaschner *et al.*, 1997; Notabartolo di Sciarra & Gordon, 1997).

The typical sounds produced by mysticetes are low frequency tonal pulses. There have been some interesting experiments for military purposes on transmission of sound through special channels created by specific temperature and salinity conditions in deep waters (Thurman & Burton, 2000). These SOFAR (Sound Fixing and Ranging) channels can allow communication across whole oceans, whereby sound rays trapped by refraction propagate close to horizontally within these channels. The reductions in spreading loss and limited surface/bottom losses maintain the acoustic pressure. Thus, if cetaceans use them for communication, their vocalisations may be detected over ranges yet unknown. Such long-range low frequency sound transmissions have been recorded over distances greater than 1000km (Bowles *et al.*, 1991). This may theoretically be useful as a communicative tool over large distances for species living solitarily or in small groups, or for animals segregated by age and sex during certain times of the year.

Table 1 describes the diverse modes of vocalisation produced by several odontocete species. Dolphin echolocation clicks extend from the audible range for humans into the ultrasonic region and most species are detectable by standard hydrophones, such as that used in the present study. However, most standard equipment's lower frequency limit for cetacean detection is set by incorporating a low-pass (200 Hz) filter, in order to mask background noise (e.g. engine noise). Unfortunately, this usually prevents the detection of baleen whales since these species typically vocalise on frequencies below 1,000 Hz (1 kHz). Similarly, at high ultrasonic frequencies, such as those produced by harbour porpoises, specialised hydrophones are required. Therefore no one system offers the ability to detect simultaneously all cetacean species in the marine environment.

## MAN-MADE SOUND IN THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

The biological significance of fish sounds has been studied since the 1950s (Winn, 1964), while other marine animals (e.g. invertebrate crustaceans) also create sound. Cetaceans are predominantly aural animals that rely on sound as their main sense. They are more vulnerable when their hearing sensitivity is well developed in the frequency ranges at which man-made sounds are emitted. Broadly speaking, small cetaceans (e.g. dolphins and porpoises) are more sensitive to high frequencies (measured in kHz) and larger species (e.g. baleen whales) to lower frequencies (measured in Hz), consistent with the characteristics of their respective vocal repertoires. Acoustic intensities even below lethal levels can still cause permanent and temporary auditory shifts affecting their communication, navigation, prey detection or predators avoidance and, thus, their overall survival.

Man-made sources of noise (*see* Fig. 1) contribute increasingly to ambient noise in the oceans, adding to natural noise sources (such as waves, thermal noise, etc.). Noise was first officially recognised as a pollutant at the 1971 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. Since then, there has been an increase in international concern, resulting, for example, in the introduction of guidelines on noise pollution in countries such as Great Britain and USA. Resolutions addressing this issue include (i) Articles 192, 194 (2, 3), 206 and 235 of UNCLOS 1982; (ii) UNCED 1992; (iii) the EC Conservation of Natural Habitats Directive (1992) and a number of UK laws including the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Control of Pollution Act 1974, the Water Resources Act 1991 and the Environment Act 1995 (Ward *et al.*, 1998).

## UNDERWATER NOISE AND CETACEANS

The noise associated with marine exploration and resource extraction may represent a source of acoustic degradation for the marine environment. Boat sonar, airguns, drilling operations and shipping traffic all produce sounds that have low and high frequency components (Goold, 1996), which may potentially affect both the low frequency-sensitive baleen whales and high frequency-sensitive toothed cetaceans. The physical nature of sound underwater means that such activities may have significant seasonal influences on the marine environment in which they and cetaceans occur.

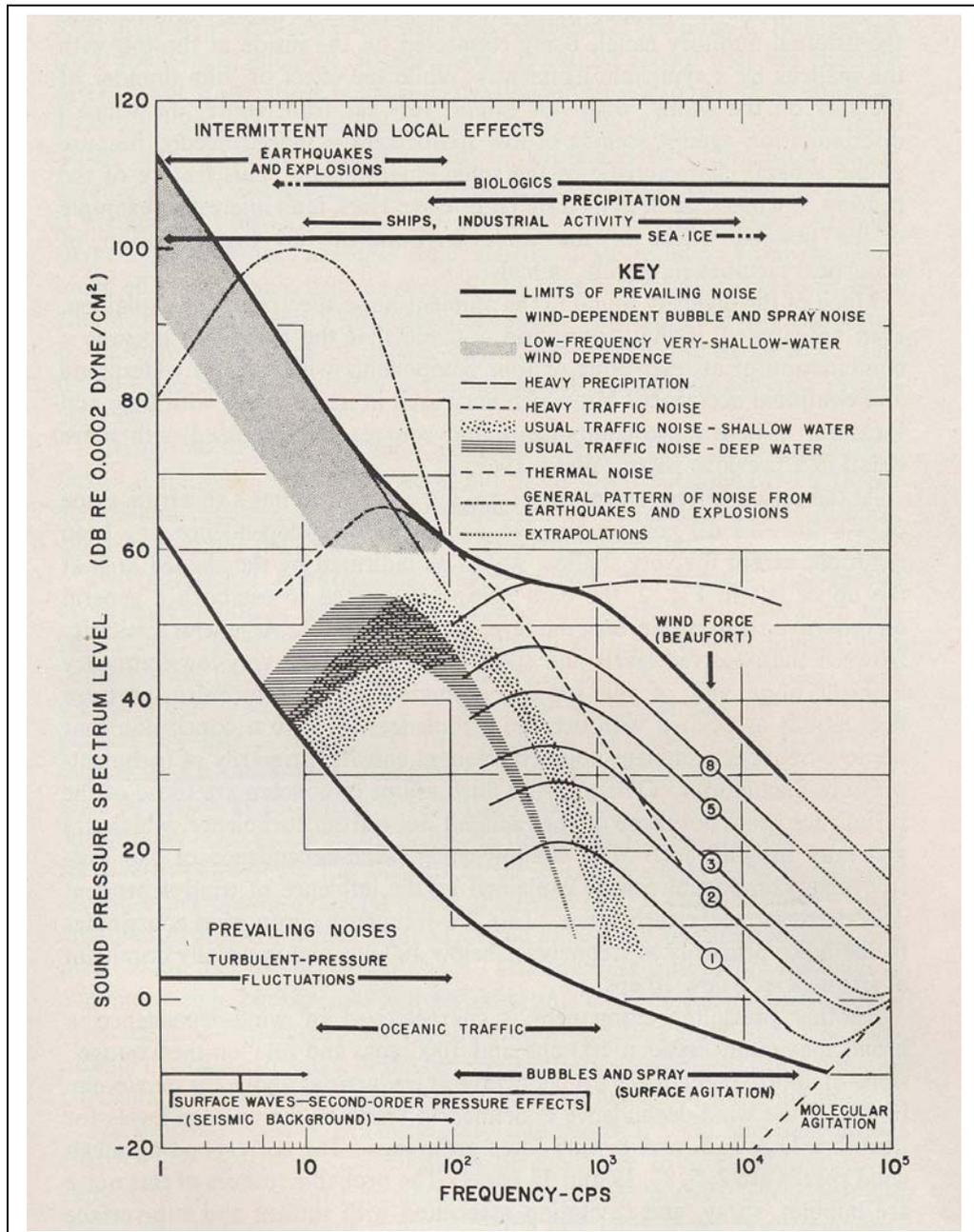


Figure 1. Summary of sound spectra, probable sources and mechanisms of ambient noise in the marine environment. Horizontal arrows show the frequency band of influence of various sources (from Wenz, 1964).

The composition of typical ambient noise in the marine environment during the 1960s is described graphically above (Fig. 1). Anthropogenic noise sources span a wide range of

frequencies (Goold, 1996) and are often emitted at intensities above the widely adopted 180 decibel (dB, re 1  $\mu$ Pa at 1m) criterion for harm to marine mammals. Scientific evidence indicates that lower received source levels can cause both temporary and permanent auditory shifts resulting in damage to marine mammals (Richardson *et al.*, 1995), even causing mass strandings in some cases (e.g. military sonar - Balcomb & Claridge, 2001). Consequently, a source intensity of 120 dB has been suggested, by Whitehead (2001), as the precautionary threshold above which underwater noise may have an impact on marine mammal populations.

Shipping activity, seabed studies and military practices all constitute important sources of noise (or acoustic) pollution. It had been estimated that the intensity of noise in the oceans would increase by 15 dB from shipping activities alone between 1950 and 2000 (Notarbartolo di Sciara & Gordon, 1997). Seismic exploration and the use of airgun arrays have increased in tandem with underwater industrial developments such as those for pipe- or cable-laying, harbour construction and hydrocarbon exploitation. Playback experiments of drilling sounds in the presence of cetaceans have shown avoidance reactions and reduction of calling rates by various baleen whale species (Richardson *et al.*, 1995). While many such studies focus on behavioural changes as a consequence of man-made noise, the potential exclusion of cetaceans from important habitats may be equally important. The direct impact of blasting activities on fish and cetaceans has been documented by Myrberg (1990), Ketten *et al.* (1993) and Richardson *et al.* (1995). The indirect impact of long-term exposure to deleterious levels of sound is also well documented (Todd *et al.*, 1996). In addition, some modern ship designs increase the range of frequencies at which they contribute to the noise in the sea. For example, fast ferries increase the volume of displaced water from the hull, which results in an increased acoustic output in the region of 10-20 kHz (Browning & Hartland, 1997).

Studies on the responses of marine mammals to anthropogenic noise have identified the following factors as influencing the degree of response given by the animals: (a) source intensity levels; (b) degree of background noise; (c) distance to the source; (e) species involved; (f) behavioural state/season; (g) prior degree of exposure to noise; (h) age/sex/time of day (Myrberg, 1990). Sources of acoustic pollution located in shallow, continental shelf waters or offshore banks may have an increased effect on cetaceans at a local level, while those produced in continental slope or oceanic waters will cover a wider spatial range and potentially affect deep-diving species, such as the rare and poorly studied beaked whales.

In view of research in Irish waters (*see* Volume II) and the requirements of legislation (e.g. EC Habitats Directive 1992, Irish Wildlife Act 1976, 2000), the Atlantic Margin area may be considered a sensitive region in which precautionary regulation of human activities is even more appropriate.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The chief research objectives of the acoustic survey programme for cetaceans in Ireland's Atlantic Margin were as follows:

1. To use acoustic methods to study cetacean distribution and abundance in areas where no prior or only scarce information existed.
2. To identify critical areas of cetacean concentration in the context of the information required by the new activities of the oil companies.
3. To enhance knowledge of the acoustic behaviour and the acoustic environment of cetaceans, and how this may be affected by oceanographic parameters, seabed features and anthropogenic activities.
4. To enhance the effectiveness with which cetaceans can be monitored in the Rockall Trough and other offshore areas of interest to oil companies by providing an automated acoustic monitoring system.
5. To provide the research team at University College Cork with acoustic equipment, enhancing the effectiveness of ongoing monitoring work and providing training for the long-term capacity of the team to develop acoustic research on cetaceans.
6. To study the possibility of improving methods to minimise the impact of noise produced by seismic survey ships in the presence of cetaceans.
7. To provide high quality independent scientific information essential for conservation and management purposes.

## STUDY AREA

The primary study area for the project consisted of the offshore waters to the southwest and west of Ireland, commonly termed "Ireland's Atlantic Margin" (Naylor *et al.*, 1999). This area stretches from the Goban Spur through the Rockall Trough and includes the adjoining Rockall Bank and continental shelf areas, including the prominent western "Porcupine Shelf", a bathymetric high which contains the relatively shallow Porcupine Bank. Research effort during the study extended into waters north and east of this region (Fig. 2), considering the potential for large-scale cetacean movement through the region in space and time.

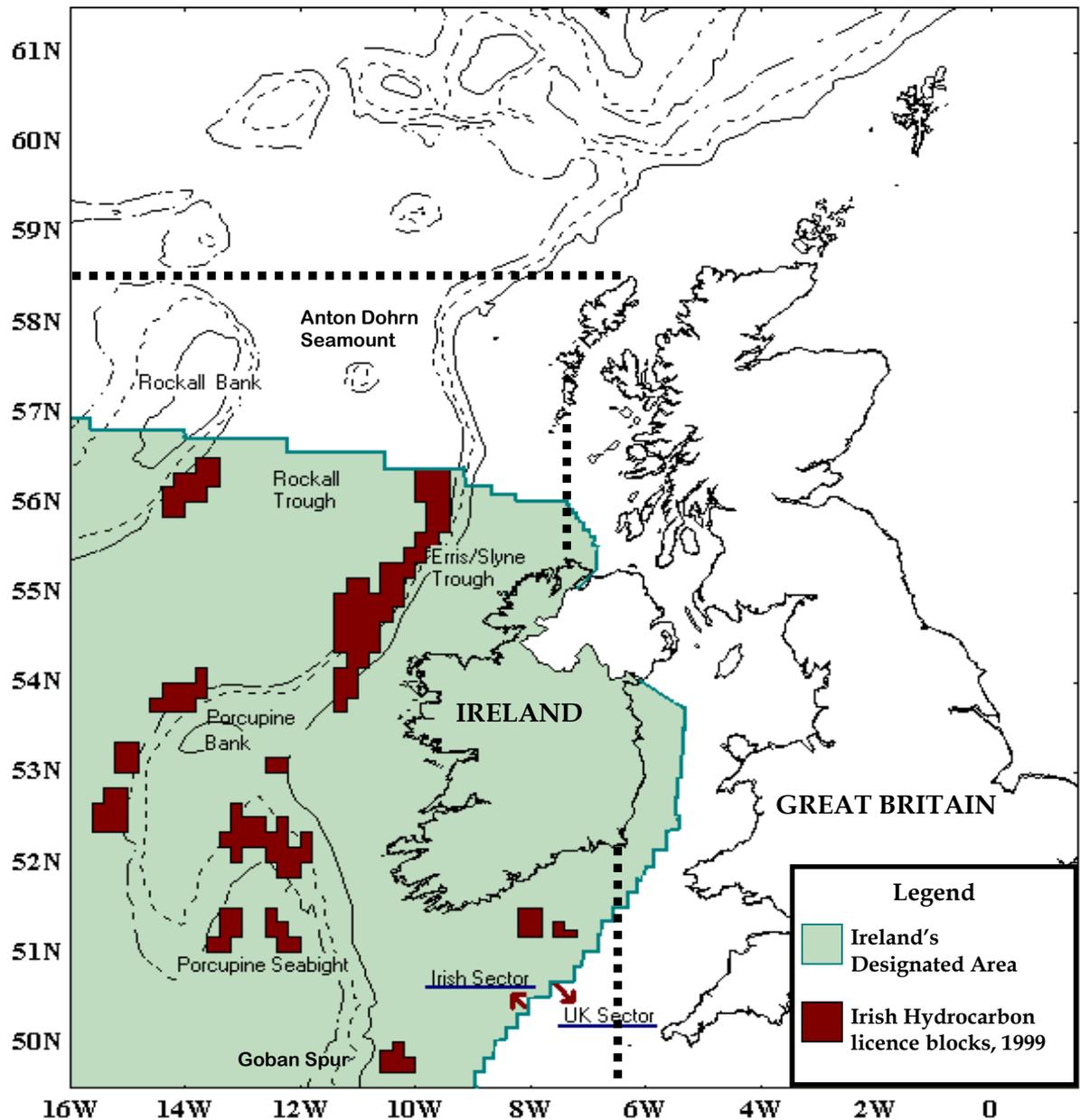


Figure 2. Project study area (to left of dotted line ■■■) showing waters comprising the Republic of Ireland's Offshore Designated Area (shaded) and licence blocks for hydrocarbon exploration held in 1999. [ ——— 200m isobath; - - - - 500m isobath; \_ \_ \_ \_ 1000m isobath.]

# **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

## **EQUIPMENT & SOFTWARE**

The acoustic monitoring method used during the research programme consisted of equipment and techniques developed over a decade in an international context. The system allowed:

- Real-time monitoring of the marine acoustic environment while the survey vessel was underway;
- Automatic recording of acoustic data to the hard disk, to be stored on writable CD media for later analysis;
- Real-time tracking of pulsed sounds from sperm whales and pilot whales, and clicks of echolocating species;
- Automatic real-time detection of odontocete whistles;
- Collection of GPS data into a relational database;
- Collection of cetacean detection information into a single database which can be used to assess cetacean abundance along the vessel's track-line;
- Acoustic data forms for input into a relational database for cetacean sightings. Environmental information such as wind speed and direction, hydrophone depth, water temperature, etc. could also be entered.

A description of the acoustic equipment (Fig. 3) begins with the 300m-long towed hydrophone array that is deployed from the stern of the vessel. The hydrophone tube is linked directly to an on-board PC with an in-built CD-writer for storing acoustic data generated during the survey:

### **1. HYDROPHONE ARRAY**

The array consists of 2 Benthos AQ-4 hydrophones with a bandwidth connected to preamplifiers with 30x gain and 200Hz low frequency roll-off filters. The equipment has an approximate flat response between 200 Hz and 22 kHz and is omni-directional in the perpendicular plane. The hydrophones are mounted 3m apart in a 10m-long oil-filled polyurethane tube with an in-built depth sensor. The array is neutrally buoyant. Previous experiments (e.g. Barlow & Taylor, 1998) showed that a 3m distance between the elements is optimal since it allows good angular resolution without ambiguity between signals from different animals.

### **2. CABLE**

The 300m long cable has an external water insulation of polyurethane surrounding a kevlar strain member. The cable contains the wires that conduct power to the preamplifiers and signals from both the hydrophone and the depth sensor. The array and cable system is made negatively buoyant by the weight of the cable in order to tow it under the surface at a depth of between 7-15m. Other designs including armoured cable would have provided more protection from damage as a result of entanglement or excess tension when pulling, but they would also have been more expensive, difficult to transport and less flexible for deployment and recovery for the range of vessels used during the study period.

### **3. AMPLIFIER BOX**

During the first research deployment on the *SIAR* survey (*see* below) the research team used an amplifier box with filters up to 5.6 kHz and an external transformer but this proved sensitive to electrical noise. Since then the device includes a stereo monitor unit with an in-built transformer

designed specially for this project. It has a set of analogue high pass low frequency filters up to 440 Hz. The power input of +/- 12 Volts (V) is provided by a set of two 12V marine gel batteries.

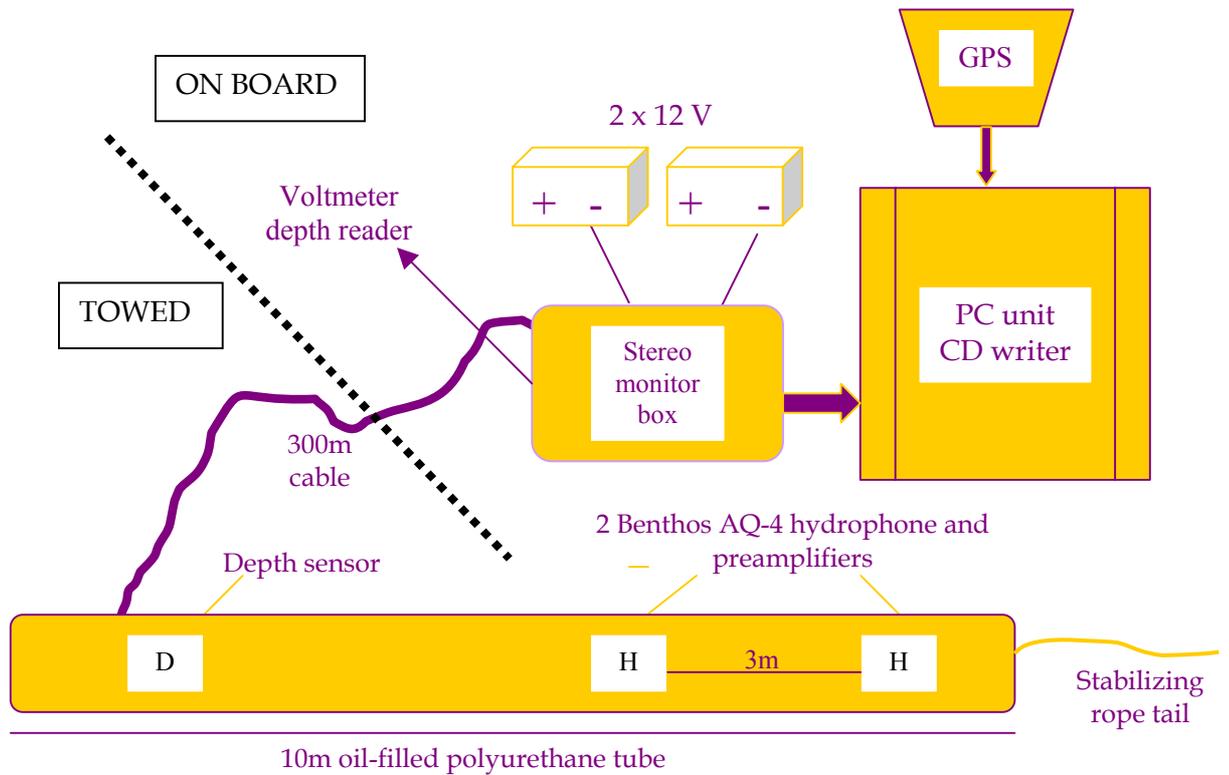


Figure 3. Schematic diagram of the equipment used on all acoustic surveys for cetaceans.

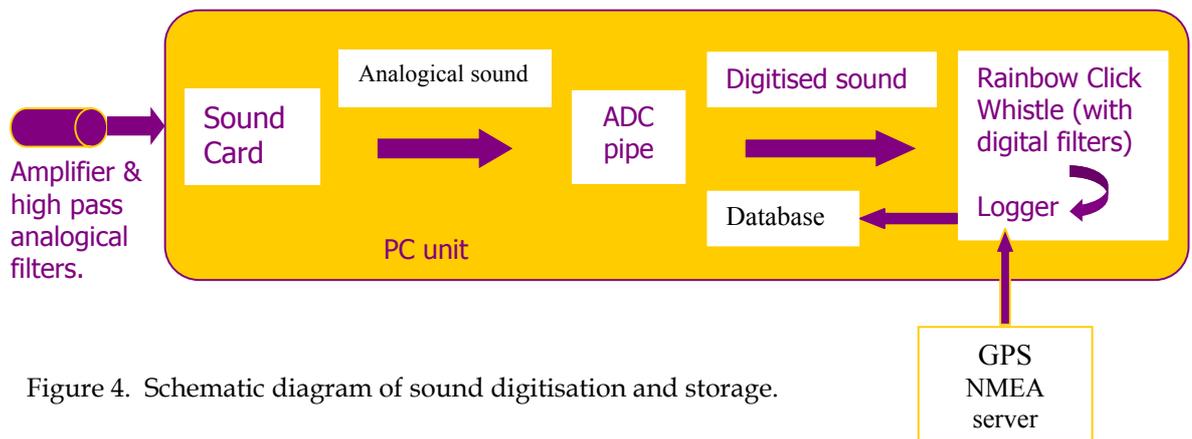


Figure 4. Schematic diagram of sound digitisation and storage.

#### 4. DEPTH SENSOR

An inbuilt depth sensor is read by a voltmeter that was calibrated *in situ* and whose reading is translated to depth in meters by the following formula:

$$\text{Hydrophone Depth} = \left[ \frac{\text{Voltage} - 4}{0.221} \right] \times \left[ \frac{100}{16} - 10 \right]$$

## 5. SOFTWARE

Dedicated software, previously developed by Douglas Gillespie and Oliver Chappell under funding from the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and Shell UK, was provided to the research team. The data acquisition software runs in real time and is composed of the following elements (Fig. 4):

- ***ADC pipe***

The transducers analogue signal from the hydrophone tube passes via an amplifier box with a high pass analogue filter and is digitised by a standard PC sound card (*Sound Blaster Live Platinum*). The *ADC pipe* program makes this single data stream available to several other programs running concurrently (*Rainbow Click*, *Whistle* and *Logger*).

- ***Rainbow Click***

*Rainbow Click* detects transient sound (such as cetacean clicks) and calculates the bearing at which they arrive at the hydrophone pair by comparing the time delay for each detected transient signal between channels. Adjustable digital filters are used to reduce noise and triggered transient signals go through a two-stage detection and characterisation process. At the first stage, transient signals of an appropriate duration which exceed a threshold (which is adjusted dynamically to be  $n$  standard deviations above the mean noise level), are marked. In the second phase the transient signal's spectral characteristics are examined before being accepted as putative cetacean clicks. The program attempts to identify clicks likely to have come from the same individual on the basis of their relative bearing and spectral characteristics. These "individual" clicks are coloured and displayed as appropriate.

- ***Whistle***

The *Whistle* program detects tonal sounds such as dolphin whistles or the lower frequency moans of baleen whales and incorporates a variety of noise reduction algorithms. Once noise has been reduced, time slices are calculated for each data block. These can be depicted in a standard spectrogram format. Within each time slice the program searches for the peak frequencies of detected signals. The program identifies those with most energy and searches for peaks at similar frequencies in adjoining slices in order to join them. If a sufficient number of such peaks are found, indicating a tonal sound exceeding a certain length, then a "likely whistle" is triggered. The contours of the whistle are depicted on a second display window and data summarising the whistle signal are stored in a *Logger* database.

- ***Logger***

This program acts as a central user interface and integration program. It receives data from a number of sources and stores this in an integrated relational database. Navigational data are received automatically via an *NMEA* interface from instruments such as the vessel's Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and other navigation and weather instruments. *Logger* receives data from the operator via pre-prepared forms and may prompt for such data at regular intervals. Checks on the integrity and accuracy of data entered in this way are run. *Logger* also receives data from the acoustic detection programs described above. Finally, the program incorporates a sound-recording module, which can make acoustic recording to the hard disk as required, or automatically on a pre-determined schedule. Data are stored in an access database. A plotting module plots data such as the vessel's track, locations of sightings and acoustic detections on a topographical map of the area.

All data obtained via these software programs are categorised into files (\*.\*) as follows:

- ***\*.wav***

Sound files recorded directly onto computer from the hydrophone/preamplifier output. These could be fixed length files recorded automatically at set intervals or variable recordings of

specific sounds of interest to the researcher. These are full data files that can be monitored aurally and analysed with any professional acoustic software.

**\*.clk**

Files containing the waveforms and summary data for all transient sound detected by a program *Rainbow Click*, which was developed by IFAW. These might commonly be sperm whales clicks and those of killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) and pilot whales (*Globicephala* spp.), in addition to the echolocation clicks other species. These files are recorded continuously, thus allowing the relative movement of vocalising animals to be tracked and revealing variation in the pattern of vocalisations.

**\*.wsl**

These files summarise data for detected tonal vocalisations (i.e. whistles).

**\*.mdb**

Microsoft™ Access® files, whose data fields can be designed by the researcher. All such files contained an index to link with a positional database from the vessel's Global Positioning System (GPS).

## ACOUSTIC SURVEY PROTOCOL.

With the exception of the *SIAR* survey on board the M.V. *Emerald Dawn* (see also Vol. II), acoustic surveys were conducted primarily on vessels of opportunity (e.g. research vessels, fishery protection vessels), which are able to provide a spare berth for a scientific observer. The use of vessels of opportunity as research platforms limits the opportunity for determining the design of the survey lines but enhances the total area of coverage at low cost.

Sea surface temperature data were also recorded during some surveys. They were also collected along the transect route of the *SIAR* survey. In addition, the Geological Survey of Ireland allowed the use of temperature data collected at several stations during the S.V. *Bligh* surveys in 2000 and 2001, and S.V. *Siren* survey in 2001. The acoustic dataset was analysed using a point sample approach, with the equipment automatically recording 20-second samples every two minutes. At an average ship speed of 8.5 knots, the equipment therefore sampled every 510 m, as the vessel moved along transect lines through the study area.

Recordings were made both during the visual watch of the researchers and also when off visual effort. For example, on the *SIAR* survey, recordings were made when drifting at night or on transit to transect lines. On the other surveys, recordings were made when travelling at night or during periods where the vessel was resting in one location. Whenever possible, the hydrophone array was towed and collected data over a 24-hour period.

With the exception of the *SIAR* survey, only one CMRC researcher was normally on board a particular vessel to collect both visual and acoustic data on all acoustic surveys. Since visual observations were recorded only during daylight, the acoustic equipment was set to automatic sampling during the day, with the researcher performing periodic checks to guarantee the correct performance of the equipment. Ideal conditions would allow two researchers on board to keep both visual and acoustic watches simultaneously.

## ANALYSIS OF CETACEAN VOCALISATIONS

Tonal sounds were detected automatically by *Logger* and their physical properties stored on a database linked with position and time data.

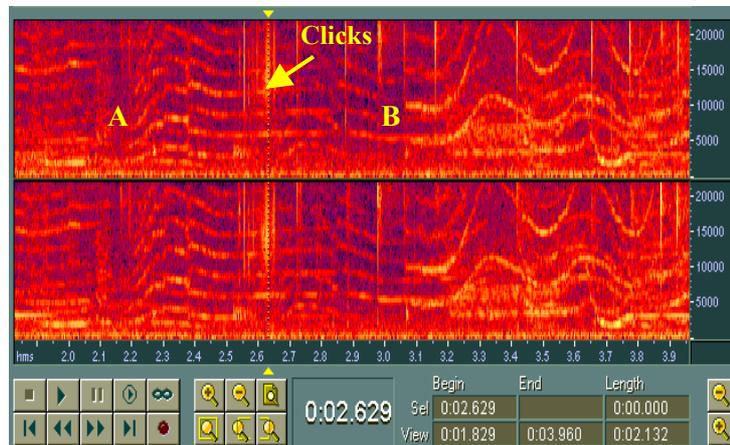


Figure 5. Sample sonogram of dolphin vocalisations

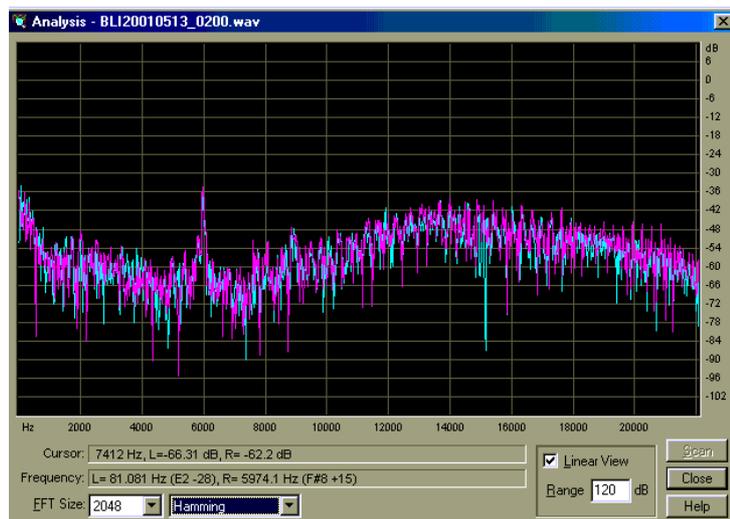


Figure 6. Power spectrum of echolocation clicks above.

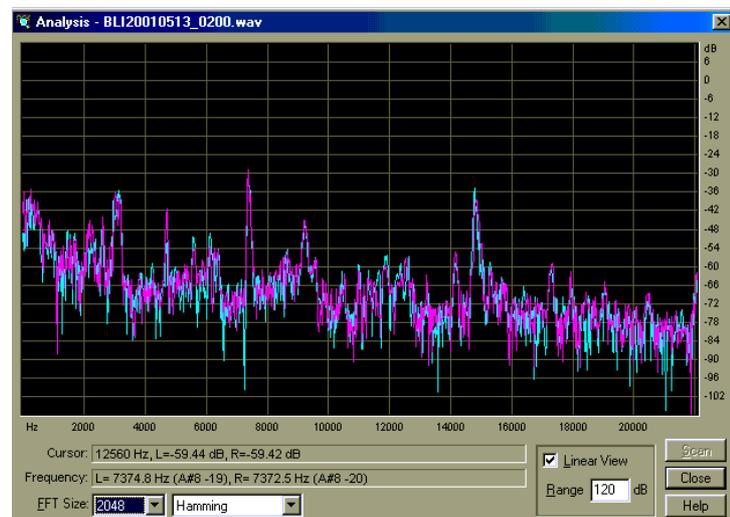


Figure 7. Power spectrum of a cetacean whistle.

The acoustic characteristics recorded were (i) maximum and average amplitude; (ii) start, end, maximum, minimum and average frequencies; (iii) the number of peaks and troughs and their maximum and minimum frequencies; (iv) bearing, duration and estimated range to the vocalising animals.

Pulsed sounds of sperm whales, pilot whales and dolphins were also recorded and summarised in "click events" with the following characteristics (i) mean amplitude; (ii) mean, first and last inter-click interval; (iii) mean, first and last bearing; (iv) the number of clicks and their duration. In addition to all files recorded over the predetermined sampling interval (i.e. 20 seconds every two minutes), continuous click (i.e. \*.clk) files were recorded. These enabled the recreation of detected signals from their physical properties and allowed for the continuous tracking of clicking animals.

Tonal and pulsed sounds were recorded and preliminary analysis carried out using the acoustic software packages *Whistle* and *Rainbow Click* and the commercial software program *Cool Edit*® (Syntrillium Corporation™). High-resolution colour spectrograms were calculated using a Hamming smoothing window and 2048 point FFT (fast Fourier transform) analysis. Pulsed sounds were analysed to determine their power spectrum, inter-click intervals, inter-pulse intervals, etc.

Figure 5 above is a sonogram presenting a series of dolphin echolocation clicks (as vertical lines) and whistles (as waveforms) in graphic form. The upper yellow arrow shows the point at which the power spectrum of the clicks has been analysed (Fig. 6), showing a peak frequency of approximately 6 kHz. Two distinct whistles (A and B) are shown (Fig. 5) having seven and two harmonics respectively. The first (A) has one peak and two troughs. The second (B) has two peaks and three troughs. Figure 7 shows the power spectrum of whistle B with 2 harmonics measured at the middle trough. It shows signal amplitudes at 7,374 Hz and 14,750 Hz with the maximum energy output concentrated in the lower harmonic. It is also possible to distinguish a third, smaller peak situated at 3.5 kHz. This corresponds to the detection of a "pinger" device being used on the vessel by the Geological Survey of Ireland during the National Seabed Survey.

#### ▪ *Species identification*

The mode in which acoustic surveys were conducted aboard vessels of opportunity introduced uncertainty in species identification, since vocalising animals were often recorded for short periods or at low intensities, and it was not possible to approach them to identify the species and estimate accurately the number of individuals. However, multi-parametric statistical analysis of whistle frequency parameters can allow for the identification of vocalisations to species level (Rendell *et al.*, 1999). While this analysis was beyond the scope of the present report, it may be carried out subsequently.

For the purposes of this report, the authors set three cetacean identification categories as follows: (i) sperm whale; (ii) pilot whale; and (iii) dolphin (Family *Delphinidae*). The latter category included both identified dolphin vocalisations and un-identified whistles resembling those produced by dolphin species. Only when the characteristic vocalisations of, for example, Short-beaked common dolphins (*a.k.a.* Common dolphins) or Atlantic white-sided dolphins (*a.k.a.* White-sided dolphins) were detected, or when the animals were also detected visually, was the third category divided up to species level.

▪ ***Proportion of time vocally active***

All acoustic detections were allocated into separate cetacean encounters. It was possible to calculate the proportion of the total recorded time in the encounter that the animals were vocally active. In the case of sperm whales, whose clicks can be separated for each individual, the calculation was done up to the level of individual whales. This was not possible for grouped animals such as dolphin species and a mathematical model has yet to be developed to correct for group size.

▪ ***Determination of sperm whale body-length***

The specialised sound production mechanism of sperm whales, described in detail by Norris & Harvey (1972), allows for age determinations from individual vocalisations (Gordon, 1991). In this species, the animal's sound producing tissues (monkey lips) are situated at the front end of the head. The initial click pulse is emitted directly into the water. A series of secondary echoes from successive reflections of the click on the frontal sac (situated close to the skull) also occur. These sounds are detectable acoustically as measurable, regularly spaced pulses and the inter-pulse interval (IPI) may be directly related to the length of the head and thus to the total length of the whale, according to a formula developed by Gordon (1991):

$$TL \text{ (Total Length)} = 4.883 + 1.453 \text{ IPI} - 0.001 \text{ IPI}^2$$

While the analysis of sperm whale vocalisations to determine the age profile of animals in Irish waters was beyond the scope of the present report, it could be carried out subsequently and would be worthwhile.

## SPATIAL AND NUMERICAL ANALYSIS

### 1. SPATIAL ANALYSIS

The data were analysed spatially using the Geographic Information System *ArcView*® 3.2 software with depth data taken from the GEBCO 1997 digital atlas (Natural Environment Research Council, UK).

The *Logger* databases provided a list of acoustic samples linked to GPS positional data. The samples were listened to and the relative distance of cetaceans in every acoustic detection was allocated a scale/index of intensity from 0 (silence) to 5 (in very close proximity to the hydrophone array). This index was allocated by aural methods yet it was possible to use detections determined by the *Whistle* program, which colour codes to different intensities, as a means of ground-truthing the scale. The commercial acoustic software packages *Cool Edit*® and *Sound Forge*® (Sonic Foundry™) were also used in the analysis.

Noise levels and presence/absence of other acoustic events such as seismic survey activity, "pinger" and multi-beam sonar emissions, were also assigned to each recording with an aural scale from 0 to 5. To assess noise levels, power spectrum analysis was performed on random examples of recordings representing all noise levels using *Cool Edit*®. The seismic samples recorded were listened to and aurally assigned a level of intensity of their pulsed sounds from 0 (silence) to 5.

The presence of other sound associated with submarines, simultaneous seismic surveys, drilling platforms, and general background noise, were also scored on a scale from 0 to 5. The dataset was plotted using *ArcView*® 3.2 software. Distances from the points where seismic pulses were detected to the seismic source were measured on the maps. The relevant oil companies and governmental agencies provided details of the dates, location and intensity of the seismic sources working at the time in the survey area.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF ABUNDANCE

Many of the techniques used to estimate cetacean abundance from sighting surveys are potentially applicable to acoustic survey data. As a result of their characteristic vocalisations, sperm whales seem to be particularly suitable candidates for such approaches. The coverage and number of acoustic encounters obtained in some surveys allows for the calculation of density and abundance of some species or clusters of species. However, this is a complex process that begins with an analysis of the physical components of the acoustic data. As a result, the analysis is ongoing and it is hoped that the results may be available at a later stage. During the present study a number of surveys also presented the opportunity for the collection of data on water temperature, salinity and sound velocity at various depths. These data were obtained by the Geological Survey of Ireland on surveys aboard the S.V. *Bligh* and S.V. *Siren* and they may add important information in future analysis of cetacean acoustics.

In order to apply the appropriate statistical methods for estimating animal abundance and population density, firstly the **number of animals** in every encounter and the **effective area** of survey coverage (Buckland *et al.*, 1993) must be obtained. For vocalising animals, the latter is related to the range at which animals may be detected by acoustic means.

- ***The number of individuals***

Acoustic survey methods may be more capable than visual ones of recording all the animals in a group as the animals can be detected over a greater range and also when diving. Line-transect methods typically used in visual surveys tend to underestimate group size unless the sighted animals are approached for better identification of group size, or unless time is given to be certain that all animals have surfaced and are seen.

In the present study, estimates of sperm whale group size were made aurally, aided by software analysis. Due to the nature of sperm whale sounds and a great deal of research thereon, it is possible to distinguish between the clicks of different sperm whales according to (i) the intensity and (ii) type of clicking, together with (iii) observed differences in the calculated bearings to clicking animals and (iv) the inter-pulse interval (IPI) of pulsed calls.

Other species present greater difficulties since their numbers have to be accounted for on the basis of aural perception. For example, the use of calculated bearings is not a reliable method for fast swimming cetaceans, such as many dolphin species. Further difficulties arise with species where research has not yet revealed the proportion of time spent vocalising, relative to an animal's sex, age, behaviour and time of year.

- ***Maximum audible range***

The range at which cetacean vocalisations can be detected depends on factors related to (i) the animals themselves, such as the *source level* (i.e. the intensity at which the sound is transmitted), the direction of emissions and the range of frequencies used. Other extrinsic factors are also involved. These are related to (ii) sound pathways and include physical attributes of the aquatic medium, such as water temperature, salinity, depth and the level of background noise, including that produced by the research vessel itself. The range of detectability also depends on (iii) the sensitivity of the acoustic equipment to signals on various frequencies.

The source level varies for different species of cetaceans, thereby affecting the detectability of the animals. This occurs even within the same species where source level can be adapted by the animal to various environmental conditions (Rasmussen *et al.*, 1999). Sperm whale source levels are reported to be in the range 160-180 dB (re 1  $\mu$ Pa) (Richardson *et al.*, 1995), although Møhl *et al.* (2000) recorded source levels up to 210 dB using hydrophones situated at 1,000m depth, in close proximity to vocalising whales. Source levels produced by dolphins typically range from 108-173 dB (Richardson *et al.*, 1995). Janik (2000) measured intensities up to 169 dB for wild bottlenose dolphins in the Moray Firth, estimating that their whistles could be heard over 5km

in a homogeneous environment. Larger toothed whales such as killer whales and pilot whales are thought to emit sound at intensities between 160 dB and 180 dB (Richardson *et al.*, 1995). However, echolocation clicks may contain higher sound pressure levels than those produced in whistles. For example, white-beaked dolphins have been recorded producing clicks at source intensities of 219 dB (Rasmussen *et al.*, 1999)

In a normal acoustic survey, vessel noise is the main factor limiting detection range (Leaper & Scheidat, 1998). One problem arises where survey coverage is not homogeneous along the transect lines due to the variation in noise levels. If background noise operates at a high source level it can mask cetacean signals. The received signal intensity is reduced by transmission loss as a function of distance to the animal. Thus the range at which a signal can be detected is limited not only by the distance of the animal from the vessel but also by the distance at which its intensity can surpass the background noise within a critical frequency band.

## RESULTS

### ACOUSTIC SURVEY EFFORT

Since the acquisition of the acoustic equipment in July 2000, five combined acoustic and visual surveys were carried out in offshore waters along Ireland's Atlantic Margin and one in the Irish Sea. The five Atlantic Margin surveys were conducted in an area stretching from southeastern margin of Rockall Bank to the Goban Spur and westwards beyond the western limit of the Rockall Trough (Fig. 8). In general, acoustic surveys covered the transect lines where the researcher was also on visual effort for seabirds and cetaceans (*see* Vols. I & II). This allowed the integration of both acoustic and visual survey datasets in most cases.

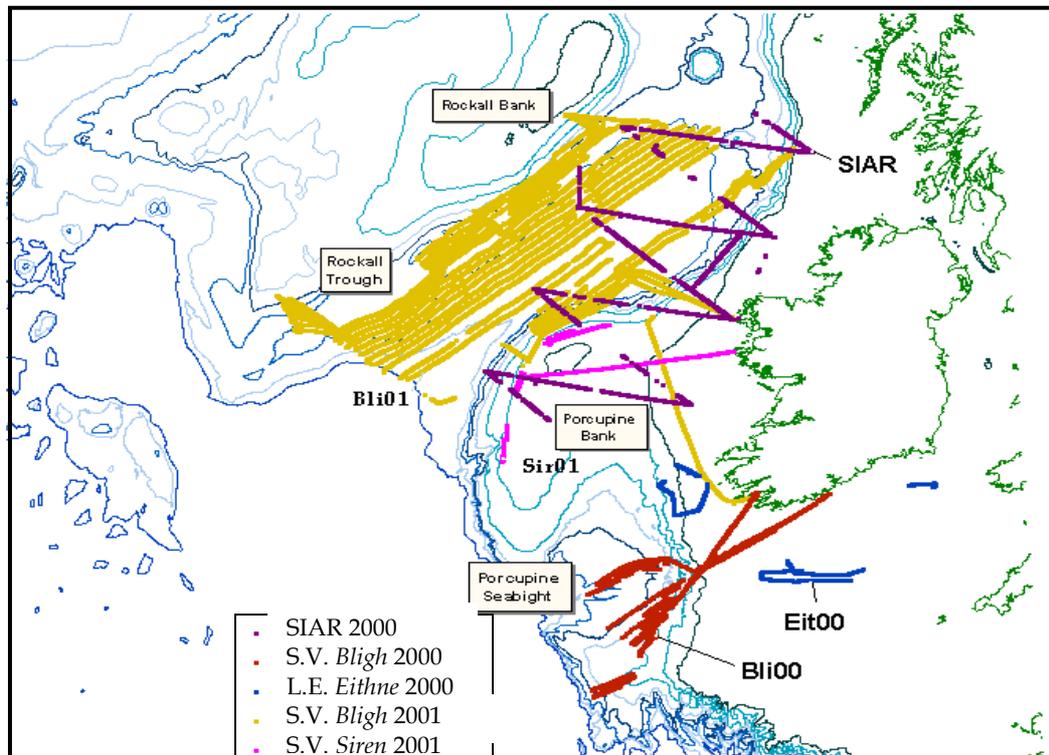


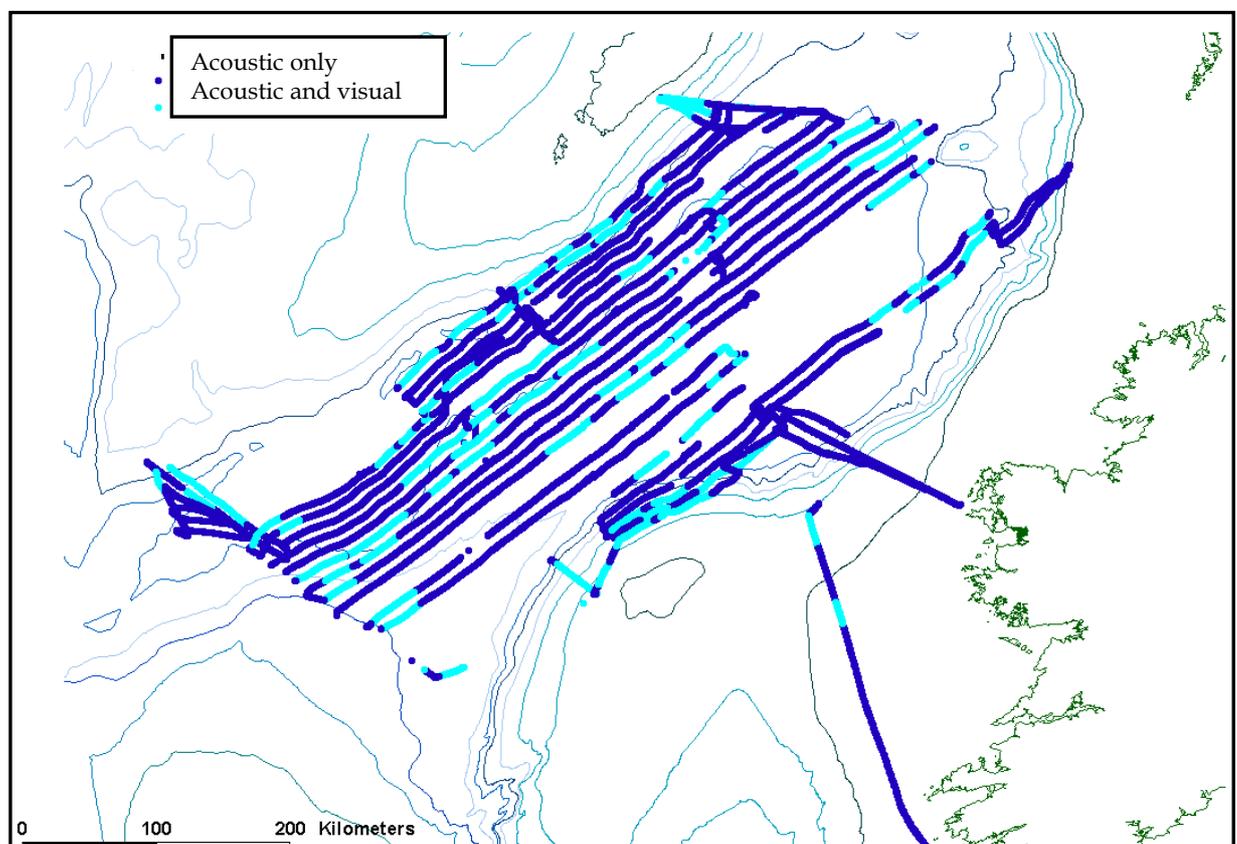
Figure 8. Plotted tracklines of acoustic surveys for cetaceans carried out by the *Cetaceans & Seabirds at Sea* team along Ireland's Atlantic Margin between July 2000 and July 2001.

Effective acoustic monitoring was achieved on ninety days at sea. The first acoustic trials, conducted prior to and during the *SIAR* survey in 2000, allowed for a short "troubleshooting" period and the solving of minor technical and deployment problems. In this and subsequent surveys, the principal cause of variation in survey effort between research trips was unsuitable weather conditions, which made deployment and recovery of the hydrophone equipment hazardous or risked the entanglement of cable around the vessel's propellers. Survey effort was also curtailed on occasion when the survey vessel was operating at speeds in excess of 16 knots. Successful deployment of the gear resulted in a total of 1,190 hours of acoustic surveying and an acoustic record spanning 238.42 hours (Table 2).

TABLE 2. Summary of effective days, hours surveyed and recorded in the study period.

Survey	Survey dates	Survey track-length (km)	Survey time (hours)	Recording time (hrs)
SIAR survey	30/07/00 to 22/08/00	2,764.70	337.40	78.18
L.E. <i>Eithne</i> '00	18/09/00 to 22/09/00	249.80	27.40	5.44
S.V. <i>Bligh</i> '00	14/10/00 to 25/11/00	1,232.80	76.10	26.27
S.V. <i>Bligh</i> '01	29/04/01 to 08/06/01	9,720.18	694.30	118.84
S.V. <i>Siren</i> '01	30/06/01 to 06/07/01	511.50	54.90	9.69
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>14,478.98</b>	<b>1,190.10</b>	<b>238.42</b>

Up to four times more time can be spent monitoring for cetaceans during an acoustic survey than during a visual survey. An example of this is shown in Figure 9, where significantly greater coverage was achieved aboard the S.V. *Bligh* by acoustic means than by combined acoustic and visual means (only 22% of the total acoustic trackline was also covered using visual methods). This is due to the ability of the acoustic equipment to record automatically, for example, through a wider range of weather conditions than can be utilized for visual surveying. It also allows the recording of acoustic data in poor light conditions or while the observer is resting at night.

Figure 9. Survey coverage by single and combined methods on the S.V. *Bligh* survey, 2001.

## EQUIPMENT PERFORMANCE

The acoustic signature of each vessel, together with other parameters such as the average vessel speed and water depth, led to differences in the performance of the acoustic monitoring system. Such differences were based on the high intra-survey and inter-survey variability in noise levels. Thus the received levels required to detect cetacean vocalisations varied somewhat, affecting the range at which the animals were detected and, consequently, the effective acoustic coverage.

On a number of surveys, the effect of background noise from broadband low frequency sources (e.g. engine noise) was less significant than targeted man-made signals on specific high frequencies (e.g. sonar). The latter narrow-band interference occurred on surveys aboard the S.V. *Bligh* and S.V. *Siren*. These vessels were engaged in mapping the Irish seabed territory under the Geological Survey of Ireland's National Seabed Survey programme. This survey required the use of two acoustic devices:

- **Pinger**

This acoustic device is used to analyse the seabed composition up to approximately 30 m below the substrate surface. It emits pulses on a peak frequency of 3.5 kHz (Fig. 10) with variable inter-pulse intervals depending on the water depth. The characteristics of the pinger echoes received from the seafloor vary according to the seabed composition.

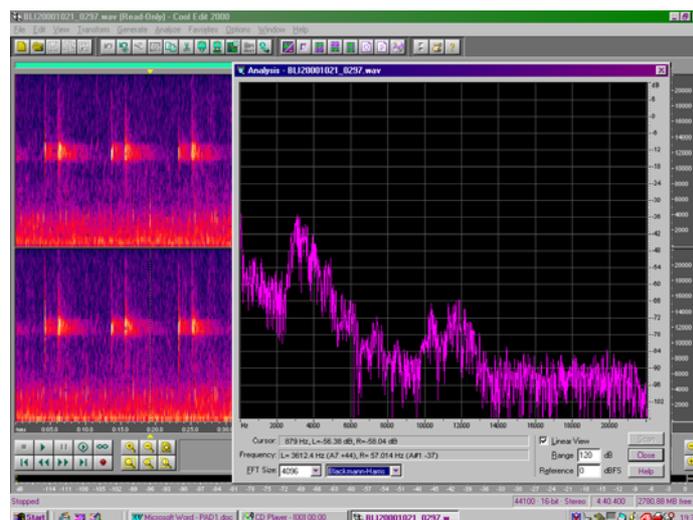


Figure 10. Sample spectrogram & power spectrum of pinger emissions

- **Multibeam**

This sonar device is used to map the water depth and derive accurate contours for the seabed. It emits pulses at various frequencies. A peak frequency of 12 kHz was used in deep waters aboard the on the S.V. *Bligh* (Fig. 11), while a peak frequency of 95 kHz was used in shallower waters (<300m depth) aboard the S.V. *Siren*.

Since the operational frequency of the pinger overlaps directly with that of sperm whale clicks and the multibeam frequency overlaps with the whistles of several cetacean species, the devices triggered the detection of the cetacean acoustic monitoring software. As a result, numerous false-positive detections were made and entered on the relevant databases. However this was anticipated and aural analysis of the samples by the researcher allowed the highly distinctive sounds of the pinger and multibeam devices to be distinguished from detections of the cetacean vocalisations.

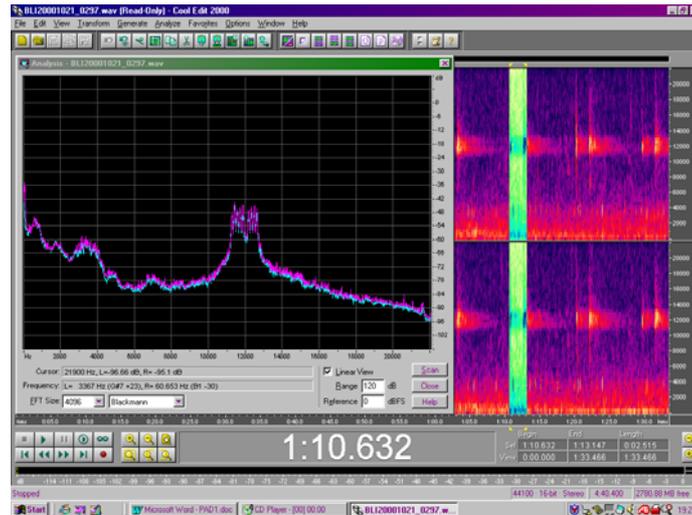


Figure 11. Sample spectrogram and power spectrum of the multi-beam sonar used on the S.V. *Bligh*.

## INDIVIDUAL SURVEY RESULTS

A summary of the results of acoustic monitoring across all surveys in the Irish Atlantic Margin region is shown below:

TABLE 3. Summary of the total number of cetacean encounters recorded by the *Cetaceans & Seabirds at Sea* team during acoustic surveys in Ireland's Atlantic Margin.

Survey	Sperm whale Encounters	Pilot whale Encounters	Dolphin Encounters	Beaked whale Encounters	TOTAL
SIAR survey	18	3	187	2	210
L.E. <i>Eithne</i>	0	0	8	0	8
S.V. <i>Bligh</i> '00	2	3	46	0	51
S.V. <i>Bligh</i> '01	89	114	175	0	378
S.V. <i>Siren</i>	1	4	19	0	24
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>671</b>

### 1. SIAR SURVEY (30 July to 22 August, 2000)

Within the scope of the research programme carried out by the *Cetaceans & Seabirds at Sea* team, funding was allocated for a dedicated three-week cetacean and seabird survey aboard a chartered vessel (see Vol. II). The rationale behind the proposed survey was to allow the investigation of a key region within the broader study area, while also filling gaps in survey coverage caused by the usual reliance on vessels of opportunity in the overall project. In addition to its spatial objectives, the planned *Survey In Western Irish Waters And The Rockall Trough* (SIAR) aimed to greatly enhance the data gathered under the overall research programme. This would be achieved by systematically surveying the target region using more

powerful visual and acoustic survey methods in tandem with the standard single-observer approach. The combination of both visual and acoustic survey methods provided an optimal set of data for cross calibration of the visual and acoustic detections to assess more accurately the range of detection, received sound levels at various distances, etc.

The vessel chartered for the *SIAR* survey was the 35m M.V. *Emerald Dawn*, a deep-water trawler based in Dingle, County Kerry. Analysis of the sound produced by the vessel itself determined that the vessel was relatively noisy, especially as it detuned its variable pitch propeller to adjust boat speed. This made acoustic surveys difficult in areas of steep bottom relief or in shallow waters, where reflection of sound from the seafloor was increased.

The survey area allocated for the *SIAR* survey was a block of approximately 120,000km<sup>2</sup>, running in a southwest to northeast direction and stretching up to 360km offshore from the Porcupine Bank towards the Outer Hebrides (Fig. 12). The target area was transected by a series of seven full transect legs approximately 143 nautical miles in length, and by two shorter legs at the northern and southern margins measuring approximately 55 and 60 nautical miles respectively. The survey extended from latitude 56° N to 52° N. The northern half of the survey (from 54° N) covered deep waters of the Rockall Trough and continental slope. In contrast, the southern half concentrated in waters less than 500 metres deep.

The hydrophone was deployed successfully during most of the visual transect lines and also when off visual effort. A total length of 1,878.3km visual survey effort was also covered acoustically. An additional 781.8km were surveyed solely using acoustic methods with a further 104.6km covered by transit-type surveys.

The *SIAR* survey was the first occasion on which the newly made acoustic equipment was used. Thus it acted as an experimental survey and enabled the authors to identify any software or technical problems. Issues with electrical noise, high on the survey due to a faulty provisional connection from the amplifier box to the PC, were subsequently resolved. Such initial problems with the hydrophone equipment reduced the system's sensitivity, occasionally affecting the detection range of the equipment. This would theoretically lead to variations in the effective survey coverage and, as a result, the effort data require further in-depth analysis if abundance estimates for particular species are to be derived by acoustic means.

All acoustic detections made during the *SIAR* survey, some of which were hours long, were grouped into 210 separate acoustic encounters (Table 3). This categorisation of the data was based on a minimum time interval of ten minutes between encounters of dolphins. At an average vessel speed of 8.5 knots this corresponds to 2.96km of transect line which approximates the audible range of dolphin vocalisations. This method followed a recent abundance estimation method used for dolphins in the Ligurian Sea (Gordon *et al.*, 2000). While drifting at night the "silent-time" period to separate encounters was increased to 30 minutes. To separate sperm whale encounters, a silent-time interval of one hour was considered appropriate, corresponding to nearly 16km travelled.

There were 21 distinct detections of sperm whale groups: (i) nine in waters >2,500m deep (Rockall Trough), (ii) one in waters <500m deep, south of the Porcupine Shelf, and (iii) eleven in waters overlying the continental slope (Fig. 12). These corresponded to 18 separate sperm whale encounters. Just three of these encounters were detected visually, all occurring in the northern (Rockall Trough) part of the survey area.

There were three distinct acoustic encounters of long-finned pilot whales (Fig. 12), two of them on the continental slope and one on the continental shelf. Two encounters on the continental slope were detected visually, while one acoustic encounter was not detected by visual means.

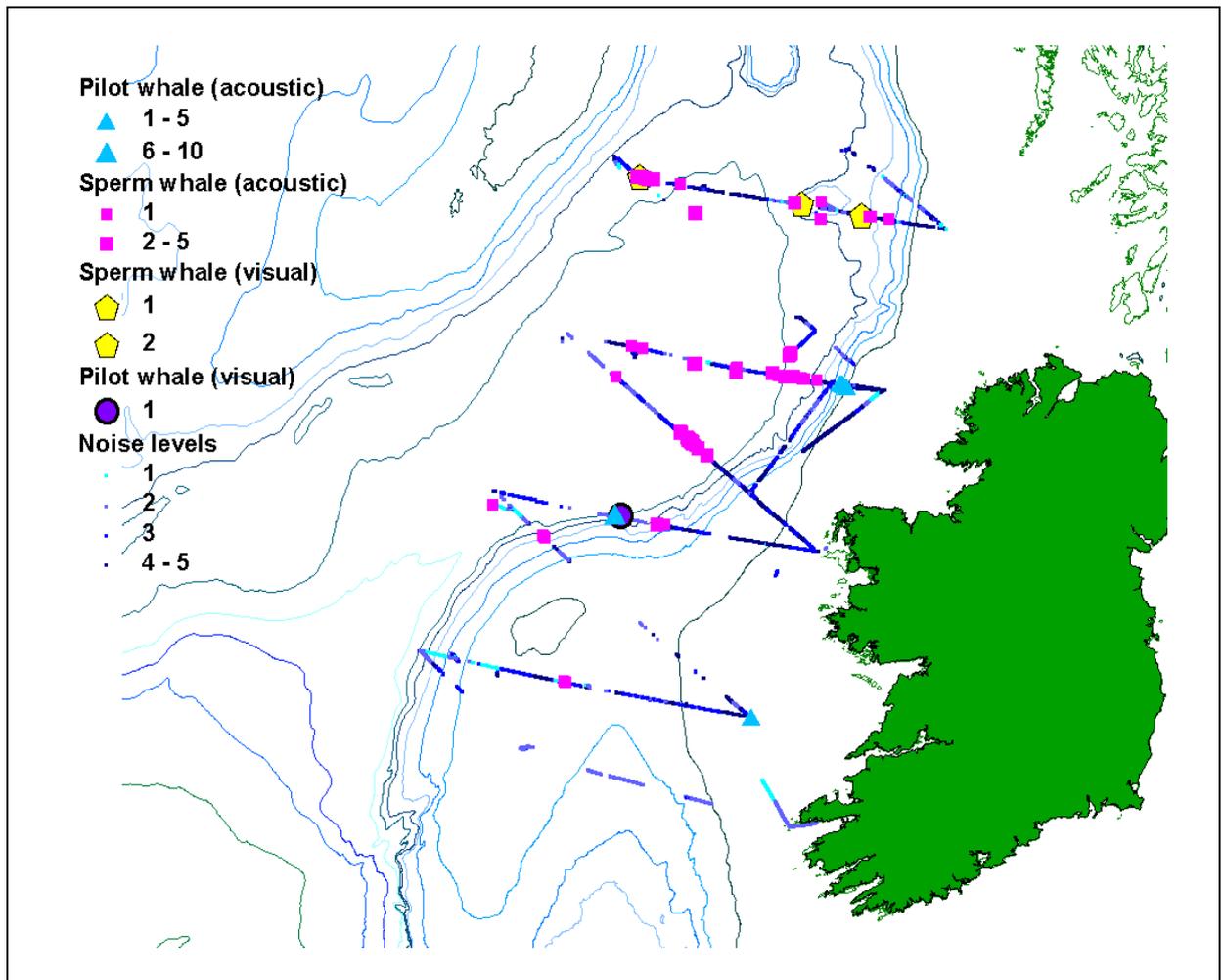


Figure 12. Long-finned pilot whale and sperm whale visual and acoustic detections made during the *SIAR* survey. Estimated group sizes are described. Transect lines are assigned a graduated colour according to the noise level present in samples (1 = minimum, 5 = maximum).

There were 187 acoustic encounters with various dolphin species (Fig. 13). The detection of dolphins appeared to show a latitudinal bias towards the southern half of the survey area, which comprised continental slope and shallower waters. Common dolphins were found to be the most abundant species in the deep waters of the Rockall Trough, while white-sided dolphins appeared to show a preference for the areas overlying steeper continental slopes. Acoustic detections were also made while in transit between transect lines and on the way to Dingle harbour where some whistles of the resident dolphin “Fungi” were recorded amidst the high background noise typical of shallow waters.

The total number of acoustic encounters is greater than the number of visual records if all the recordings (both on and off visual effort) are taken into account. However, the numbers of acoustic and visual detections, independent of one another, are very similar if off-effort periods are discounted. While it may be tempting to assume therefore, that visual survey methods, if conducted properly, may approximate acoustic survey methods, it must be remembered that several factors must be considered when analysing visual and acoustic data together. For example, the detectability of cetaceans may be highly species-dependent. A significantly higher number of sperm whales, which are deep-diving species easily be missed by a passing vessel, were recorded acoustically during the *SIAR* survey than were observed on visual effort. Conversely, it is also common for several sightings of one or more dolphin species to be made within a single continuous acoustic detection. In addition, various physical properties of the

medium through which the sound is transmitted may also play a role in acoustic detection rate (e.g. oceanographic conditions). Needless to say, further analysis of sound spectra, amplitude and bearings associated with all detections are required. Such analysis should provide a more accurate determination of encounter characteristics, of detection range and of the number of species.

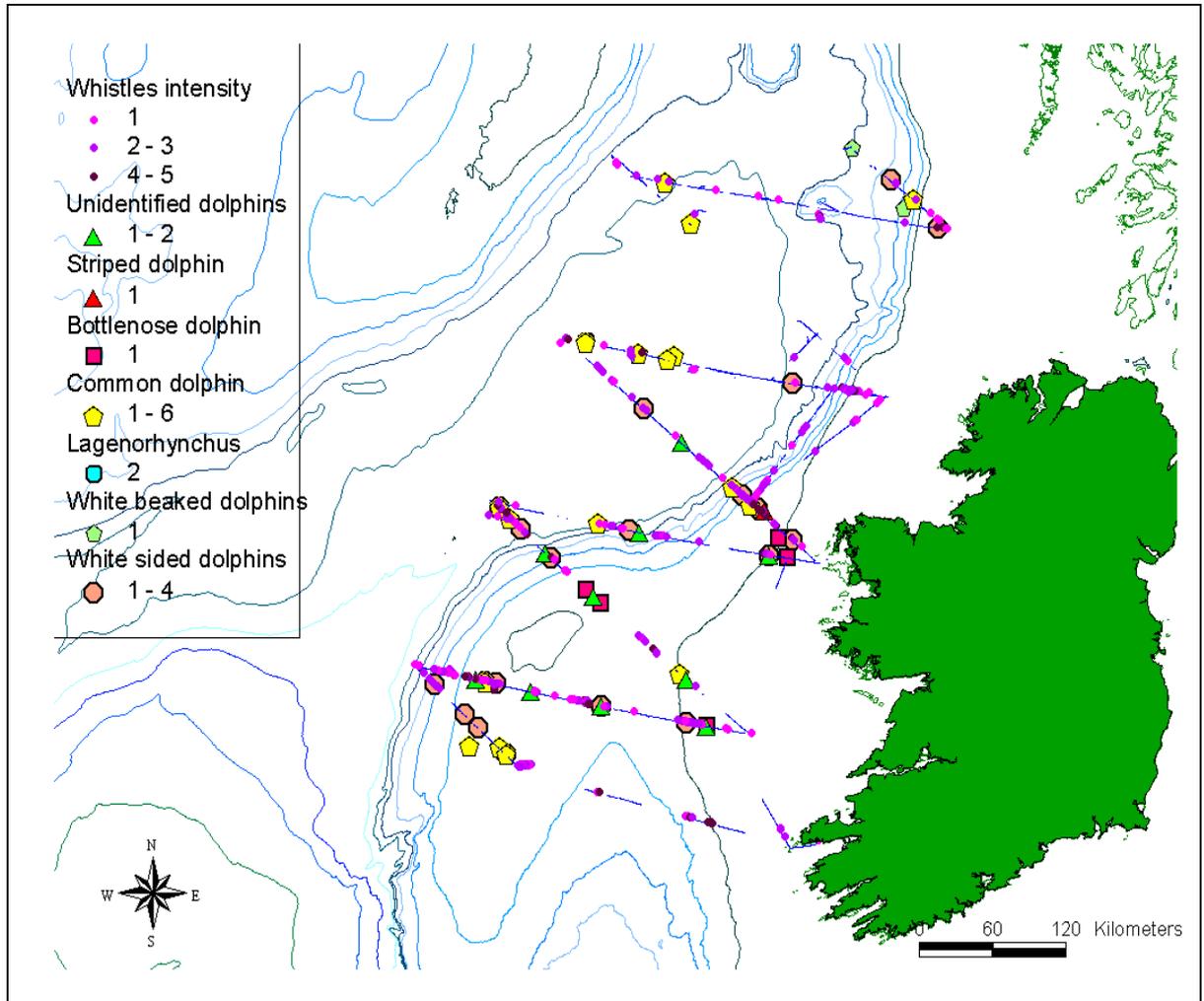


Figure 13. Summary of all acoustic detections of dolphins and visual encounters made during the SIAR survey. Detections are classified to species level where possible and estimated group sizes are given. Transect lines are assigned a graduated colour according to the intensity of whistles present in samples (1 = minimum, 5 = maximum).

## 2. L.E. *EITHNE* (18 to 22 September, 2000)

A combined acoustic and visual survey was carried out on the Irish Naval Service flagship, L.E. *Eithne*. The vessel provides a good platform for acoustic studies since it was designed to be a quiet ship. However, the vessel's ability to travel at relatively high speeds (15-20 knots) occasionally affected the detection range of the hydrophone as the array was occasionally skimming across the ocean's surface. As a result, background noise at medium frequencies, generated by increased water flow, was higher than in other surveys conducted during the research programme. Although weighting the cable could have reduced this component of the background noise, it would have increased the risk of losing or damaging the equipment at high speeds. An added difficulty arose when the equipment had to be recovered during boarding operations associated with fishery protection activities, as the frequent changes of course could potentially damage the array.

Nevertheless, the hydrophone array was towed along a total of 805.8km at spaced intervals during the survey, which took place mainly in continental shelf waters to the southwest of Ireland (Fig. 14). Some data were lost due to the unforeseen use of faulty CD's. Thus only 249.8km (corresponding to 13.5 hours) of survey effort could be analysed. A total number of 381 valid samples totalling 2.19 hours of recordings were detected by the acoustic equipment. The distribution of the acoustic detections is summarised in Table 4 and represented graphically in Figure 14. In calculating the percentage of cetacean detections per recording, samples with high level of water noise (noise level 5) were not considered.

TABLE 4. Summary of survey coverage and cetacean acoustic encounters during the L.E. *Eithne* survey.

Area	Trackline covered (km)	% Coverage	% recordings with cetacean detections	Number of encounters
Continental Slope	37.2	16%	16%	3
Continental Shelf	212.6	84%	9%	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>249.8</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>8</b>

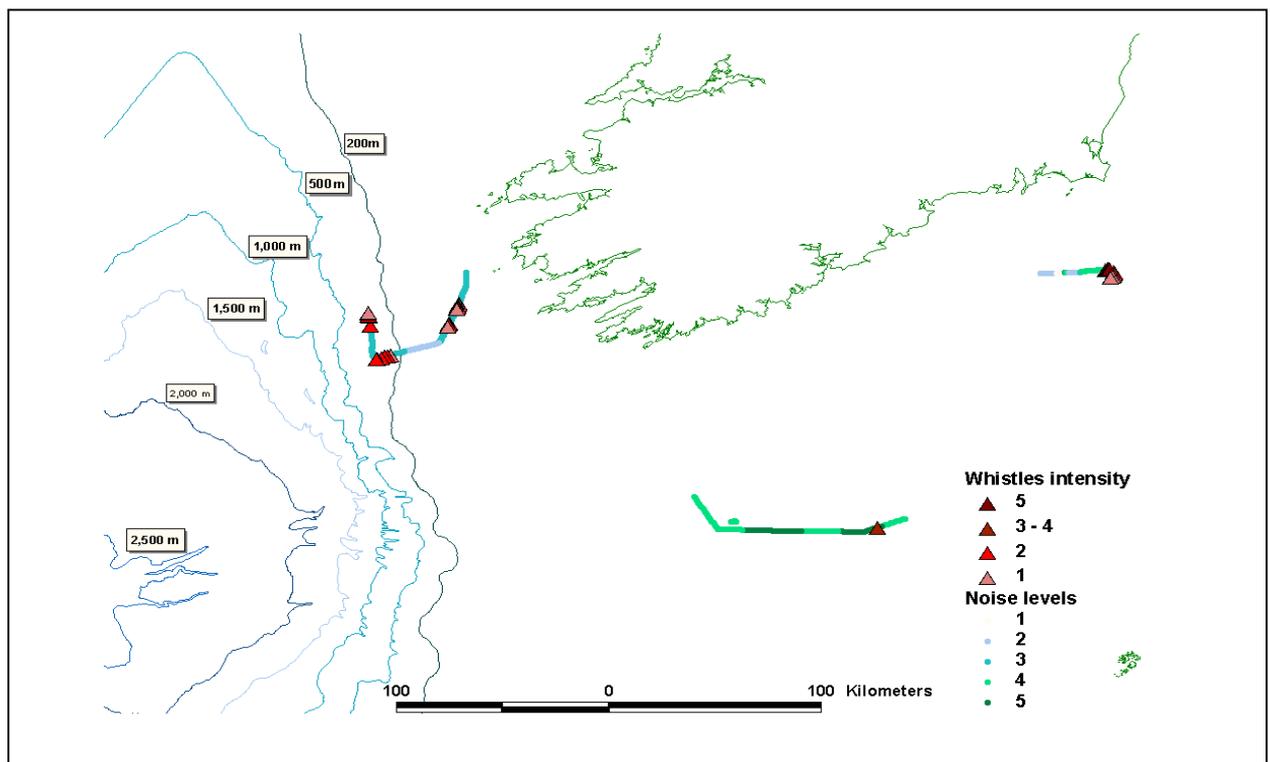


Figure 14. Acoustic detections of cetaceans and noise levels recorded on the L.E. *Eithne* survey.

A total of eight separate acoustic encounters of dolphin species were made during the survey (Fig. 14). All encounters were recorded at night, when the observer was off visual effort. This is not surprising since, during the day, the fishery protection activities of the vessel limited the use of the hydrophone. Aural identification and the relatively long duration of the encounters suggested that the species were mostly common dolphins.

The number of detections was small when compared to other surveys, which may be related to the difficulties with CD equipment and the contribution made by high frequency components

of the background noise. Acoustic detection rates per kilometre of transect line appeared to be comparatively higher in waters overlying the continental slope with fewer detections in the Celtic Sea portion of the survey area (Fig. 14). While the levels of background noise were higher in the Celtic Sea, a brief comparison between the continental slope and shelf within the western portion of the survey area, where the levels of noise were similar, showed a higher concentration of encounters over the slope.

The use of Irish Naval Service vessels as acoustic research platforms offers some potential. The wide coverage, continuous patrolling activity and favourable acoustic characteristics make them suitable for the long-term monitoring of cetacean abundance in Irish waters. The principal limitation is introduced by the relatively high cruising speeds that result in shallow hydrophone deployment and elevated levels of noise. The use of added weight and/or a depressor could increase tow depth and alleviate the latter problems.

### **3. S.V. *BLIGH* 2000 (14 October to 25 November 2000)**

The surveys on board the S.V. *Bligh* resulted in the best geographic coverage using the acoustic equipment. This acoustic survey was the first of three acoustic surveys for cetaceans carried out on board the vessels chartered by the Geological Survey of Ireland for the National Seabed Survey. A total of 1,232.8km of track-line was covered over the course of 76.1 hours during the survey. The average vessel speed was 9.1 knots.

The survey lines overlapped on several occasions. This was due to the repeated transit of the ship to the coast to gain shelter from the gale-force winds that occurred frequently during the survey period. The separation in time between the transits made them useful for presence/absence analysis, although they did not increase the survey area covered. Although background noise from the water turbulence, waves, etc, increases with higher sea states, this survey verified the effective performance of the equipment in adverse weather conditions. The high number of cetacean encounters recorded in conditions up to Beaufort force 9 was noteworthy.

A total of 4,528 automatic detection samples were taken spanning 26.27 hours of recording and 61.3% of the total number of recording samples contained cetacean vocalisations. A total of 51 acoustic encounters were recorded during the survey, comprising two sperm whale encounters, three pilot whale encounters and 46 encounters with various dolphin species. Comparison of the detection rate along survey lines inside the continental shelf (Area B: depth < 200m) and on the steep slope of the Goban Spur and Porcupine Seabight (Area A) indicated differences in cetacean distribution (Area A: 67% of 3,286 samples contained cetacean vocalisations; Area B: 41% of 1,213 samples contained cetacean vocalisations; Fig. 15)

Common dolphins were the most frequently recorded species on this survey. The comparatively high acoustic encounter rate may be related to a southern shift in the distribution of cetaceans in the winter season. The number of encounters may also be related to the complex seabed relief of the survey area. The continental slope in the area that encompasses the Goban Spur and Porcupine Seabight is very steep and includes a complex system of canyons where important meso-scale processes may enhance local productivity. Further evidence of this is indicated by the presence of carbonate mounds associated with deep-water corals in the area.

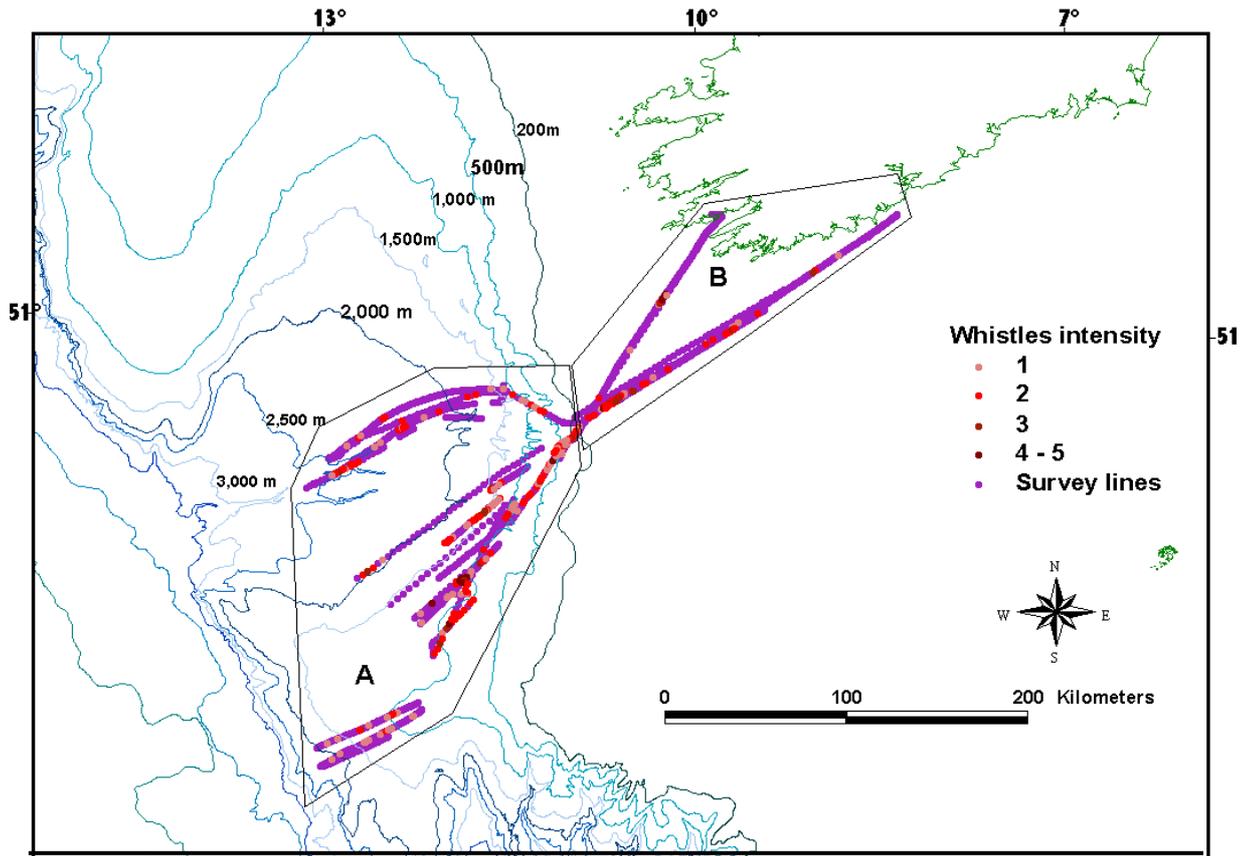


Figure 15. Distribution of cetacean vocalisations recorded on the S.V. *Bligh* 2000 survey, separated into areas A (continental slope) and B (continental shelf).

#### 4. S.V. *BLIGH* 2001 (29 April to 8 June 2001)

This survey intensively covered the Rockall Trough over a six-week period in the spring of 2001. A total of 40 days were effectively surveyed, totalling 694.3 survey hours. During the survey 19,997 samples (corresponding to 118.83 hours of monitoring) were recorded. The average vessel speed was 8.7 knots. As in the previous S.V. *Bligh* 2000 survey, the vessel's activity did not interfere with the deployment of the acoustic equipment, as it was possible to tow the magnetometer (used by the GSI for mapping magnetic anomalies) and the hydrophone array simultaneously. This allowed for the comparison of the survey capabilities of a single observer on visual effort and on acoustic effort.

Visual effort covered only 22% of the total acoustic trackline. All visual sightings, apart from those of baleen whales, were also detected and recorded by the acoustic equipment. The incidence of background noise during the survey (Fig. 16) were recorded as follows: level 1 - 0.03%; level 2 - 37.6%; level 3 - 45.2%, level 4 - 15 % and level 5 - 1.7% and a graphical representation is shown

Based on experience and the vessel speed, encounters were defined by a silent period separation of fifteen minutes between dolphin and pilot whale encounters and forty-five minutes between sperm whale encounters. This separation between encounters was very conservative (4km for dolphins and pilot whales and 12km for sperm whales) as the deep waters of the Rockall Trough and the silent characteristics of the vessel allowed for a wider range of detection than usual. The data will require further analysis to separate encounters on the basis of relative bearings to the animals. However this may allow the authors to produce retrospective density and abundance estimates for sperm whales in the Rockall Trough in the spring of 2001.

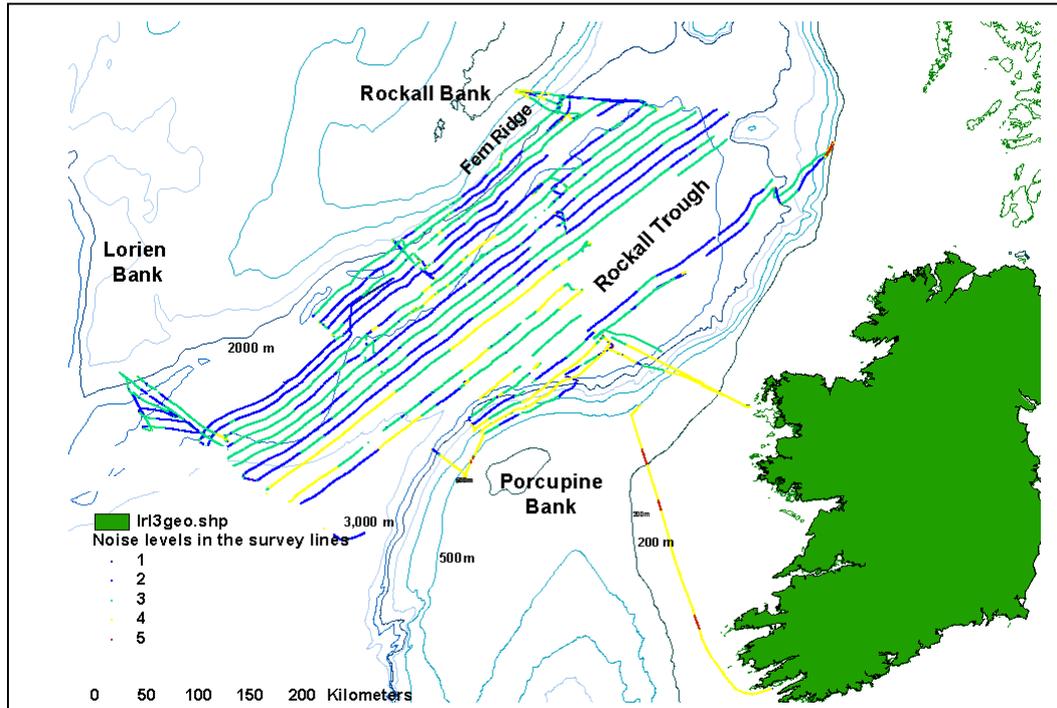


Figure 16. Noise levels (1 = minimum, 5 = maximum) recorded among acoustic samples recorded on the S.V. *Bligh* 2001 survey.

The distribution of the acoustic detections during the survey is shown in Figures 17 and 18. A total of 378 acoustic encounters were recorded during the survey. These could be separated into 175 encounters with various dolphin species, 114 encounters with pilot whales and 89 encounters with sperm whales. The 89 encounters with sperm whales (Fig. 17) had a minimum duration of less than two minutes, and a maximum recording duration of four hours and eight minutes. Counting of the number of individuals within sperm whale groups, which may be corrected with further acoustic analysis, yielded group sizes from one to seven animals.

On the majority of occasions, sperm whales were recorded acoustically before they were seen and only once was an animal sighted first as it rested on the surface before it dived and began vocalising. The analysis of detection distances is not complete, but a detection distance of approximately 16km was derived from a number of recordings in which clicking individuals were acoustically monitored for periods of over an hour.

To investigate the influence of slope on cetacean distribution, the authors selected polygons containing tracklines from the northwestern margin of the Porcupine Shelf across the Rockall Trough (Fig. 19). This allowed the comparison of the distribution of acoustic detections between polygons situated throughout the Rockall Trough area. The polygons were distributed randomly along the Rockall Trough on the basis of selecting areas with minimum slope and maximum survey coverage. The results are given as percentages to correct for the non-homogeneous coverage in the different polygons. In addition to this analysis, two small polygons were situated to cover survey lines that crossed the continental slope. Another small polygon was positioned over a particular basin-like indentation (C) within the survey area, which is situated along the southwestern margin of the Rockall Trough.

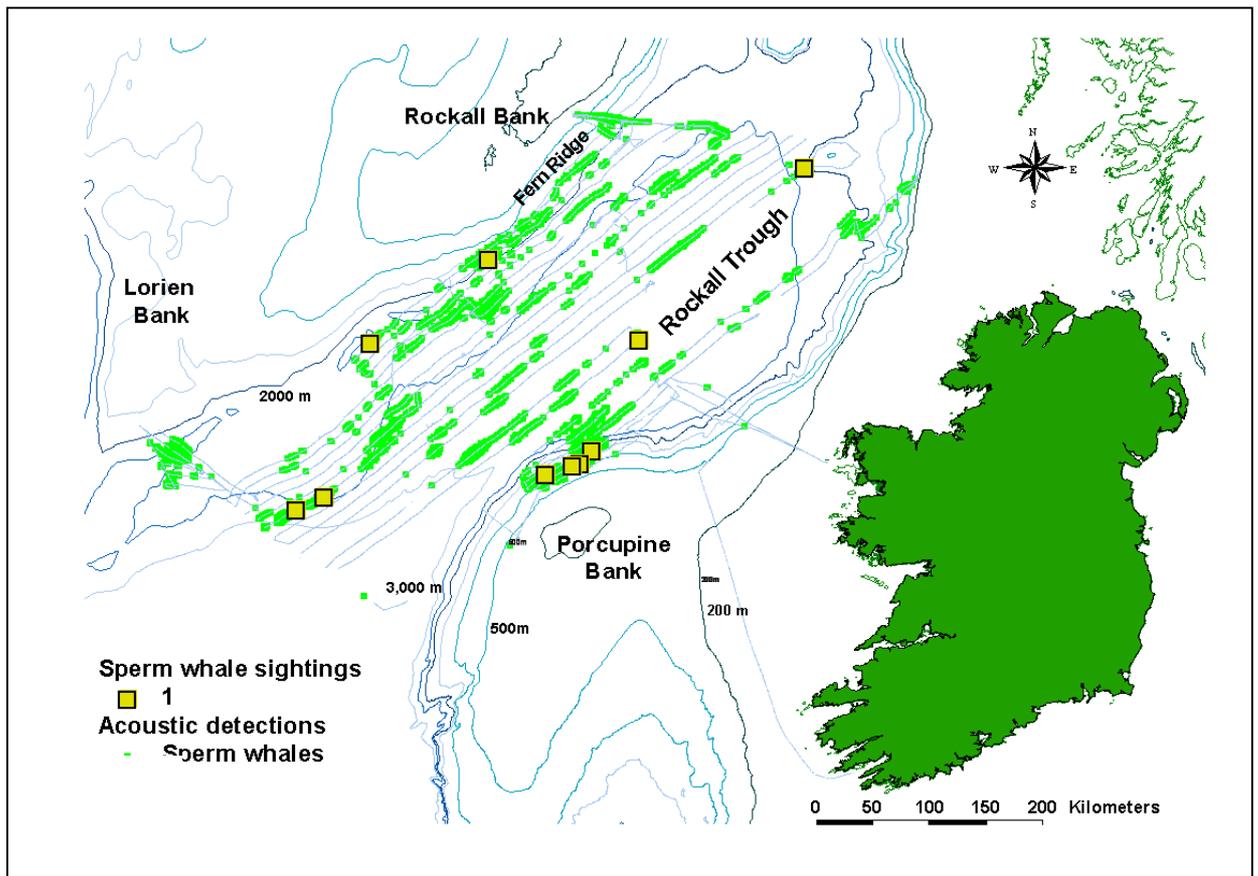


Figure 17. Distribution of sperm whale visual and acoustic detections during the S.V. *Bligh* 2001 survey.

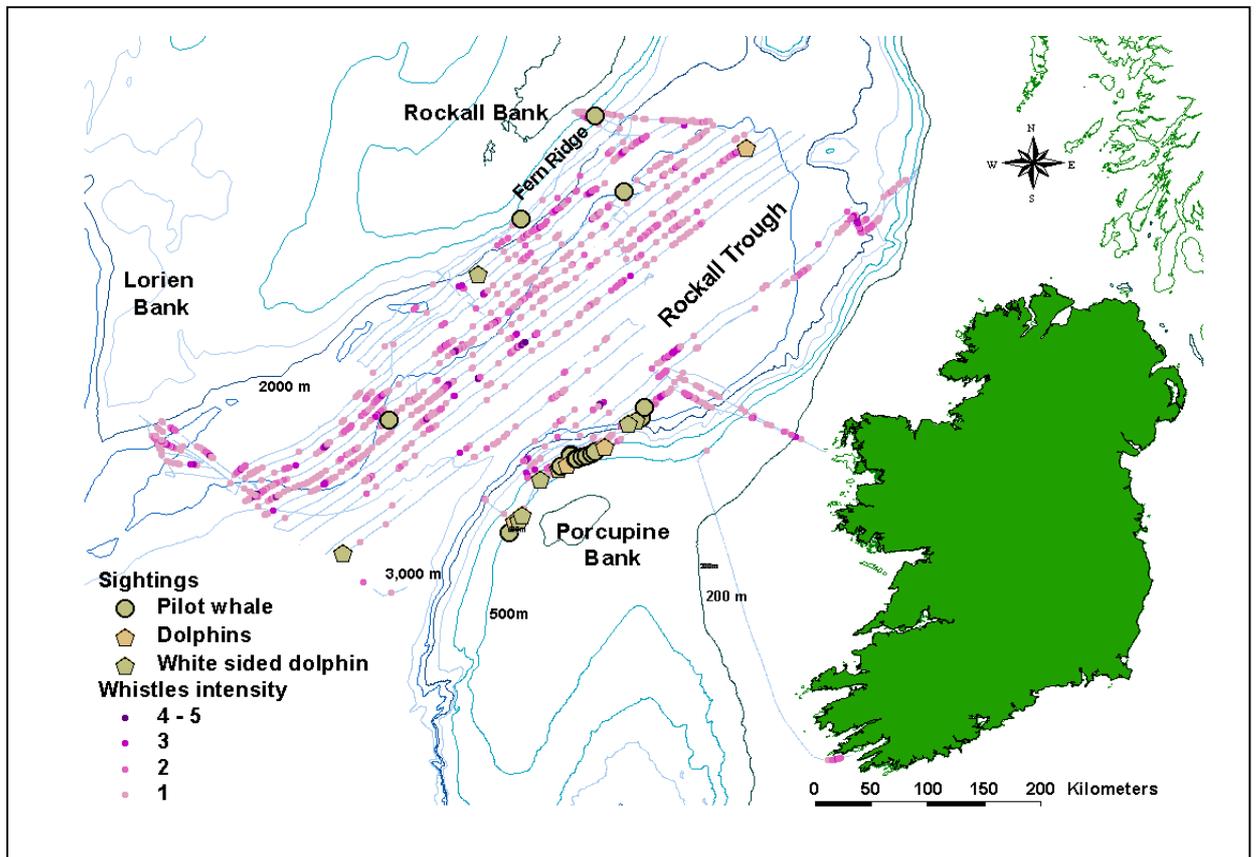


Figure 18. Distribution of long-finned pilot whale and dolphin visual and acoustic detections during the S.V. *Bligh* 2001 survey.

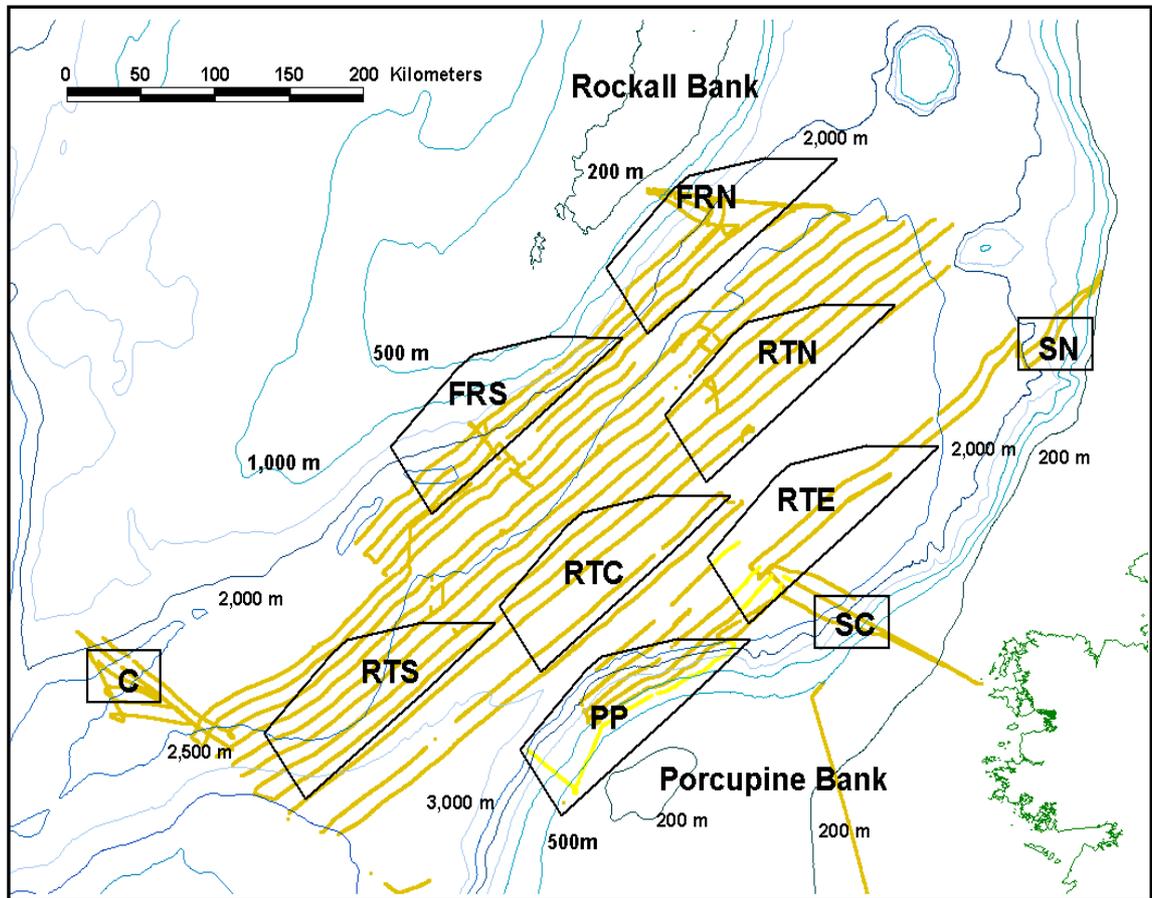


Figure 19. Tracklines of the S.V. *Bligh* 2001 survey showing area polygon sub-samples used in the distribution analysis.

TABLE 5. Summary of the distribution and frequency of occurrence for acoustic detections of cetaceans from S.V. *Bligh* 2001 survey. Detection data described are from selected area polygons (see Fig. 19).

Area	Total no. of samples	Cetacean detections	Whistle detections
NW Porcupine Shelf (PP)	1,112	35.7%	12.6%
Rockall Trough South (RTS)	1,508	25.7%	14.2%
Rockall Trough Centre (RTC)	961	29.0%	5.4%
Rockall Trough North (RTN)	1,144	19.0%	10.3%
Rockall Trough East (RTE)	846	15.4%	9.8%
Feni Ridge South (FRS)	945	26.7%	5.2%
Feni Ridge North (FRN)	1,335	29.8%	13.8%
Unknown seabed feature (C)	479	40.3%	16.7%
Continental Slope North (SN)	194	43.81%	32.5%
Continental Slope Centre (SC)	221	9.0%	8.1%

Results from these analyses show that area C and the northern Irish continental slope (SN) areas had a higher percentage of cetacean detections than any other region (Table 5). These areas are small in comparison with other polygons. In contrast a similar area of steep slope (SC) selected off northwestern Ireland contained very few cetacean detections (9% of samples).

Of the larger polygons analysed, the northwestern Porcupine area (PP) contained the highest number of detections. This region is an area of considerable ecological importance, according to recent findings. The map below (Fig. 20) indicates the distribution of seabed carbonate mounds from the Geological Survey of Ireland data and also from recent *Geomound* and *Ecomound* research projects, in which the CMRC was also involved (see Hovland *et al.*, 1994; Henriet *et al.*, 1998; Wheeler *et al.*, 1998). The map also shows surface water temperature taken at several locations along the survey track. Sea surface temperatures ranged from 10.2 - 12.7°C, with colder water located in the northern sector.

In the northwestern Porcupine region, the mounds are situated at water depths ranging from 500 to 1,000m and are found in areas of dynamic hydrology. They are related to the presence of the deep-water reef-forming coral *Lophelia pertusa* and *Madrepora oculata*. These coral species have highly diverse associated faunal assemblages (Rogers, 1999). Coral mounds are also known to be located in relatively high concentrations in the Porcupine Seabight and along the southern margin of the Feni Ridge. Such areas appear to be coincident with areas of relatively high cetacean abundance (see Vol. II). This underlines the significance of such areas from many physical and biological perspectives and warrants further detailed investigation of these habitats, their oceanographic conditions and the biological species that aggregate therein.

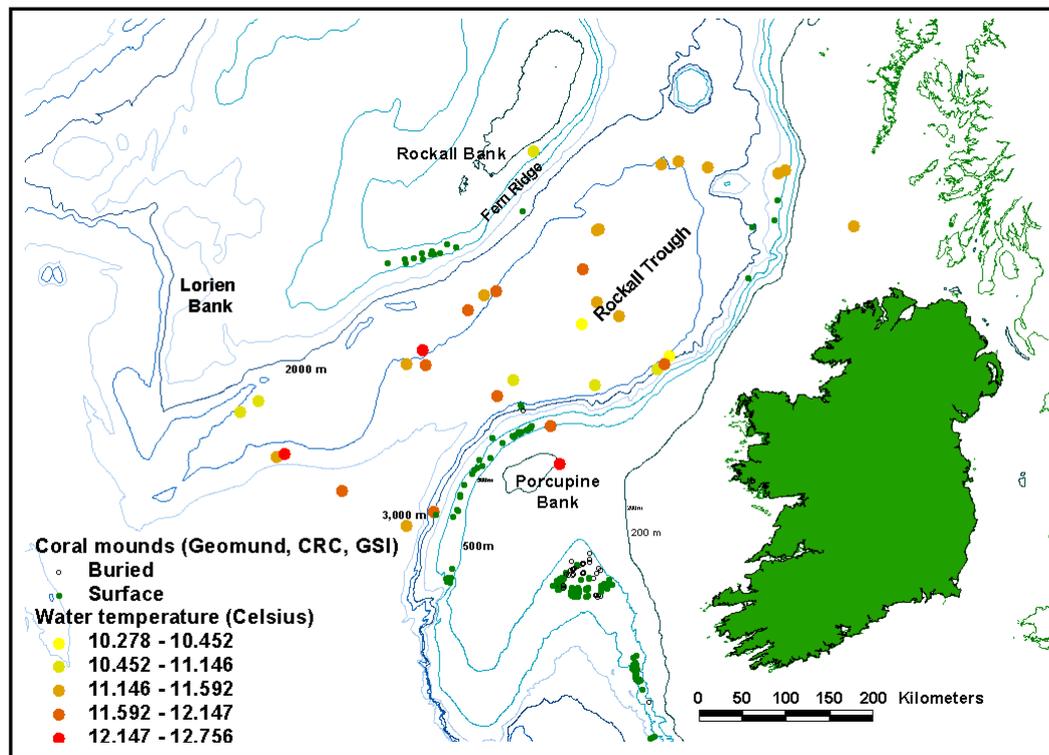


Figure 20. Distribution of location data for seabed carbonate mounds (several sources) and GSI sea surface temperature records obtained during the S.V. *Bligh* 2001 survey.

### 5. S.V. *SIREN* 2001 (30 June to 6 July 2001)

This relatively short trip covered part of the 500 m isobath fringing the Porcupine Shelf and a transect ashore to coastal County Galway (Fig. 21). The vessel was chartered by the Geological Survey of Ireland under the National Seabed Survey. It was thus using similar acoustic devices (i.e. pinger and multibeam sonar) to those utilised aboard the S.V. *Bligh*. The multibeam's operating frequency on this survey was 95 kHz, which lies beyond the frequency range of the hydrophone equipment used in cetacean research. The inter-pulse interval of the pinger was relatively short in duration, due to its use in comparatively shallow waters. This factor, coupled

with vessel noise, and the water depths being surveyed combined to create a relatively noisy environment on the survey. As a result, the acoustic survey range for cetaceans was quite limited.

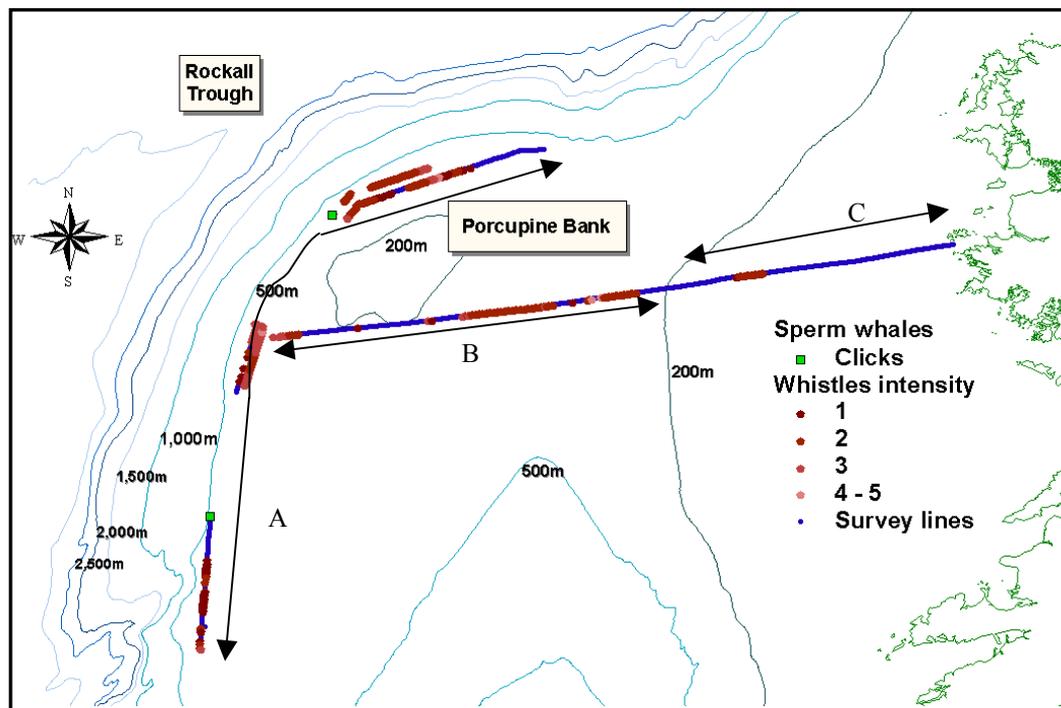


Figure 21. Summary of survey lines and acoustic detections of cetaceans recorded on the S.V. *Siren* survey. Survey lines were divided (A to C) for analysis purposes on the basis of their proximity to the continental slope.

A total of 54.9 hours of effective acoustic survey were achieved at an average vessel speed of 9.4 knots. This yielded a total acoustic transect length of 511.5km, as shown in Figure 21. The total number of acoustic encounters was 29, consisting of one encounter with sperm whales, four encounters with pilot whales and nineteen encounters with dolphin species.

In spite of the high background noise, a relatively high number of detections were made during the survey, with 39.8% of all acoustic samples containing cetacean vocalisations. When divided into separate areas, the detection rate within samples was highest along the western margin of the continental shelf (Fig. 21). In transect A, 45% of samples contained cetacean vocalisations. This was followed by a similarly high rate of cetacean detections within samples taken through the Porcupine Shelf region (transect B = 41.2%). This contrasted sharply with acoustic samples from waters less than 200 m depth (transect C) in which 10% of samples contained cetacean vocalisations.

The acoustic information gathered on this survey supported the results of dedicated visual surveys during the *SIAR* survey and those aboard vessels of opportunity (*see* Vol. II), in addition to acoustic data collected aboard the S.V. *Bligh* in 2001, all of which indicate the importance for cetaceans of waters in the Porcupine region. Together, the data further underline an apparently high density of cetaceans, particularly odontocete (i.e. toothed cetacean) species, along the continental slopes fringing southern, western and northern margins of the Porcupine Shelf.

## PROBABLE ACOUSTIC RECORD OF CUVIER'S BEAKED WHALES

During the course of the *SIAR* survey seven sightings of members of the beaked whale family (Family *Ziphiidae*) were made throughout the chosen survey area (Fig. 22). These consisted of groups of Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*), Sowerby's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon bidens*) and northern bottlenose whale (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*), in addition to sightings of beaked whales that could not be identified to species level (see Vol. II).

The acoustic behaviour of beaked whales is poorly known. MacLeod (1999) reviewed the limited information available on this subject and suggested that beaked whale vocalisations may be categorised by (i) pulsed sounds ranging from 300 Hz to 129 kHz, and (ii) non-pulsed sounds from 2-10 kHz up to 16 kHz (the latter identified as that of the northern bottlenose whale). Furthermore, anatomical evidence appears to indicate that the auditory system of beaked whales may be sensitive to high frequencies in the ultrasonic range, in addition to low frequency sound (MacLeod, 1999).

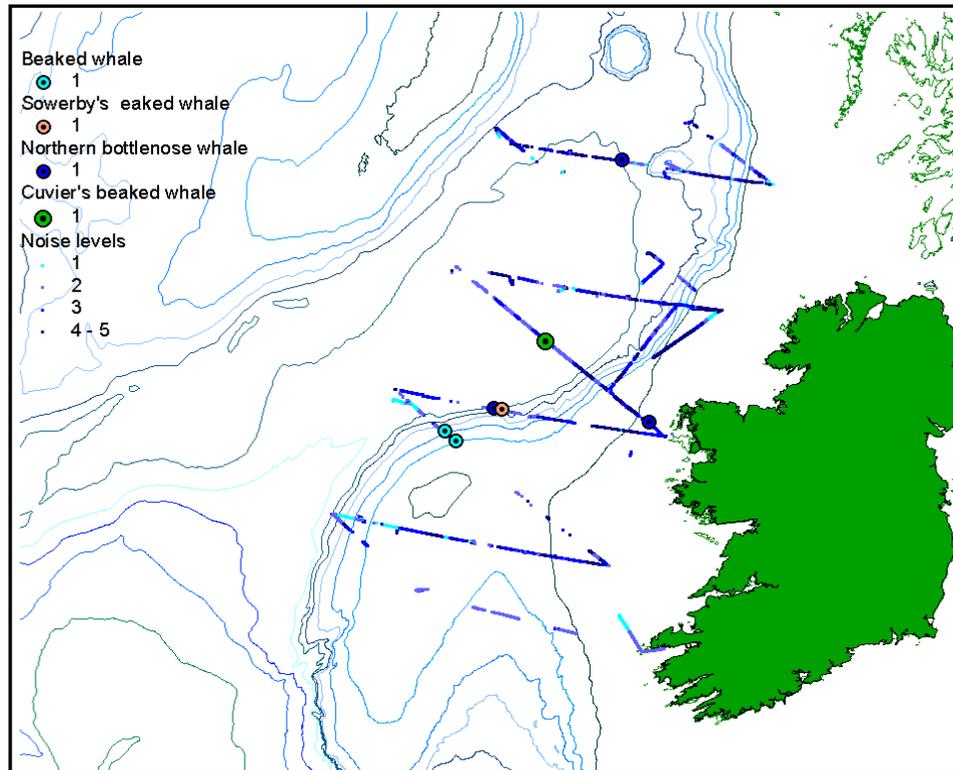


Figure 22. Sighting positions for groups of beaked whale species recorded during the *SIAR* survey in 2000. Background noise intensity levels are given on an ascending scale from 1 (minimum) to 5 (maximum).

During the *SIAR* survey, both pulsed and tonal sounds were recorded in the presence of beaked whale species. On one occasion, pulsed sounds were recorded simultaneous to one northern bottlenose whale encounter. However, these were greatly masked by the background noise. Further pulsed sounds were also recorded during sightings of other identified and unidentified beaked whales. However, the quality of recordings was very poor due to high levels of background noise.

Only two of the simultaneous visual and acoustic recordings of beaked whales presented data of sufficient acoustic quality for further analysis. Both were during an encounter with a single group of five Cuvier's beaked whales that approached within 30m of the survey vessel, as it lay

adrift and on standby. Seven observers were mobilised upon first sighting of the animals and no other cetaceans were seen or heard in the area within one hour of the sighting.

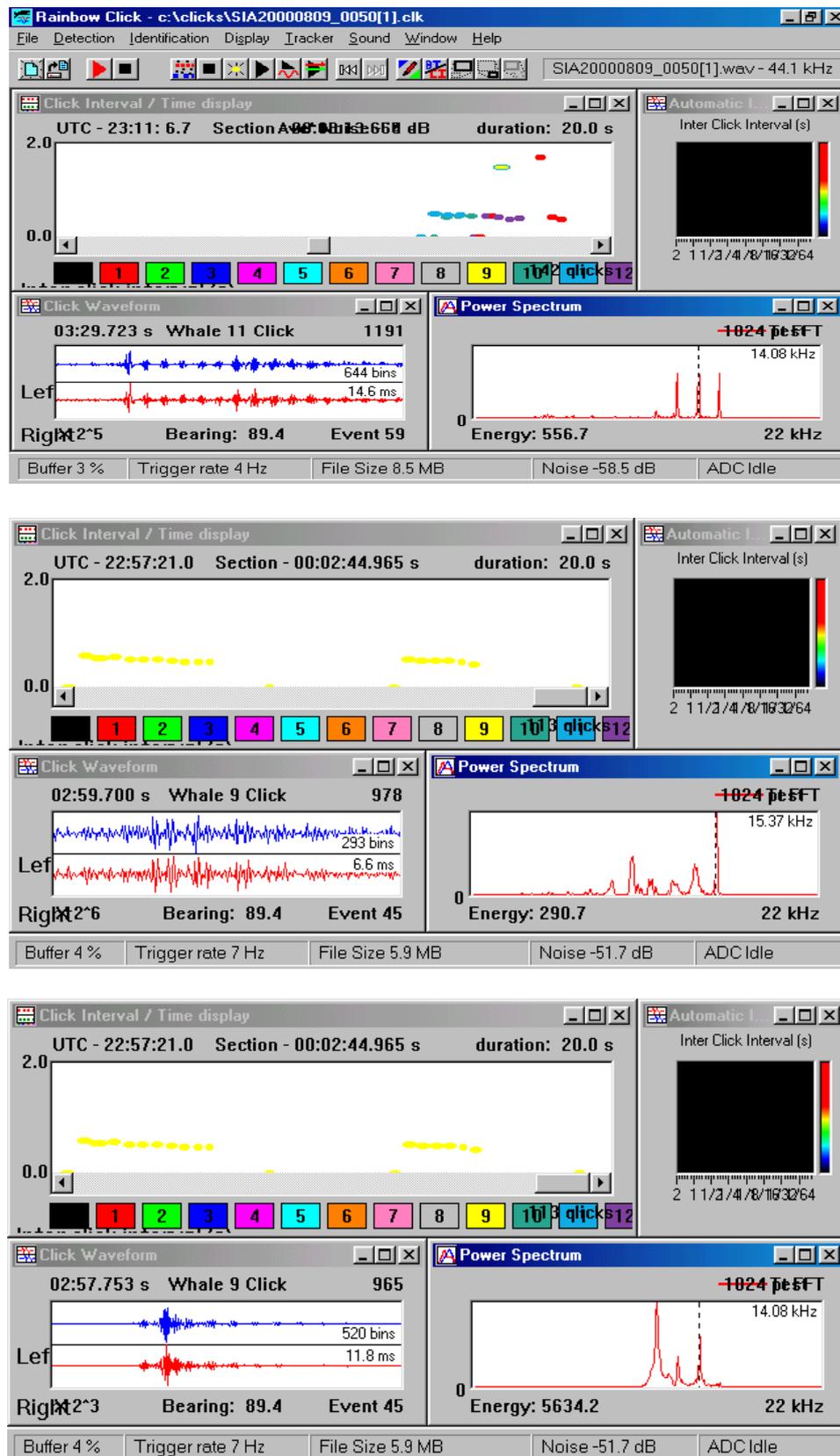


Figure 23. Stereophonic displays of three click waveforms and their power spectra, recorded in the presence of five Cuvier's beaked whales during the SIAR survey.

Analysis of the first click's power spectrum showed peak frequency levels within those postulated by MacLeod (1999): 15.46 kHz, 14.08 kHz and 12.75 kHz (Fig. 23). The analysis of several other clicks showed the same peak frequencies, although these did not always occur together, plus other peaks at 15.37 kHz, 12.46 kHz and 11.46 kHz. Most of the clicks showed regular echoes and it appeared that variable inter-pulse intervals occurred for different vocalising individuals. This might have some relationship to the individual animal's size, as determined for sperm whales (Gordon, 1991). The measurement of several inter-pulse intervals in the recordings yielded an average duration of 0.7 milliseconds. However, an exhaustive analysis of all clicks is required to properly characterise the acoustic data obtained in these recordings.

Beaked whales are widely acknowledged as rare and notoriously inconspicuous cetacean species. Most beaked whale species tend not to approach boats or perform aerial displays. Furthermore, these animals are believed to occur singly or in small groups in offshore waters, in which they are deep-diving species, which makes them difficult to detect and observe in the field. To our knowledge, there is only one published recording of the Cuvier's beaked whale tonal sounds (i.e. Manghi *et al.*, 1999) and no published records exist of pulsed sounds such as those recorded in the present study. It is possible that other cetaceans were present in the region during this simultaneous visual and acoustic recording and that the sounds recorded were of another species. However, this is unlikely due to the observer effort and the proximity of the observed Cuvier's beaked whales to the acoustic equipment deployed beneath the survey vessel during the encounter.

It is also possible that, in the course of other acoustic surveys, other pulsed sounds of beaked whales were confused with those of sperm whales, thus underestimating their presence. The rarity of simultaneous visual and acoustic detections of many beaked whale species makes interpretation of the limited data gathered in the present study relatively difficult and the subject area certainly requires considerably more research.

## ACOUSTIC DETECTION OF SEISMIC AND DRILLING ACTIVITIES

High-frequency sources, attributable to exploration-related activity, were occasionally detected along the Atlantic Margin. Since these, like other similar devices (e.g. sonar) overlapped with the known frequency and audible ranges of toothed cetaceans, it was decided by the research team that measurements should be obtained opportunistically and investigated.

Pulses from seismic survey vessels engaged in exploration off northwest Ireland were detected on the *SIAR* and *S.V. Bligh* 2001 surveys. The received signals were higher in intensity as the relevant vessel for cetacean research approached the shallower continental shelf waters to the west of Ireland. Contact between the authors and the Petroleum Affairs Division (PAD) of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources confirmed the identity of seismic vessels and the nature of exploratory activities in the area.

During the *SIAR* survey in 2000, the hydrophone equipment was being used in cetacean detection for the first time. High levels of background low frequency noise necessitated the use of high pass filters from 200 Hz up to 5.6 kHz, in order to optimise cetacean acoustic detection. This prevented the continuous monitoring of seismic sources in the survey area. However, on several occasions seismic pulses could be heard in spite of the filtering process. Upon further investigation, the received sound levels increased dramatically with a change towards lower frequency settings or in the absence of filters. In view of the presence of seismic sound pulses in the acoustic environment of cetaceans these sources were monitored opportunistically during the *SIAR* survey (e.g. when off survey effort, on standby or adrift at night).

Monitoring for seismic activity during the SIAR survey showed that seismic sound pulses from the M.V. *Polar Princess*, which was conducting a 3-D seismic survey off the County Mayo coast, could be recorded at distances exceeding 250km (Fig. 24). Clearly, therefore, the entire study area covered by the SIAR survey was prone to background noise from various sources, including noise from seismic exploration. The acoustic intensity of this seismic source was relatively high in the shallower continental shelf waters adjacent to the seismic vessel (Fig. 24).

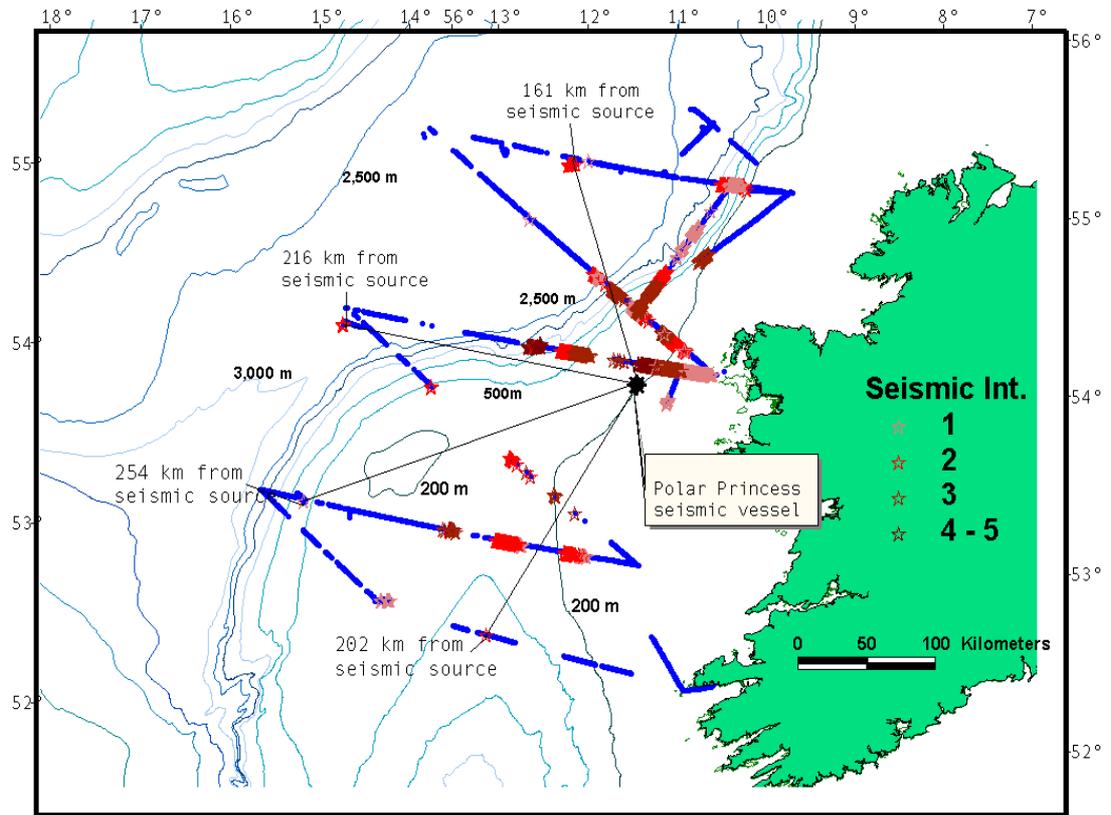


TABLE 6. Summary of seismic operations coincident with acoustic and visual surveys for cetaceans aboard the S.V. *Bligh* (2001). Data were made available by PAD.

Vessel Name	Contracting Company	Survey Date and Area	Seismic Sources	Location centre
M.V. <i>Geopacific</i>	Statoil	15 May - 9 July 500km <sup>2</sup>	Airgun array 3,460 x 2 sources = 6,920 in <sup>3</sup>	S. Erris Trough 54° 32' 20" N 10° 47' 25.9" W
M.V. <i>Seisquest</i>	Enterprise Energy Ireland	17 May - 4 June 300km <sup>2</sup>	Airgun array 3,450 in <sup>3</sup>	Central Slyne Trough. 53° 57' 32" N 11° 15' 39.2" W
M.V. <i>Seisquest</i>	Marathon Petroleum	4 June - 13 June 240km <sup>2</sup>	Airgun array 3,460 in <sup>3</sup>	S. Slyne Trough. 53° 34' 47.6" N 11° 22' 05.2" W

During the period of the S.V. *Bligh* 2001 survey, three seismic surveys were conducted off northwest Ireland, all using airgun arrays (Table 6). Seismic emissions in all surveys were produced at an array depth of 6m. On this occasion, acoustic and visual survey effort for cetaceans had seen the completion of a number of acoustic survey lines prior to the commencement of seismic activity. When the S.V. *Bligh* 2001 survey and seismic activities were being conducted simultaneously, seismic pulses were detected at the observer's furthest possible distance from the source (Fig. 25). This indicated that sound produced during 3-D seismic activity were detectable underwater at distances greater than 500km from the source.

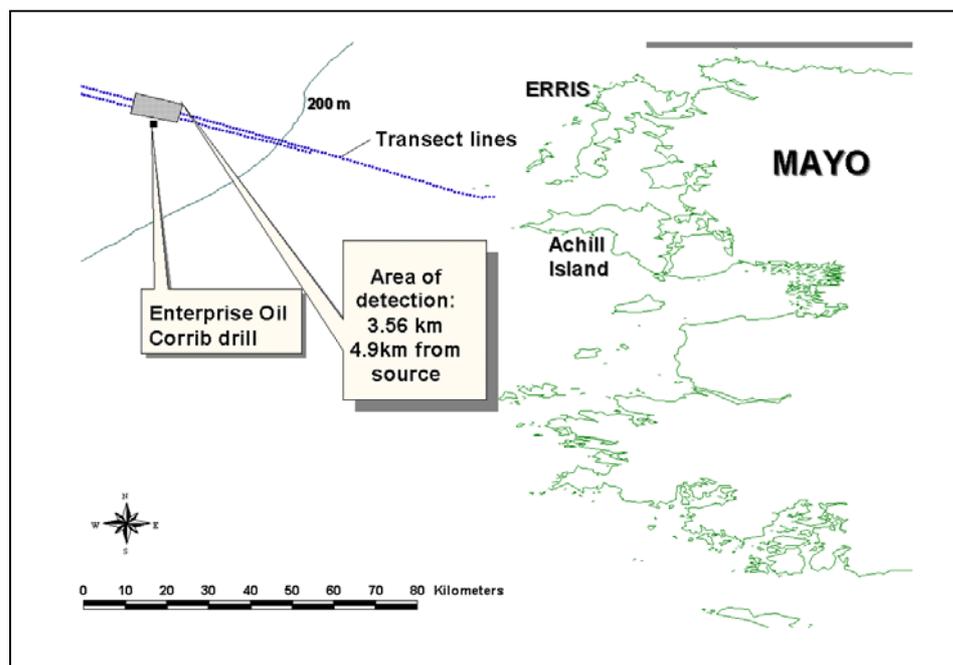
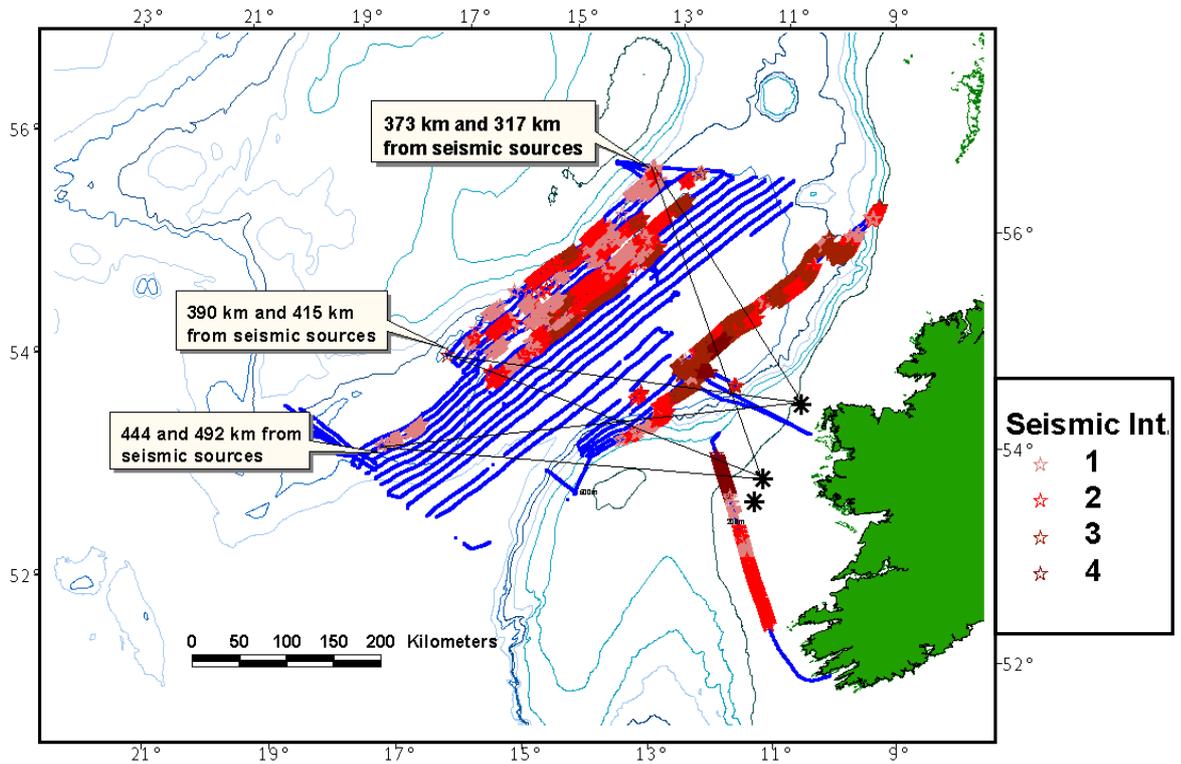


Figure 26. Location of the detection zone for drilling activity off western Ireland during the S.V. *Bligh* 2001 acoustic and visual survey. Vessel transect lines and the 200m depth contour are shown.

In the case of the S.V. *Bligh* 2001 survey, seismic pulses from vessels operating off the west coast of Ireland were detected in waters overlying the continental shelf, the Rockall Trough and as far west as the Feni Ridge. Received sound levels were logically dependent on the distance to the source, but other factors such as water depth and bottom slope have to be taken into account when accounting for the range at which seismic activities can be detected.

In addition to noise associated with seismic operations, the hydrophone equipment used in cetacean detection also recorded sound associated with subsurface drilling activity off western Ireland on two occasions. The focal point for this activity was the Enterprise Energy Ireland 18/25-3 Corrib Appraisal Well, situated in the Slyne Basin (54° 19' 14.467" N, 11° 04' 09.378" W). Two transect lines aboard the S.V. *Bligh* (2001) passed at distance of 3.56km and 4.9km from the anchored semi-submersible drilling rig on consecutive days (4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> May) (Fig. 26).

Recorded sound from these drilling operations was in the form of continuous pure tones at a peak frequency of 9.4 kHz. The maximum distance at which this sound could be detected using the acoustic equipment was significantly lower (<5km from the source, Fig. 26) than the distances at which seismic activities in the area could be detected, yet was in the order of several kilometres.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **USE OF ACOUSTIC METHODS**

The acoustic equipment used throughout the surveys reported on here, was operational on a 24-hour basis, in sea states up to Beaufort force 9 and at vessel speeds of up to 16 knots, although the average survey speed was 8.5 knots. Other instruments, such as a magnetometer, were simultaneously towed on two surveys without any damage to the acoustic equipment.

This kind of acoustic survey, using a towed hydrophone array, proved to be very efficient for studying sperm whales and several other toothed cetaceans. The equipment failed to detect these animals only when they were beyond the detection range or when animals were not vocalising (e.g. sperm whales on the surface). In the case of sperm whales, members of a group do not dive simultaneously, thus it is usually possible to detect non-solitary animals by acoustic means. Our results showed that out of 110 sperm whale encounters just three were of whales seen at the surface before they dived, after which they could be detected acoustically. However, the equipment was not as efficient a detection tool for dolphin species, as their vocalisations are less powerful and resting and travelling animals may often remain silent. Nevertheless, the proportion of dolphin detections recorded by acoustic means is often higher than that by visual means (Gannier, 1999).

It is noteworthy that, during the *SIAR* survey, a team of five visual observers operating simultaneously was required to achieve a similar detection level to that derived from acoustic methods. This further underlines the high probability that cetacean occurrence is underestimated by a single-observer sighting survey, as normally carried out under the standard "Seabirds at Sea" methodology (*see* Vol. II). Consequently, acoustic methods present an opportunity to improve upon the accuracy of data gathered by a sole observer.

However, the time required to operate acoustic equipment and monitor alongside full visual survey effort suggests that future cetacean surveys in the Irish Atlantic Margin using vessels of opportunity should see the deployment of two observers instead of one (*see* Vol. II). This would make the most practical sense and allow for the shared responsibility for visual and acoustic survey duties on board the survey vessel.

An analysis could be done separately for the different surveys with sufficient data, to compare spatial and temporal variations of the distribution of some species. Such analysis could not be included in this report due to the large acoustic dataset collected and the short time-frame available for analysis. In addition, false positive detections introduced by pinger and multibeam sonar devices increased the handling time for acoustic samples from individual surveys.

### **DISTRIBUTION OF CETACEANS DETECTED ACOUSTICALLY**

Some cetacean species' attraction to or deterrence from the vessel may introduce an element of bias in the analysis in areas where these species were predominant. For example, surveys in the southern Atlantic Margin area tended to be dominated by encounters with common dolphins. The frequent presence of this species, members of which commonly bow-ride survey vessels, may influence the overall detection rate by acoustic means, masking the presence of species which are not attracted to or are actively deterred by vessels. This source of false positive or negative error is also studied on visual surveys and needs to be accounted for in determining true detection rates. Thus a degree of caution must be applied in interpreting the results of acoustic data without the empirical determination of sources of bias.

The acoustic system detected a minimum of seven species of cetacean: sperm whale, long-finned pilot whale, Cuvier's beaked whale, common dolphin, striped dolphin, bottlenose dolphin and Atlantic white-sided dolphin. In addition, vocalisations were recorded of animals not identified to species level. Sperm whales were detected on all surveys and were recorded in all the deep sea areas, both slope and trough. However, care needs to be taken when interpreting the acoustic detections in the deeper trough areas; detection range tends to increase with water depth due to lower levels of background noise and a higher range of transmission of the signals.

During the acoustic research programme the *Cetaceans & Seabirds at Sea* team recorded sperm whales in a total of 110 encounters, some up to four hours long. Several studies have been carried out correlating the different click rhythms and other sound production of sperm whales with various activity categories. The rate of vocalisations such as the "creaks" of sperm whales have already been used to identify areas of enhanced feeding activity (Drouot *et al.*, 2000). Further analysis of the data gathered in the present study could allow areas with concentrated feeding activity to be identified.

Ongoing analysis would also provide information on the acoustic repertoire of the different cetacean species occurring in Ireland's Atlantic Margin. This baseline data is important in order to allow future identification of populations and their degree of interrelation with other areas. Further analysis may also allow the better identification of encounters to species level, since differences in the calls of closely related species (e.g. pilot whales *Globicephala melas* and *G. macrorhynchus*; Rendell *et al.*, 1999) may be demonstrated with dedicated research efforts. Acoustic analysis to determine sperm whale body-length may provide tangible proof of the presence of juvenile individuals in northern latitudes and Ireland's Atlantic Margin. Although the sighting records of juvenile sperm whales in Ireland's Atlantic Margin (*see* Vol. II) are unequivocal, acoustic analysis would provide quantitative data on the size distribution of the sperm whale population inhabiting Ireland's Atlantic Margin, be it seasonally or throughout the year.

The greatest numbers of acoustic detections in all surveys were in areas where the seabed has a high slope gradient. These detections occurred both at the continental slope and in separate formations such as deep submarine canyons and basins, confirming the biological importance of these areas. This is consistent with results from various studies in the northeast Atlantic (Evans, 1998). The apparent tendency for cetacean species to aggregate in continental slope areas may be related to feeding activity, as some such areas are known to be rich in biological productivity. However, combined acoustic and visual surveys in the present study showed that not all areas of steep gradient display a high occurrence of cetaceans and ongoing studies will be required along Ireland's Atlantic Margin to further determine those areas of principal importance and the factors which make them so.

Acoustic detections of cetaceans indicated that a north-south gradient in cetacean abundance may occur within Ireland's western continental shelf area, with generally higher numbers of animals detected acoustically in the southern half of Ireland's Atlantic Margin. This gradient appeared to vary, depending on the season. For example, in the southern shelf area, there appears to be a greater abundance of cetaceans in the winter than in the summer.

The results of acoustic surveys also suggested that waters overlying the northwestern margin of the Porcupine Shelf, the Porcupine Seabight and Goban Spur regions and, generally speaking, the continental slope are areas of relatively high cetacean abundance. The area with the greatest proportion of acoustic detections was a deep basin along the southwestern edge of the Rockall Trough (53.5° N, 19° W). The higher concentration of cetaceans associated with certain bathymetric features, such as submarine canyons and banks, may be related to the fact that these features promote, retain and concentrate productivity from the base of the food chain to

higher trophic levels. The increased turbulence, local up-welling and water mixing in these areas favour phytoplankton and thus zooplankton production. These resources are exploited by local predators that are, in turn, preyed upon by pelagic species such as cetaceans and seabirds (Hyrenbach *et al.*, 2000).

While such physical seabed features may assist in the identification of areas of importance for cetaceans, variability in the distribution of species observed in the present study may also relate to other features. For example, ephemeral hydrographic features with a more limited spatial and temporal extent may also occur seasonally with great biological significance. These may attract transient aggregations of cetaceans and other predators to exploit the increased productivity generated. While the highly dynamic pelagic systems require a different management scheme to those applicable in stable terrestrial situations (Hyrenbach *et al.*, 2000), both systems share the need to protect specific sites on the basis of their importance for the biology of a particular species. Such sub-areas include breeding and nursery areas for cetaceans, feeding grounds and important migratory routes.

Concentrations of cold-water coral mounds along the continental slope to the northwest of the Porcupine Bank are coincident with areas of high cetacean abundance and species diversity. The relationship between the presence of cold-water corals and diverse cetacean species may be related to a coincidental exploitation by both cetacean and corals of the biological processes that have resulted from dynamic oceanography in areas of steep slope and strong currents. The coincident relationship may also be more simply based on an increased biodiversity in the area due to the presence of coral reefs, providing a habitat for fish and cephalopod prey species of cetaceans. In any case, the data collected by acoustic means and visual methods (*see* Vol. II), certainly indicate that the northwestern Porcupine Shelf and most of its continental slope represent an important habitat that should be the focus of further research. The information gathered in this study also indicate that this region should be effectively managed in order to guarantee the continuation of the ecosystem function at all levels.

## **NOISE AND CETACEANS IN THE IRISH ATLANTIC MARGIN**

Areas of importance for cetaceans, identified in the present study and in visual surveys (*see* Vol. II) (e.g. parts of the Porcupine Shelf, Porcupine Seabight and Rockall Bank), may be directly and indirectly affected by seismic activity, since many have also been designated for hydrocarbon exploration. Drilling noise was detected during acoustic surveys along sections of transect line through the Slyne Trough. These track-lines were devoid of cetacean detections when compared with other zones of the continental slope and shelf but there is presently not enough information to study any correlation between these results. Commercial drilling activities were also being carried out during the present study on the Porcupine Seabight, an area of relative importance for cetaceans. Airgun pulses from seismic surveys were recorded in the present study up to almost 500km away from the source, confirming the long-range propagation of these signals. This is a particular concern for deep-diving species such as sperm whales and beaked whales, which are thought to be more sensitive to acoustic pollution (Gordon *et al.*, 1998).

Ongoing research will certainly be necessary (i) to accurately determine existing and potential areas of direct and indirect impacts to cetaceans in Ireland's Atlantic Margin and (ii) to improve upon measures to mitigate against such impacts from seismic activities and other sources.

## CONCLUSION

The present study utilised acoustic survey methods for surveying cetacean populations on a large geographic scale in Irish Atlantic Margin waters for the first time. The use of acoustic methods proved highly successful in operational and informational terms. This was particularly the case where weather and light conditions did not allow visual survey methods to be used and where critical monitoring was being carried out aboard vessels producing relatively high levels of underwater noise.

Key conclusions from the study may be summarised as follows:

1. Acoustic surveys for cetaceans enhanced significantly the data collected under the overall research programme, supported many findings of cetacean research conducted by visual means and providing a platform for the improvement of survey methods in these waters.
2. The use of acoustic methods in the present study have also enhanced the potential of gathering valuable information on rare species inhabiting Ireland's Atlantic Margin, such as data on the acoustic repertoire of beaked whales, whose ecology is poorly known.
3. The relative abundance of several cetacean species, derived from acoustic survey data, appeared to be correlated in parts of Ireland's Atlantic Margin with certain physical seabed features such as the continental slope. This supported several findings determined from visual surveys for cetaceans (*see* Vol. II)
4. Cetacean acoustic behaviour, in combination with visual survey data, might provide a useful supporting indicator of the distribution of vertebrate and invertebrate prey species along Ireland's Atlantic Margin.
5. Measures for mitigating the impacts of man-made sound on cetaceans and other marine mammals occurring along Ireland's Atlantic Margin are currently adopted on a voluntary basis by seismic survey vessels. It is considered that these should be obligatory and consistent with recognised international guidelines. Future at-sea monitoring aboard seismic vessels in Irish waters should also be conducted by trained, dedicated marine mammal observers.
6. The acoustic and visual survey systems developed during the project may be used to monitor cetacean occurrence during seismic surveys and other potentially-detrimental acoustic activities in order to minimise their impact on the animals, and to assess induced changes in cetacean behaviour. Indeed it was for this purpose that some components of the hydrophone system were developed.
7. Priority research areas for the future include the furthering of knowledge of the acoustic repertoire of species of the Atlantic Margin, development of automated species identification, improved knowledge of acoustic behaviour of cetaceans in Ireland's Atlantic Margin, in particular proportion of time they are vocal, knowledge of source levels and directionality of vocalisations. An ongoing analysis of acoustic data gathered in the study should be performed. If done, estimates of the relative abundance and density of sperm whales, long-finned pilot whales and various dolphin species in the areas of Ireland's Atlantic Margin could be derived for comparison with visually-obtained data.

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*Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.*

### PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDIT

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