

# A review of the progress made further to the 2012 IWC scientific committee workshop on interactions between marine renewable projects and cetaceans worldwide.

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## ABSTRACT

*Participants in the 2012 marine renewables workshop were asked to reply to a simple survey about the workshop a year after the event. Most respondents had found the workshop useful on a personal level but some were concerned that it was difficult to find and cite the workshop report and that this may affect how it is used. There is no evidence that the workshop report has been cited anywhere yet. These observations raise questions about how IWC workshop reports might best be made public and whether their accessibility can be improved.*

Key words: Climate change, habitat, conservation, renewables.

## INTRODUCTION

The Scientific Committee of the IWC has over the last few decades developed research programmes and workshops on environmental subjects. Recently it started to consider marine renewable energy developments noting that they are increasing rapidly worldwide and that baseline data on the impact of interactions with cetaceans are lacking. A workshop was duly convened - on interactions between marine renewable projects and cetaceans worldwide – and met at the El Panama Hotel, Panama City, Panama June 8-10, 2012 (IWC, 2012a).

This workshop aimed to identify research needs and formulate recommendations for research, monitoring, conservation and management. The workshop report produced by the 29 duly reviewed the available information and provided a series of recommendations covering primarily the following areas:

- **Strategy to minimise risk**, including that suitable scientific evaluation and compliance mechanisms are needed to ensure that mitigation and monitoring are adequate;
- **Broad management issues**, including noting that uncertainties over the level of impacts;
- **“Fundamental” research**, including that the Scientific Committee could assist with design and evaluation of population and impact assessments;
- **Evaluation of threats**, including the need to take into account the cumulative impacts from all threats and noting that the Scientific Committee has considerable expertise in developing management frameworks and testing their performance against specified targets;
- **Monitoring**, noting the need to assess impacts against pre-determined conservation objectives; and
- **Data sharing and the future role of the IWC Scientific Committee in the consideration of MREDs**, including encouragement from the workshop to the Committee to continue to act as a forum to review the development of MREDs and their implications.

The meeting of the Scientific Committee that followed endorsed all the workshop’s recommendations (IWC, 2012b).

In order to start to assess how the workshop report, which also contained, significant background information, was being received and used by the community addressing marine renewable developments, we surveyed the scientists who were involved in the 2012 workshop and asked them to answer some questions (repeated below).

We also conducted online surveys to see if we could find any citations of the workshop report.

## RESULTS

Questions and responses are given sequentially below. Responses were received from 8 with 6 replying to most questions.

### 1. Are you aware of any of the recommendations from the workshop or indeed the report itself being used to influence policy, practices or procedures in the marine renewable sector?

Three participants replied 'no'; one 'yes' (but gave no details); and one commented that copies of the workshop report had made their way into the hands of US government and NGO people working on renewables but added that it was still too early to tell if they were having any influence.

### 2. Have you used the report and its recommendations in your work (for example have you cited it) and if you have please provide details?

Two said 'no'. One said that he has used it in discussions in the Netherlands to highlight but only that this issue was on the international agenda. One reported that she had used it to help with a presentation for her institute to inform ongoing developments and had also distributed it to colleagues. Similarly, another participant reported that he had used the report at a recent meeting of the Scottish Marine Renewables Research Group to illustrate that others outside of the Scottish Government would be interested in hearing about reports of 'renewables-related entangled whales (if they ever come in)'. He also mentioned the workshop at the BOEM wave/wind planning meeting in Oregon in November 2012. Finally, another noted that the report had made her aware of the usefulness of having a noise standard for pile-driving, as in Germany and that this might be applied to other noise sources.

### 3. Generally, did you find the workshop useful?

Seven out of seven that replied to this question said 'yes' and one of these said 'very useful'. Three indicated that they had learned a lot and one noted that it had generated new professional contacts for her.

### 4. Did it influence and/or inform your view of the development of marine renewables?

Five of the six that replied to this question this gave an affirmative response and the sixth noted he had made the issue a priority theme for a scientific congress he was organising.

### 5. Was the workshop of an appropriate length and depth?

Four replied positively. One said 'in principle yes [but] it could have benefitted from more industry participation'. And the final participant to answer this question said 'probably'.

### 6. What might we have done better?

One said 'not much'; a second he did not know; a third had found the venue uncomfortable; and a fourth had had problems accessing the report of the meeting noting that she could not download it or find a link that could be sent to others. This last issue was also picked up by three other participants in subsequent correspondence.

In addition, one participant commented that 'pre-meeting file distribution would have smoothed much out – as would have working internet connection (for file depository and recovery). But these are minor things.' One participant criticised the report for being 'too vague' and noted she would have liked to have preferred to see something innovative and new with 'outside of the box' thinking and solutions'.

## OTHER OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Whilst we did not get many replies to survey and it is only a year since the workshop was held, so any conclusions here can only be very preliminary, some of the insights from participants may be helpful to the how future workshops are conducted and their reports developed.

We concur with the respondents that the workshop report was difficult to find once the workshop was finished, despite being on the IWC website and listed under Scientific Committee number (i.e. SC/64/Rep6 Rev1). In our experience, general searches of the web fail to find the report (at the time of writing searches tend to lead to the documents submitted to the pre-meeting workshop rather than to the report of the workshop itself); it can only be found when searching specifically for the report by title. Currently there is no evidence that the report has been cited anywhere.

It may therefore in the future be helpful to give the workshop reports more prominence on the IWC website or find some other way that search engines can see them.

It is gratifying that the participants themselves found the workshop useful but, with some exceptions where participants have forwarded its recommendations themselves, its recommendations seem unlikely to have been widely read. This would include the call for more information on this topic to be submitted to the Scientific Committee, as there is not a single submission on this topic this year<sup>1</sup>.

We think that this is probably the first time that anyone has tried to review the effectiveness of an IWC Scientific Committee workshop and whilst our approach was only a simple one, we suggest that similar follow-ups to other workshops may be useful in the future.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many thanks to those who replied to our request for comments and to those who attended the 2012 workshop.

#### **REFERENCES**

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<sup>1</sup> Scientific committee website last viewed 27/5/2012.