

SC/68B/E/08

Update on Progress of the IWC Strandings Initiative 2019-2020

IWC Secretariat



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

Update on Progress of the IWC Strandings Initiative

May 2019 – May 2020

IWC SECRETARIAT

ABSTRACT

This paper provides a progress update for the IWC Strandings Initiative from May 2019 - May 2020 and details of planned upcoming work. A draft new four-year workplan is currently being developed and will be presented to the next meeting of the Scientific Committee in 2021. In addition, work is underway to explore the relationship between the IWC Strandings Initiative and the “Global Strandings Network” which was an outcome of a workshop at the World Marine Mammal Conference in December 2019 and the “Barcelona resolution”. Recommendations on this will also be presented at the next meeting. In addition, an update is given on Strandings Initiative funding. The Scientific Committee is invited to note this update and comment on questions posed below.

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. Dr Karen Stockin held this position from April 2018 until December 2019 when she departed to take up a 5 year Royal Society of New Zealand Rutherford Discovery Fellowship to investigate strandings response. Stockin remains a valued member of the Strandings Expert Panel.

At its last meeting (SC68a) in May 2019 the Scientific Committee welcomed progress under the Strandings Initiative and encouraged continued support of the initiative, including funding for the co-ordinator post. It endorsed the use of a matrix for prioritization of training requests (subject to further revision as necessary), and encouraged further consideration of development of training materials.

PROGRESS

Progress since May 2019 has included:

- Expert Panel remote “real time” response to assistance and advice requests associated with stranding events including an attempted stranded blue whale necropsy in Costa Rica; killer whales’ pod in Genova Port (Italy) and Haifa Port (Israel) (live animals) and Lebanon (field necropsy); a short finned whale and stranded pygmy whale in Taiwan (two separate incidents); humpback whale euthanasia in Namibia; entrapped killer whales in Norway; strandings investigation in Kenya and Mozambique; and an Arnoux’s beaked whale in New Zealand. Provision of advice from the Expert Panel was facilitated using e mail correspondence, the Expert Panel “What’s app group” and one to one assistance by cell phone.
- Engagement with Asian Marine Mammal Stranding Network (AMMSN)– the strandings co-ordinator participated in a 3-day symposium in Kaoshing, Taiwan (Sept 2019), presented a keynote on the IWC Strandings Initiative and ran a workshop on Mass Stranding Response.
- The Strandings Co-ordinator contributed to IAAAM/IFAW Necropsy Training at the International Association for Aquatic Medicine (IAAM) Conference in May 2019 in Durban, South Africa.
- In collaboration with U.S. Marine Mammal Commissioner Dr Frances Gulland and a steering group with representation from NOAA, IFAW, the University of Padua, SeaAlarm and the University of California, Davis the IWC strandings co-ordinator organized a Global Strandings Network workshop at the World Marine Mammal Conference (WMMC), Barcelona, Spain (Dec 2019). Funding generously provided by IFAW, NOAA and Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) funded participation of developing country participants in the workshop and the main conference. The report of this meeting is available at <https://www.europeancetaceansociety.eu/ecs-special-publication-series-overview>
- The above workshop led to a proposal for a “Global Stranding Network”, intended as a forum for collaboration to enhance response to stranded marine mammals (including cetaceans, pinnipeds, sirenian and otters) globally, to integrate efforts by organizations involved in international strandings response. The webdomain www.globalstrandingnetwork.org has since been acquired for use as a communication tool and a venue to share existing training materials and protocols. The IWC is engaged in this initiative through members of its Expert Panel and scoping work to develop a new four-year workplan for the IWC strandings initiative (see below) will

identify how the IWC Strandings Initiative should continue to engage with and add value to this new network. Recommendations on this will be presented to the next Scientific Committee meeting in May 2021.

- An informal meeting of the EP took place in the margins of WMMC in Barcelona and several discussions are ongoing, including on the scope of IWC training and emergency response funding, which will feed into development of the new workplan.
- 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 input to development of the *Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Best practice on cetacean post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling*, as well as updates on the IWC Strandings Initiative being provided to various meetings. Consultations with other organisations will be part of the process to develop the new four-year workplan, in order to identify opportunities for collaboration.
- The strandings co-ordinator engaged in Secretariat wide efforts to develop an external fundraising approach for the IWC and continued fundraising efforts in support of the Strandings Initiative. This included preparation of a concept note on the IWC Strandings Initiative as an aide to fundraising. More progress on fundraising will be needed for appointment of a new strandings co-ordinator and implementation of the programme of work (see below).
- Ongoing contribution of text and images for the IWC Strandings Initiative website and other outreach material.

STRANDINGS EXPERT PANEL AND STEERING GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Recommendations on the governance of the Strandings Initiative – including its Expert Panel and Strandings Steering Group will be made once the workplan has been developed. (for current membership see Annex 1). In the meantime, the Expert Panel proposes to address gaps in their panel membership by adding new members from Africa, Indian Ocean and the South Pacific. Nominations will be sought from existing panel members and members of the Strandings Steering Group and the Chair of the Expert Panel will make the final decision in consultation with these groups.

DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW FOUR YEAR WORKPLAN

Following departure of the Strandings Co-ordinator in December 2019 it was decided to engage a consultant to undertake some key tasks for the IWC in the lead up to the next Commission meeting (IWC68). Dr Andrew Brownlow (Scotland's Rural College) has been engaged as a strandings consultant until September 2020 to deliver these tasks including:

- i. Development of a new four-year costed work programme for the Strandings Initiative, undertaking all necessary consultations for development of the work plan including a review of progress of the initiative so far and lessons learnt.
- ii. Engage with and contribute to discussions of the Global Strandings Network for all marine mammal species initiated at the World Marine Mammal Conference 2019 in Barcelona, particularly with a view to identifying the implications for the IWC Strandings Initiative four-year work programme.
- iii. Undertake dialogue with the most relevant international organisations (e.g. ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS, CMS, CITES, IUCN Wildlife Health Specialist Group, OIE) to explore synergies with the work of the IWC and help to determine the best role of the IWC to be articulated through the new four-year work programme.
- iv. Work with the IWC Secretariat and Expert Panel to identify fundraising opportunities for the four-year work programme and to provide a concise fundraising strategy document.

The consultant will also provide some temporary co-ordination (as needed) for the Expert Panel for queries relating to discussion of training requests and its provision of emergency response advice.

An update from the strandings consultant will be presented to the Environmental Concerns Sub-Committee for discussion. The Committee is invited to discuss how it can engage with the development of the workplan as this proceeds intersessionally. One potential option is for interested members of the Committee and Contracting Governments (not already represented on either the Expert Panel or Strandings Steering Group) to join the Steering Group.

STRANDINGS INITIATIVE FUNDING

The Scientific Committee budget for 2019-20 included an allocation of £9,000 (£4,500 in 2019 and £4,500 in 2020) for strandings emergency response¹ and, due to no eligible funding assistance requests being received this remains unspent. The Scientific Committee may wish to agree that this funding is carried over to the next biennium to support strandings emergency response, or more generally to support implementation of the strandings initiative workplan. Further detail on use of this funding, or any proposal for change in use (following development of the new work programme) would then be provided to the Committee at its next meeting.

The new four year workplan will be a costed workplan setting out costs of appointment of a strandings coordinator and implementation of the four year work plan.

QUESTIONS FOR THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

The Scientific Committee is invited to take note on this update and provide any comments, in particular to:

- Provide any comments relevant to the development of the new strandings workplan and in response to the report from the consultant.
- Provide advice on how the Committee can best engage with the development of the new strandings workplan as it proceeds intersessionally,
- Approve proposal for expansion in membership of the Strandings Expert Panel to address geographic gaps.
- Make recommendations on carry over of SC funding for strandings to the next biennium budget.

¹ This funding was allocated for “*travel for strandings response, logistics, and diagnostics to better understand the circumstances and determine the cause(s) or contributing factor(s) for the strandings events and/or mitigate welfare concerns*”. The items for which funding requests would be considered eligible include (i) emergency travel to regional expert assistant or advisor to attend event if needed (ii) provide financial assistance for response, diagnostics/analyses and logistics to determine the cause(s) or contributory factor(s) (iii) provide financial assistance for basic response and biological sample collection/analyses to inform high priority data gaps.

ANNEX 1

MEMBERSHIP OF THE EXPERT PANEL AND STRANDINGS STEERINGS GROUPS

Strandings Expert Panel

Sandro Mazzariol, Italy (Chair)
Nantarika Chansue, Thailand
Rob Deaville, UK
Daren Grover, New Zealand
Frances Gulland, USA
Gaby Hernandez, Costa Rica
Patricia Holm, Convenor Environmental Concerns Subcommittee IWC SC
David Mattila, IWC Secretariat Human Impacts Technical Advisor
Milton Marcondes, Brazil
Michael Meyer, South Africa
Katie Moore, USA
Lindsay Porter, Hong Kong
Teri Rowles, USA
Ursula Siebert, Germany
Raphaella Stimmelmayer, USA
Marcy Uhart, Argentina
Aviad Scheinin, Israel
Karen Stockin, New Zealand

Strandings Steering Group²

Bob Brownell, USA
Silvia Frey, Oceancare
Rosie Carpenter, UK
Rob Deaville, SC and EP
Frances Gulland, SC and EP
Helena Herr, SC
Milton Marcondes, SC and EP
Sandro Mazzariol, Chair of Strandings Expert Panel
Herman Oosthuizen, Chair of the Whale Killing Methods and Welfare Issues Working Group
Mduduzi Seakamela, South Africa
Jenny Renell, ASCOBANS
Rojas Bracho, Mexico, Chair of Conservation Committee
Teri Rowles, SC and EP
Mark Simmonds, SC
Sarah Smith, IWC Secretariat
Raphaella Stimmelmayer, SC and EP
Robert Suydam, Chair of Scientific Committee
Tonya Wimmer, SC

² This list indicates members of the steering group and whether they are representatives of the Scientific Committee (SC) and Strandings Expert Panel, Chairs of IWC subcommittees or members nominated by an IWC Contracting Government (country indicated) or Accredited Observer organisations.