



CETACEAN SPECIALIST GROUP

22 September 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

I have been advised that an on-water seismic survey is about to begin in the Saramacca River, which is known to be inhabited by West Indian manatees and is, importantly, one of the few areas where these animals can be observed readily and often. It is my understanding that the work in the Saramacca will be the first stage of a wider seismic acquisition programme which will eventually include portions of the lower Coppename, where Guiana dolphins as well as manatees will be at risk.

I'm sure you know that the West Indian manatee, as a species, *Trichechus manatus*, is redlisted by IUCN as Vulnerable. The Antillean subspecies to which the manatees in Suriname belong, *T. manatus manatus*, is redlisted as Endangered because the estimated number of mature individuals throughout the subspecies' range is thought to be less than 2,500 and the population is expected ("without effective conservation actions") to decline by at least 20% over the next two generations (about 40 years) for a variety of reasons including "habitat degradation" and "human disturbance" (see <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22105/0>). Seismic surveys are certainly among the types of activities that can be expected to cause habitat degradation and disturbance to these endangered animals.

Although it is encouraging to know that the plans for this seismic survey programme include explicit consideration of the potential harm to manatees and dolphins, and measures to "monitor and mitigate" such harm, I have yet to see evidence of serious engagement with sirenologists, cetologists, and bioacousticians who could advise on the specific issue of how manatees and dolphins are likely to be affected under the conditions that prevail in the Coppename and Saramacca rivers. I am concerned that the efforts made to date may not be sufficient to ensure that the overall survey plans are as precautionary as possible, with rigorous and fully transparent monitoring so that, at the very least, the effectiveness of the monitoring and mitigation programme can be fairly evaluated. As one example of how this high standard has been met for a marine seismic survey in an area inhabited by endangered mammals, see http://www.iucn.org/wgwap/wgwap/task_forces/seismic_survey_task_force/.

I realise there is strong pressure to proceed with the work once approval has been given by the relevant local authorities, and it may seem to the operators that they have met their regulatory burden and therefore they are clear to go ahead with the surveys. However, when it comes to endangered wildlife, and particularly aquatic mammals, it is important to recognize the great interest and global concern that surrounds these animals, and therefore to ensure that the best possible advice has been obtained and appropriately precautionary measures are being taken. Based on what I have seen thus far, the planning for the aquatic seismic surveys about to begin in Suriname is "not there yet." In particular, I would encourage the operators, and the authorities responsible for overseeing this enterprise, to take more time and invest more resources in order to incorporate independent international expertise.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Randall Reeves". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Randall Reeves

Randall Reeves, Chairman
27 Chandler Lane
Hudson, Quebec
JOP 1H0 CANADA

Phone: 450 458 6685
Fax: 450 458 7383
Email: rrr Reeves@okapis.ca