

IWC Conservation Management Plans and Scientific Committee advice; guidance for sub-groups

THE CONVENORS

1 INTRODUCTION

Conservation management plans and their role in the Commission and Committee's work was first discussed by the Scientific Committee in 2008 (IWC, 2009).

A key component of Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) is that they provide a framework for international collaboration to address threats to populations that occur within the waters of more than one country and on the high seas i.e. they are complementary to national initiatives alone. The Conservation Committee has drawn up CMP Guidelines in order to: (a) assist countries wishing to develop their own CMPs and (b) assist the determination of conservation priorities for the implementation of CMPs that would be supported by the IWC. These can be found in IWC/63/CC5 and were endorsed by the Commission at IWC/64.

The Committee has been involved with the scientific aspects of the development of three draft CMPs thus far: western gray whales (with IUCN); Southeastern Atlantic right whales; and Southeast Pacific right whales. It has also suggested that work be undertaken in conjunction with relevant range states to consider Arabian Sea humpback whales as a candidate CMP – this work is ongoing. The Commission has asked the Committee to draw up a priority list of possible candidates for future CMPs; this will form an important part of our advice to the Commission this year and will initially be discussed within individual sub-groups. The focus at this meeting will be on large whales. Clearly, developing priority lists for small cetaceans will be much more complex and we need to give thought to how that might be done in the future. Similarly, this Committee and the Conservation Committee will need to give consideration as to how to CMPs might interact with other efforts such as that of the Convention on Biological Diversity for defining 'Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs)'.

2 CRITERIA FOR PRIORITISATION

The Commission has identified some key components of CMPs (e.g. see IWC/63/CC5). These are summarised below.

- (1) The focus should be on practical and achievable actions (including protection for critical habitats) that have the greatest chance of resulting in improved conservation status; actions fall broadly under a number of headings (co-ordination, research, monitoring, public awareness, mitigation) all of which must be driven by the need for positive conservation outcomes.
- (2) CMPs are living documents that are to be reviewed periodically against measureable milestones based on monitoring, assessment, and compliance with agreed measures.
- (3) CMPs are designed to complement existing measures (e.g. national recovery plans or other national or regionally agreed measures) not to replace them; in particular they can fill identified gaps given the geographical and seasonal range of the populations involved. IWC involvement can *inter alia* bring in additional range state support, the involvement of other IGOs and scientific/technical expertise.

With these components in mind, the Committee has been asked to present the Commission with a list of priority candidates for future CMPs, recognising that CMP proposals will need the support of range states and a wide range of stakeholders. To assist in drawing up such a list, the Convenors have drawn up the following criteria to assist discussions. Suggestions from sub-groups will be collated and discussed by the full Committee during the Plenary sessions.

A population that meets at least one of the following criteria might be considered as a candidate:

- (1) population status (i.e. knowledge of where the population is now in relation to its unexploited abundance, with an estimate of future trend) has been assessed and is of concern, and actual or likely human activities that can negatively impact the population have been identified;
- (2) population status has not been assessed but human impacts are believed to be substantial and thus of concern;
- (3) present abundance is known and actual or likely human activities that can negatively impact the population have been identified;
- (4) present abundance and trend are not well known but abundance is believed to be small such that any adverse impacts as a result of human activity may be critical.

We have not tried to develop a quantitative guideline for ‘concern’ here, given the different levels of information that may be available; initially, levels of ‘concern’ can perhaps be left to each sub-group to decide and then the Committee as a whole can decide when discussing the overall prioritisation of those considered candidates. While at this stage the Scientific Committee is not being asked to draw up a detailed application for consideration for an IWC CMP (as noted in IWC/63/CC5, this requires collaboration amongst range states and stakeholders), the priority list should briefly outline the rationale for inclusion in terms of knowledge of the population and actual or likely threats, and, if known, potential mitigation measures or research gaps. Where known, it would also be appropriate to identify any research/monitoring gaps of *conservation* priority.

Example summary template:

Population	Abundance	% unexploited	Trend	Range states	Known/likely threats	Information gaps
Arabian Sea Humpback	Believed to be 82 individuals in 2004 (95% CI 60-111) based on dorsal fin and fluke photo identifications	Unknown	Unknown	Oman, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, (occasional sightings Iran, Iraq)	Entanglement, ship strikes, pollution	Abundance and trends; bycatch and ship strike numbers; full range