

# IWC/MAY19/BMI/01

---

## IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative- Background Context for Workshop

Marguerite Tarzia



INTERNATIONAL  
WHALING COMMISSION

# International Whaling Commission's Bycatch Mitigation Initiative- BMI

## Background context for Bycatch Workshop

Bycatch - the accidental capture and entanglement of non-target species in fisheries- is a global conservation and fisheries management issue. Bycatch threatens the survival of several cetacean populations and species<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, it is widely recognized that bycatch is likely to occur in all areas where cetacean distribution and fisheries overlap<sup>2</sup>. Yet efforts to accurately estimate the scope and scale of this threat, and subsequently to implement mitigation measures, are hindered by a lack of information from a number of regions where anecdotal evidence suggests that bycatch may be occurring<sup>2,3</sup>. This is true for many fisheries in the Western and Northern Indian Ocean, where artisanal and commercial fleets use gears, such as gill nets, that are associated with high bycatch rates, but very little data are available to assess the rate of cetacean bycatch and its population level impacts<sup>3,4</sup>.

The International Whaling Commission's (IWC) Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI), aims to work collaboratively with governments, renowned experts and other organisations at a global and regional level to address the threat that bycatch poses to cetaceans. [A two-year work plan](#) and [10-year strategy](#) for the initiative were endorsed at the IWC's 2018 Commission meeting, and will be implemented by the Initiative's Bycatch Coordinator, a Standing Working Group (SWG), and an [Expert Panel](#), composed of multidisciplinary experts from around the world.

The initiative will initially focus on building the necessary expertise and tools to be able to offer support to IWC member, and non-member countries in addressing their bycatch challenges. It will prioritise artisanal and coastal gillnet fisheries, which are recognized to cause high levels of bycatch in many parts of the world<sup>2,5</sup>, but are notoriously difficult to monitor, and for which few mitigation solutions have been successfully tested and proven effective<sup>6</sup>.

In order to build up the expertise and knowledge base of the initiative, a key area will be collaborating with governments, scientists and fishing communities to work 'on the ground' in **Pilot Projects**. Provided that the BMI has the buy-in from governments and the fishing community, and all those in between, these projects will help us trial both experimental approaches and techniques that have worked elsewhere. Pilot projects will aim to tackle a local bycatch problem- whether that includes quantifying bycatch, monitoring the problem, or developing technical or social solutions that work for both conservation and fishing communities. Successful pilot projects will make progress towards tackling a cetacean bycatch problem at a local or national level, but will also be useful, globally, in informing approaches in other locations and countries.

The BMI has identified the Western and Northern Indian Ocean as a region to prioritise given the growing body of literature which identifies that significant bycatch is occurring across different fisheries and countries within the region. The workshop 'Bycatch mitigation opportunities in the Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea' therefore has a major objective of identifying potential collaborations and potential locations and fisheries where pilot projects could be developed. Once a location has been identified and approved by the relevant national government the BMI would work to build a collaborative project with both local stakeholders and other experts and organisations, including to secure the necessary funds to make the project a reality.

Further information on the BMI's general focus, the two year workplan and pilot projects in particular will be presented during the workshop. Alternatively, please contact the IWC Bycatch Coordinator Marguerite Tarzia ([marguerite.tarzia@iwc.int](mailto:marguerite.tarzia@iwc.int))

---

<sup>1</sup> Reeves, R.R., Berggren, P., Crespo, E.A., Gales, N., Northridge, S.P., Di Sciara, G.N., Perrin, W.F., Read, A.J., Rogan, E., Smith, B.D., Van Waerebeek, K., 2004. Global priorities for reduction of cetacean bycatch. Scientific Committee document SC/56/BC2, International Whaling Commission, July 2004, Sorrento, Italy.; & Read, A.J., 2008. The Looming Crisis: Interactions between Marine Mammals and Fisheries. J Mammal 89, 541–548. & Reeves, R., McClellan, K., Werner, T., 2013. Marine mammal bycatch in gillnet and other entangling net fisheries, 1990 to 2011. Endangered Species Research 20, 71–97.; & Thomas, P.O., Reeves, R.R., Brownell, R.L., 2016. Status of the world's baleen whales. Marine Mammal Science 32, 682–734. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mms.12281>