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Update on the Whale Watching Handbook

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INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

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ABSTRACT

The Whale Watching Handbook was endorsed at IWC67 and launched in October 2018. The Handbook is an online, living resource intended to support responsible whale watching. It was developed by the IWC in collaboration with the Convention on Migratory Species, and with input from a range of scientists and governments. This paper provides an update to the Scientific Committee on the launch of the Handbook and seeks the Scientific Committee's view on future updates.

INTRODUCTION

The development of an online Whale Watching Handbook is a long-standing recommendation of both the Scientific Committee and Conservation Committee. In 2017 funding was made available for its development, through contributions to the Voluntary Conservation Fund from the UK and the USA. In addition, the Convention on Migratory Species agreed to fund the translation of the online handbook into French and Spanish.

Throughout 2017 and 2018, the Whale Watching Handbook was developed in partnership with the CMS and in collaboration with a wide range of scientists, governments and managers from around the world. Gianna Minton was contracted by the Secretariat to develop the content of the Handbook, and Chamaeleon Studios was contracted to design and develop the website. The draft online Handbook was presented to and endorsed at IWC67 in September 2018.

LAUNCH AND PROMOTION OF HANDBOOK

The Whale Watching Handbook was launched in October 2018. It is available online here: <https://wwhandbook.iwc.int/en/> Much of the content is available in three languages, with translation of the remaining content ongoing. This is a substantial undertaking and the CMS is thanked for its work in this regard.

The launch of the Handbook was publicised via the IWC website, news bulletin and new Twitter feed, and via press releases issued jointly with CMS. Tailored versions of the press release targeted specialist travel trade, conservation publications, mainstream and local news media. Member governments were also asked to circulate the press releases using their own national media networks.

The Secretariat approached other inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, international and national travel trade associations and travel companies (including UN World Tourism Organisation, Association of British Travel Agents, Expedia, Wanderlust) seeking inclusion of the Handbook in any sustainable tourism initiatives.

A Powerpoint introduction to the Handbook was developed and the Secretariat continues to seek relevant opportunities to present the Handbook. To date the Handbook has been promoted at events including at the 2018 Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (IWC Secretariat); a capacity-building partnership event at the UN Headquarters in New York (Miguel Iñiguez); the 5th International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas (Gianna Minton and Jorge Urban); and the international Cambridge Student Conference for Conservation Science (IWC Secretariat). The first newsletter of the whale watching network of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) will be circulated soon and features an article on the WW Handbook. A promotional poster and bookmarks have also been produced as part of this effort.

The impact of this outreach is assessed by the number of hits on the Handbook website. In the first four months the Handbook received nearly 31,000 page visits from over 10,000 separate visits, from 160 countries. The average time spent on the site was 4 minutes with 4.2 actions performed (e.g. separate page views, downloads, internal searches). So far, the most frequently visited pages relate to species information and downloadable species factsheets. Anecdotally, we are aware that these particular pages are being used by a number of whale watching companies in very different locations around the world.

FUTURE UPDATES

The Handbook is intended to be a living resource, and will be updated annually, subject to funds. Since the launch of the Handbook, the Secretariat has been responding to feedback from Governments and others, and new requests for information to be included in the Handbook. Updates have been made as appropriate. In addition, the Secretariat has been liaising with the CMS translators and adding Spanish and French translations versions as they become available. However, Secretariat capacity to keep the Handbook updated is very stretched, and there is a

need for a contractor to handle outstanding feedback and translations, incorporate feedback from the Scientific Committee, develop additional desired content on industry, and develop new case studies and country profiles.

As agreed at IWC67, an application will be submitted to the Voluntary Conservation Fund for this additional work to be conducted through a small contract for Gianna Minton, who was previously contracted to work on the Handbook, and identified through an open and competitive tendering process. It is hoped the contract will be agreed in the summer of 2019, allowing Minton to develop new content, respond to comments received and incorporate Scientific Committee feedback.

QUESTIONS FOR THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

The Scientific Committee is requested to provide:

- Suggestions for updates to the current content of the Handbook
- Suggestions for potential new case studies and country profiles for inclusion in the Handbook
- Updates to the literature on whale watching, either missing from the current searchable table of literature or published since May 2018
- Suggestions for additional content to support industry stakeholders using the Handbook.