

## ISRP STATEMENT ON MEDIA ACCOUNTS OF 2008 MADAGASCAR STRANDING REPORT

In response to various news releases and accounts of the ISRP stranding report on the Madagascar melon-headed whale mass stranding, the ISRP would like to make the following comments and clarifications.

1) The report clearly concludes that the use of seismic airguns several days after the whales were fully into the LaLoza lagoon system played no role as a triggering event in the stranding of those animals. This is clearly stated as one of the potential causes, with many others, that the panel ruled out as a contributing factor. There are major differences in the sound output characteristics between seismic airguns used in exploration surveys and multi-beam echosounder systems and the ISRP felt confident in ruling out the former but not the latter as potentially contributing to the stranding.

2) The ISRP was clear in emphasizing the uncertainty that exists in unequivocally concluding a cause and effect relationship between the multi-beam echosounder and the stranding. There are a number of unknown factors and several other potential contributing factors that were emphasized that limit how definitive this conclusion may be. The media reports largely do not reflect the caution that was included with the ISRP report.

3) However, the nature of this type of event, where a behavioral response may serve as the initial trigger for animals being in an out of habitat scenario in which mortality is caused by secondary factors, is inherently difficult to ever "prove." There may never be physical indicators or medical tests to indicate such a relationship may have occurred as would be the case for something like a ship strike or a disease. The approach taken in our report is to consider all of the possible contributing factors and rule out those for which there is clearly not evidence. We were unable to rule out the sonar system as contributing to this event. Given the close time and space proximity to the stranding location and its directed pattern of usage we concluded that this was the most plausible and likely initial triggering event. These conclusions and caveats related to #2 above are clearly stated in the executive summary and in the report.