

SC/68A/E/05

Progress Report by the IWC Strandings
Coordinator April 2018–April 2019

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INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a progress update for the IWC Strandings Initiative from April 2018-April 2019 and details of planned upcoming work. A draft proposed workplan for 2020-2022 will be presented to the next meeting of the Scientific Committee in 2020.

INTRODUCTION

At IWC66 the Commission endorsed the recommendations of the Scientific Committee (SC) and the Whale Killing Methods and Welfare Issues Working Group (WKM&WI WG) with respect to an IWC Strandings Initiative. This included the establishment of a Strandings Expert Panel (SEP) and Strandings Co-ordinator post. In April 2018, the Secretariat, in consultation with the Strandings Steering Group (SSG) and the SEP, appointed Dr Karen Stockin for a one year 0.5 FTE position as the Stranding Co-ordinator. At IWC67 the Commission welcomed the progress made on the initiative and further endorsed the extension of the Coordinator position until October 2020. This report details progress of the Strandings Initiative and the Strandings Co-ordinator from the first year in post.

SCOPE

Key tasks and responsibilities of the Strandings Co-ordinator include leading the strategic development of the Strandings Initiative in close collaboration with the SSG, developing (in coordination with the SEP) capacity building/training programmes for emergency response to large-scale mass and/or unusual mortality events, and drafting of specific guidelines/training workshops using IWC-endorsed curricula. Additionally, the Co-ordinator convenes SEP meetings and workshops, facilitates the provision of scientific and technical advice on strandings response and training from the panel, prepares reports on progress to the SSG, SC and WKM&WI WG and pursues fundraising opportunities to support the delivery of the Strandings Initiative.

PROGRESS

- Review and update of the Strandings Initiative SEP and SSG membership.
- Co-ordination of EP in response to assistance request by Argentina for common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) mass stranding, Golfo Nuevo, Peninsula Valdes (April 2018). A funding request (£5,000) and deployment of regional expertise was approved to support post-mortem analyses relating to this incident. A final report from the primary investigator will be presented to the Scientific Committee.
- Planning and execution of joint strandings/entanglement training (in conjunction with Human Impacts Co-ordinator, Dr David Matilla) for Chile and Peru. Training was attended by 59 participants including from fisheries and other government organisations, regional universities and NGOs, and was held in Lima, Peru (Nov 2018).
- Second SEP Virtual Meeting (August 2018): Agenda items included identification of fund-raising opportunities to support Emergency Responses and Training subcommittee activities, and refinement of Terms of Reference and guidelines for Emergency Response and Training (see below); and completion

of Emergency Response (Dec 2018) and Training (Jan 2019) subcommittee meetings. New action points were raised at both subcommittees which are currently in progress.

- Finalisation for endorsement at SC68a, a strategy and protocol for handling requests received by the Secretariat for training and emergency response.
- Preliminary overview of strandings materials provided by Project Jonah (NZ) and GMAST (USA) and British Divers Marine Life Rescue (UK) to identify examples of current training materials available that can be fully reviewed and where required, extended as part of the Strandings Initiative.
- Ongoing engagement with IUCN Wildlife Health Specialist Group (IUCN-WHSG) and CITES to assist in the development of a procedure for transboundary transport of diagnostic specimens for cetacean disease investigations in emergency situations.
- Ongoing engagement with IGOs (ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS, NAMMCO, IUCN) and other external organizations (NOAA, IFAW) to identify capacity requirements and potential synergies. This included an overview of the Strandings Initiative presented at 24th ASCOBANS Advisory Committee Meeting (AC24) in Vilnius, Lithuania (September 2018).
- Engagement with intersessional work led by the UK under the WKM&WI to develop a Cetacean Welfare Assessment Tool (Jan 2019).
- Engagement with Australian State and Commonwealth Government marine mammal managers on the IWC Strandings Initiative (Mar 2019).
- Management of requests received from countries wishing to establish strandings networks, including the Jamaica's National Environment and Planning Agency and Kenyan Watamu Marine Association. These requests will be further scoped during upcoming Scientific Committee meeting in Nairobi (May 2019).
- Ongoing engagement with the SC Bycatch Inferences from Strandings Working Group (BISWG) to understand what records exist within the IWC National Reports and how these could potentially benefit current understanding of international bycatch events.
- Engagement with Asian Marine Mammal Stranding Network (AMMSN) with regards to IWC Strandings Initiative – planning underway to attend and present at a 3-day symposium to be held in Kaoshing, Taiwan (Sept 2019). The co-ordinator will present a keynote on the IWC Strandings Initiative and run a workshop on Mass Stranding Response.
- Instigation and proposal of a Global Strandings Network workshop to be held at the upcoming World Marine Mammal Conference (WMMC), Barcelona, Spain (Dec 2019). Steering group established and proposal submitted to the WMMC workshop committee for consideration.
- Engaged in Secretariat wide efforts with regards to developing an external fundraising approach for the IWC and continued fundraising efforts in support of the Strandings Initiative. Voluntary funding pledged at or soon after IWC67 included £3,935 from OceanCare, £3,832 from World Animal Protection (in support of Chile/Peru joint training), £383 from Humane Society International, £766 from the International Fund for Animal Welfare and £383 from Centro de Conservacion Cetacea. The IWC Welfare Fund provided £10,000 in support of the Chile/Peru joint training and subsequently a further £25,000 in support of strandings co-ordination, whilst a further voluntary donation of £10,000 for strandings co-ordination was received from the UK government.
- Preparation of text and images for the IWC Strandings Initiative website and other outreach material (Mar 2019).
- Co-ordination of EP in response to assistance requests relating to a long-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala melas*) mass stranding in Brenton Loch, Falkland Islands (April 2019) and True's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon mirus*) mass strandings in Tofo, Mozambique (April 2019). In both cases the EP provided guidance to local first responders on matters of welfare concern, euthanasia and scientific sampling.

UPCOMING WORK

Over the next two years, the Strandings Co-ordinator, working with the EP and SSG will:

- (I) Perform one to three in-country trainings at the request of member countries: Building capacity in stranding response and investigation.
- (II) Respond to one to three cetacean events if requested: Developing investigations, focusing on welfare issues, logistics, and diagnostics to better understand the circumstances and determine the cause(s) or contributing factor(s) for these stranding events.
- (III) Establish a repository of training and response materials (including GMAST and others) that can be assessed by the SEP, and where necessary, be presented at SC68b for SC sign off.
- (IV) Develop further materials/information dissemination via virtual meetings, workshops, or websites to include live stranding and dead animal response and investigations.
- (V) Present on welfare concerns associated with strandings and grass-roots necropsy protocols (focused on African nations) at the 50th International Association for Aquatic Animal Medicine (IAAAM), Durban (May 2019).
- (VI) Convene an in-person meeting of SEP at the World Marine Mammal Conference, Barcelona, Spain (Dec 2019).