

MEDIA RELEASE

Designated Corporation for Scientific Whale Research

THE INSTITUTE OF CETACEAN RESEARCH

July 13, 2026

2026 IWC/Japan Joint Cetacean Sighting Survey Cruise in the North Pacific – Departure of the IWC-POWER research vessel

1. Background

This survey is conducted jointly by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and Japan and is commonly referred to as IWC-POWER (International Whaling Commission/Pacific Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research). IWC-POWER is the successor of IWC/SOWER (International Whaling Commission Southern Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research), a successful whale research program acclaimed globally, which was conducted in the Antarctic Ocean from 1996/1997 to 2009/2010. Taking advantage of the know-how, experience and achievements of IWC/SOWER, IWC-POWER has been carried out every summer since 2010 based on the main research plan of the IWC Scientific Committee.

The surveys conducted over the past 16 years, through last year, were designated as IWC-POWER Phase I (Short-term Programme) and focused primarily on a broad area of the northeastern Pacific Ocean. During Phase I, numerous fin whales and sei whales were sighted in the Gulf of Alaska north of 40°N, an area where no large-scale cetacean sighting surveys had been conducted for several decades. In the Chukchi Sea of the Arctic Ocean, which had represented a major gap in the collection of genetic samples, a large number of biopsy samples were collected from gray whales. South of 40°N, many Bryde's whales and sperm whales were also sighted, and valuable data were obtained to support objective assessments of the abundance of these species. In addition, information on the distribution of rare species, including blue whales and North Pacific right whales, was collected. With these and many other achievements, Phase I was successfully completed.

The 17th survey cruise marks the first year of IWC-POWER Phase II (Medium- to Long-term Programme), building upon the achievements of Phase I. Based on recommendations of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG), Phase II aims to further advance objective assessments of the abundance of large whales in the North Pacific to support their effective conservation and management.

This year's survey will be conducted entirely in international waters and will cover the area between 155°W and 135°W north of 40°N, where surveys were also carried out in 2021. A total of four international researchers—two from Japan, one from the United States, and one from the Republic of Korea—will participate in the survey, which will be conducted from 17 July to 5 October.

2. Outline of the 2026 Research Cruise

The IWC-POWER program is conducted collaboratively by the IWC and the Government of Japan. The IWC Scientific Committee has developed the research program and established the IWC-POWER Steering Group (Convenor: Koji Matsuoka, ICR), which has a role of designing the research plan and analyzing the results of the cruises. The Institute of Cetacean Research, under the commission of the Fisheries Agency of Japan, carries out the IWC-POWER cruises. The outline of this year's survey plan is as follows:

2.1 Main objectives

- (1) Collection of information for the in-depth stock assessment of humpback whales and gray whales.
- (2) Collection of data on distribution and stock structure of the rare North Pacific right whale.
- (3) Collection of data on abundance and stock structure of other whale resources with insufficient resource information.
- (4) Collection of basic information, including oceanographic (sea water temperature, marine debris, etc.) necessary for the development of the medium- to long-term plan of this research program.
- (5) Collection of information from areas affected by the marine heatwave (“The Blob”, 2014–2016).

2.2 Research Cruise Period

From July 17 to October 5, 2026 (81 days)

2.3 Research Area

The survey will be conducted in the high seas between 155°W and 135°W north of 40°N (Figure 1).

The research vessel will call at the Port of Kodiak, Alaska, to embark and disembark the U.S. researcher and to load and unload survey equipment and materials.

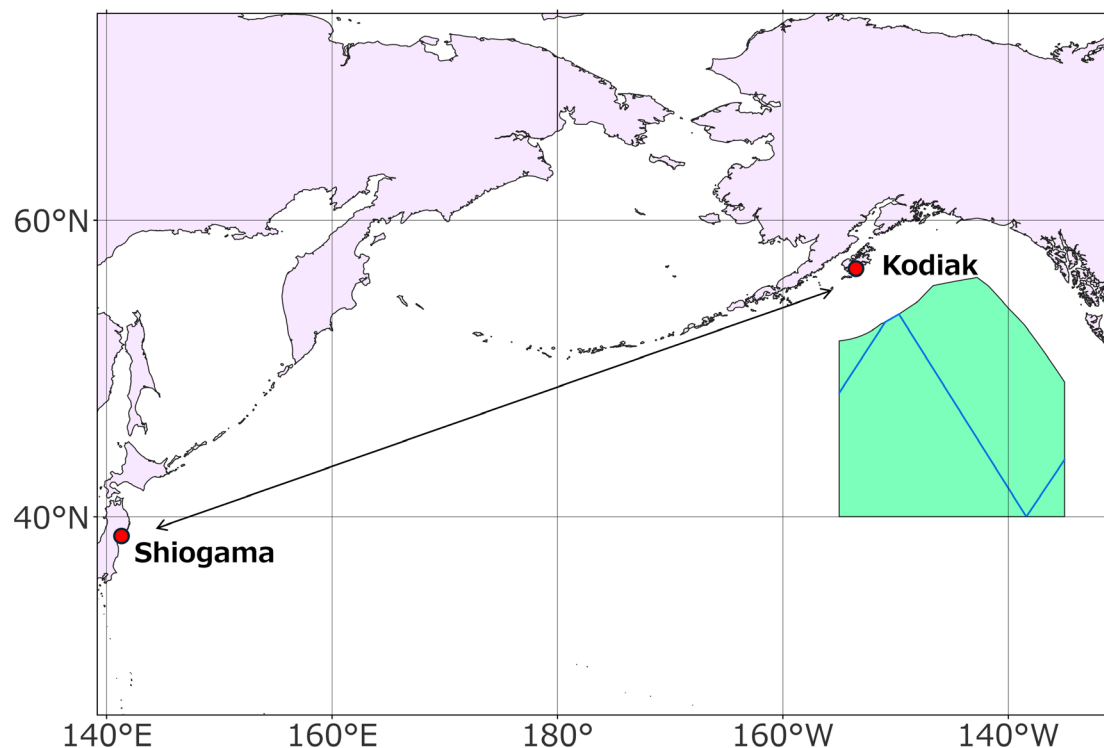


Figure 1. 2026 IWC_POWER survey area (green; high seas), survey trackline (thick blue line), and outbound and return transit routes (black-arrowed line).

2.4 International Researchers

The survey will be conducted by the following international researchers appointed by the IWC Scientific Committee.

Taiki Katsumata (Cruise leader, Institute of Cetacean Research, Japan)
Bernardo Alps (IWC-nominated international researcher, USA)
In-Woo Han (Cetacean Research Institute, National Institute of Fisheries Science,
Republic of Korea)
Hiyori Suzuki (Institute of Cetacean Research, Japan)

2.5 Research vessel

Yushin-Maru No. 2 (747 tons, Captain Shigeru Nojima, 16 crewmen).

2.6 Operating body

The Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR, Japan)

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