

SC/68B/WW/03

Update on IWC 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 Handbook and seeks comments from the Scientific Committee on new Handbook content and on a draft editorial protocol for the Handbook.

INTRODUCTION

The content and website for the IWC online Whale Watching Handbook were developed throughout 2017 and 2018, with funding through the Voluntary Conservation Fund from the UK and USA and in collaboration with the Convention on Migratory Species, which agreed to fund the translation of handbook content into French and Spanish. Gianna Minton was contracted by the Secretariat to develop the content of the Handbook, and Chameleon Studios was contracted to design and develop the website. The online Handbook was endorsed at IWC67 in September 2018.

At its last meeting the Scientific Committee received an update on the launch of the Handbook and was asked for its views on future updates. The Committee warmly welcomed the progress of the Handbook and made some suggestions for new content and discussed some locations of concern and Handbook promotion. The Committee made recommendations with regard to Scientific Committee input into new Handbook content, and the development of an editorial protocol for managing Handbook content.

Since September 2019 Gianna Minton has been contracted to develop and manage content for the Handbook with a mandate to:

- in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, draft 3-5 new country profiles for the handbook;
- in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, draft 3-5 new case studies for the handbook;
- Investigate whether content for industry could be improved or elaborated;
- Update existing content (particularly the searchable table of literature) based on new information from the Scientific Committee; and
- Where possible, assist with the management and uploading of pending translations.

EDITORIAL PROTOCOL

Following discussions at SC68a a draft Editorial Protocol (Annex 1) for managing Handbook content has been developed by the Secretariat, with input from the Conservation Committee's Whale Watching Standing Working Group (SWG). This sets out the process and responsibilities for identifying, developing and sign off of new content and other updates, including for input by the Scientific Committee. Taking into account comments from the Scientific Committee, the protocol will be finalised and submitted to the Conservation Committee at IWC68 for endorsement. It has already been used to guide the drafting of new content for the handbook, which will be reviewed and approved according to the proposed protocol.

NEW HANDBOOK CONTENT

Country profiles and case studies

Following SC68a, a list of potential new case studies and country profiles was compiled by Minton based on suggestions from SC WW subcommittee members as well as various IWC or CMS contracting governments, and refined with the Whale Watching SWG. Minton has worked with Government representatives and various other experts to produce five new country profiles (Canada, Dominica, Ecuador, Greenland and Maldives) and three new Case Studies (on ACCOBAMS High Quality Whale Watching, San Ignacio Lagoon, Mexico and practical aspects of enforcement of WW regulations). This new content is made available in a separate working paper. One more country profile (Chile) will be produced under Minton's current contract.

Content for industry

Various discussions with industry representatives regarding the Handbook content for industry drew the conclusion that the existing industry content for the Handbook was largely appropriate, with no suggestions for new ‘feature’ content. However, a few suggestions were made regarding additional resources and links to add to the ‘downloadable resources’ section of the site, including the development of a new page with specific content for whale watching guides and educators. Minton has assembled a compilation of links to external websites and resources that may be of interest to guides. A modest addition was made to Minton’s contract for the production of a series of factsheets in a series of topics of interest to whale watching customers that can be printed and laminated or displayed on a tablet. These new products are also available for review in a separate working paper.

Searchable table of literature

The Handbook’s [searchable table of literature](#) has been updated with new information provided by the Scientific Committee at IWC68a and papers published since May 2018. A further update will be undertaken after the SC meeting.

HANDBOOK PROMOTION

Analysis of Handbook use from its launch in 2018 to March 2020 shows that visitor numbers are climbing slowly and now average 156 individual visitors per day. Whilst the Handbook has been accessed by people in 205 countries, the majority (66%) of visitors use the English language section rather than the French or Spanish pages. The current outreach plan has three main aims: to identify key opportunities to raise awareness of the Handbook within specific audience sectors, (for example when new content is published); to generate a regular flow of information about the Handbook on social media; and to increase awareness of the French and Spanish language sections.

A ‘Species of the Week’ feature was launched in April using the IWC website and Twitter feed, with simple quiz questions, the answers to which can be found on the relevant species page of the Handbook. In recognition of the unique home-schooling arrangements in place in many countries at the moment, a children’s artwork competition is part of Species of the Week. Other aspects of the outreach plan will be rolled out in due course. A promotional banner has also been created for use at conferences, exhibitions and lectures.

QUESTIONS FOR THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

The Scientific Committee is asked to provide:

- Comments on the draft editorial protocol for managing handbook content.
- Comments on the new Country Profiles and Case Studies and the factsheets for whale watching guides.
- Updates to the literature on whale watching, either missing from the current searchable table of literature or published since May 2019.

Annex 1

Draft Editorial Protocol for updating the Whale Watching Handbook

General Principles

The Whale Watching Handbook is designed to support managers, regulators, operators and anyone interested in whale watching. It is a flexible and evolving tool incorporating international best practice, educational resources and a summary of the latest, relevant scientific information.

The Handbook meets these principles by ensuring robust information, recorded factually and neutrally.

Wherever possible, images are incorporated onto web pages, to support the text and enhance presentation.

Practical Guidance

The Secretariat is responsible for overseeing, maintaining, developing and updating the Watching Handbook in line with the principles above and the process below. The IWC works in partnership with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) who generously provide translation of the Handbook into French and Spanish.

Additional categories of content to be included will be identified in consultation with the Whale Watching Standing Working Group of the Conservation Committee and/or the Whale Watching Sub-Committee of the Scientific Committee.

Content is developed by national governments, local specialists, the IWC Secretariat and its contractor(s), and members of its Scientific Committee and Conservation Committees. The following principles apply:

- Case studies – All case studies will be signed off by the Commissioner of the country in question. Subsequent edits will also be signed off by the Commissioner, in consultation with any earlier contributors as appropriate.
- Country profiles – all country profiles will be developed by the IWC Commissioner for that country or designated alternatives, or by the Secretariat in collaboration with the IWC Commissioner/designated alternates. All country profiles, and subsequent edits, will be signed off by the Commissioner of the country in question.
- Species accounts - all will be reviewed by at least one external expert and internally in the Secretariat.
- All other pages – will be reviewed by the Secretariat and reviewers with relevant expertise.

All pages will be edited by the Secretariat to ensure coherence of style and format across the site as a whole.

The Scientific Committee

The Secretariat will provide an update to the Scientific Committee on modifications made to the WW Handbook content and seek feedback and suggestions for future updates. The Secretariat will also consult intersessionally as appropriate.

Role of the Conservation Committee

The Secretariat will provide an update to the Conservation Committee on modifications made to the WW Handbook content and seek feedback and suggestions for future updates. The Secretariat will also consult intersessionally as appropriate.

Convention on Migratory Species

The IWC and CMS are working in partnership on the Handbook. The CMS Secretariat will seek feedback as appropriate from its members on the Handbook. CMS Contracting Governments may also submit country profiles, for inclusion in the Handbook. This may include CMS members that are not members of the IWC.