

IWC/MAY18/CCPG/14

Report from the Voluntary Conservation Fund Steering Group (VCF-SG)

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Steering Group



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

Voluntary Conservation Fund Steering Group (VCF-SG)

Submitted by the Chair of the VCF-SG

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Background

The Intersessional Correspondence Group on Strengthening IWC Financing (ICGSF) recommended the establishment of the VCF and a Steering Group for the fund in 2014. The fund has subsequently received a number of donations, some of which have been allocated to support work on bycatch, whale watching and the development of a database of conservation recommendations. The VCF can receive funds that are earmarked for specific projects or that are put into the VCF to support projects in the agreed categories overseen by the Steering Group.

As of 31/12/2017, the balance of the VCF is £186,650, of which just over **£100,000** remains unallocated.

Intersessional activity

A discussion paper was circulated to the group in April 2018 (annex B) proposing a possible process for allocating funds from the VCF and a set of evaluation criteria to be used when assessing funding proposals. Comments were received and discussions are ongoing.

Allocation Process

There is not currently a detailed formal process for allocation of funds from the VCF. An example of recent practice involved the Steering Group agreeing, in 2017, to fund projects on whale watching and bycatch to implement recommendations endorsed at IWC66. Most of the money allocated had been earmarked by the donors for these topics.

In order to enhance the clarity of the process, the VCF-SG is developing a process which ensures rigorous, transparent decision making, while also providing some flexibility around how decisions are made.

A proposed process can be found in annex A. Please note that the process assumes that the Commission has endorsed both the costed proposals and/or work/strategic plans brought to the CC meeting. Where possible, work plans will include detail of funding requests to be worked up intersessionally, but only in the context of having well-defined, robust delegated authorities (e.g. VCF-SG, F&A Committee) who will then report activities in line with the Rules of Procedure and the Commission mandate.

Evaluation criteria:

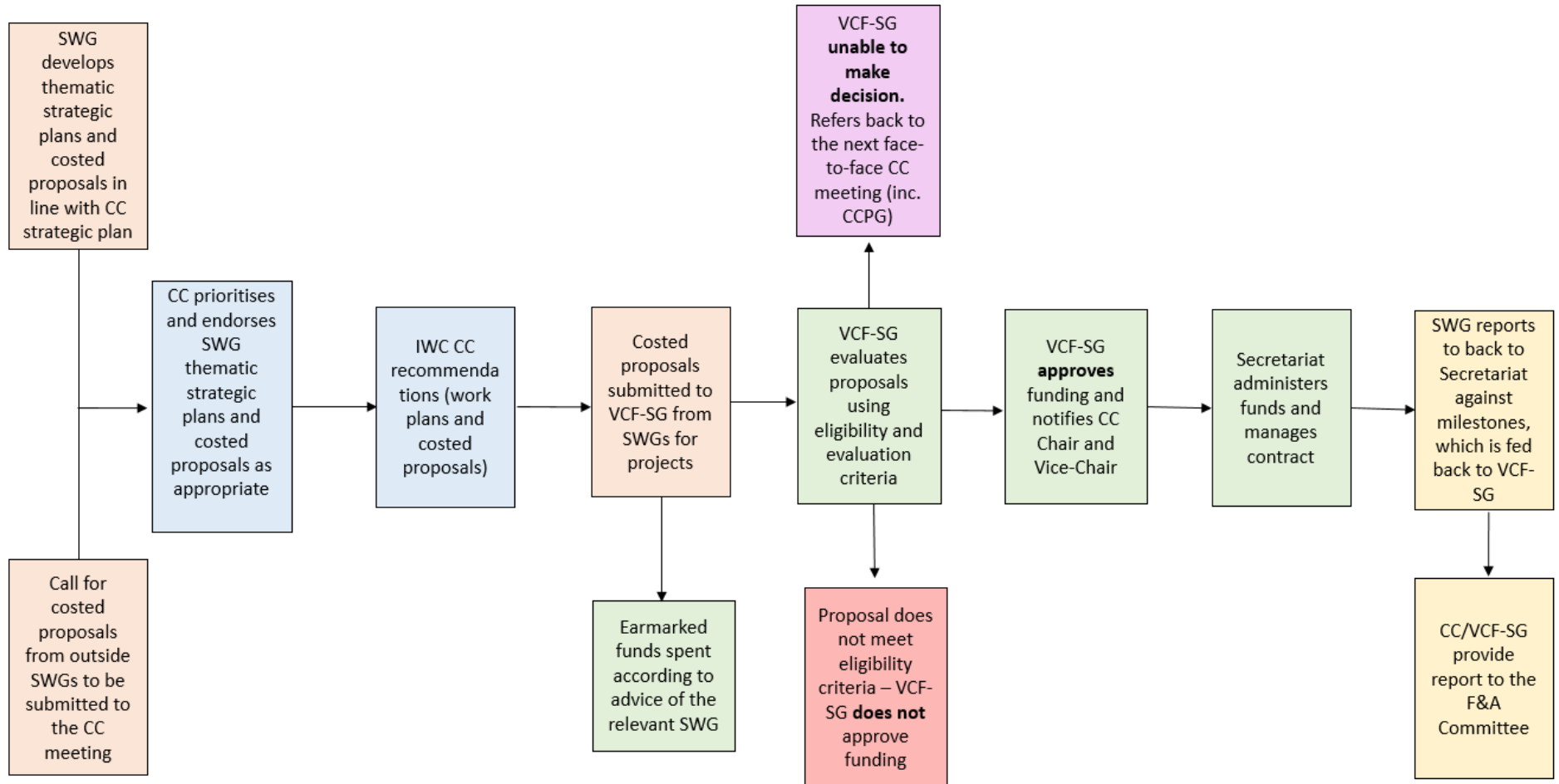
There is some proposed evaluation criteria for potential projects in annex A of the discussion paper (annex B). Prior to detailed evaluation by the steering group, each project will be screened to ensure it passes the general eligibility criteria (found in Annex B of discussion paper). Part of this screening will include a check that any conflicts of interest are declared, and where there is an actual or perceived conflict the proponent will recuse themselves and leave the discussion.

Proposed actions:

- 1) Amend the project categories (IWC/64/F&A3) to a more general "Projects which support the delivery of the Conservation Committee's strategic plan".

- 2) Endorse the proposed allocation processes. The Chair of the VCF-SG will then put forward a proposal to amend the wording in the Rules of Procedure and Financial Regulations to provide flexibility for letting projects intersessionally. The group will then bring an updated Terms of Reference to the CC meeting in September for consideration and endorsement.
- 3) Endorse the proposed evaluation criteria.
- 4) Agree to bring the CMP fund and the Carole Carlson Memorial Fund under the umbrella of the VCF (i.e. follow the same process but each SWG will maintain control over what projects are funded).

ANNEX A: PROPOSED VOLUNTARY CONSERVATION FUND ALLOCATION PROCESS



Annex B:

Voluntary Conservation Fund Steering Group: Process and Roles

Discussion paper circulated to the Steering Group in April 2018

1. Aim

The aim of this paper is to review the governance and arrangements of the Voluntary Conservation Fund (VCF), including project categories, allocation process and the relationship of the VCF with other funds.

The Steering Group is invited to comment on the recommended actions, with a view to developing recommendations to be proposed at IWC67 including changes to the Financial Regulations as appropriate. This paper includes recommendations which aim to ensure rigorous, transparent decision making, while also providing some flexibility around how decisions are made, noting that any funding recommendations will be endorsed by the Commission.

Background

The Intersessional Correspondence Group on Strengthening IWC Financing (ICGSF) was established at IWC62 in 2010. The Group aims to find ways to support the rebuilding and maintenance of healthy whale populations.

In 2014, at IWC65, the ICGSF made a series of recommendations which included the establishment of a VCF and the establishment of a Steering Group for the Fund.

The Fund has subsequently received a number of donations, some of which have been allocated to support work on bycatch, whale watching and the development of a database of conservation recommendations. The VCF can receive funds that are earmarked for specific projects or that are put into the VCF to support projects in the agreed categories overseen by the Steering Group.

As of 31/12/2017, the balance of the VCF is £186,650, of which just over £100,000 remains unallocated.

A workplan for the steering group was circulated in September and an updated version can be found in Annex D to reflect the new timetable.

2. Project Categories

3.1 Key issues

- a) The purpose of the VCF is to support the rebuilding and maintenance of healthy whale populations. In 2012, the IWC agreed the following categories as priority areas for VCF support:
 - a. Projects supporting conservation management plans
 - b. Projects supporting whale watching
 - c. Projects addressing bycatch and entanglement
 - d. Projects addressing ship strikes
 - e. Projects addressing stranded cetaceans, including euthanasia
 - f. Projects addressing pollution
 - g. Projects addressing emerging issues and new threats to whale populations.

- b) In 2016 the Conservation Committee developed a strategic plan (found [here](#)) that identifies its priority actions. With this in mind, rather than retain specific project categories it may be more straightforward to agree that any project which contributes to the delivery of the Conservation Committee's strategic plan can be funded by the VCF. This will also account for any future changes to the strategic plan.
- c) Entanglement and strandings are not currently on the Conservation Committee agenda. Although entanglement and strandings can be considered conservation issues for certain species and populations, they are more widely considered a welfare concern and therefore may best be covered by money which has been donated for the purposes of work on improving cetacean welfare going forward.

3.1 Proposed actions

- 1) Amend the project categories (IWC/64/F&A3) to a more general "Projects which support the delivery of the Conservation Committee's strategic plan".
- 2) Where Working Groups have work strands that are not explicitly covered by the Conservation Committee's strategic plan, but which overlap with the work of the Conservation Committee, the Chairs of those Working Groups should attend Conservation Committee meetings to discuss appropriate funding sources.

3. Allocation Process

4.1 Key issues

- a) In terms of allocation, there are two functionally different types of project:
 - i. Specific projects recommended by the Commission or Conservation Committee (subsequently endorsed by the Commission). This includes specific costed projects identified intersessionally by different Standing Working Groups (SWGs) which will feed back to the Conservation Committee. These projects would be higher priority than any open call for funding.
 - ii. Projects which are a result of an open call for projects that may address a specific concern or thematic issue identified by the Commission, Conservation Committee, or SWGs and would contribute to the delivery of the Conservation Committee's strategic plan (if there are funds remaining). For example, if an SWG identifies a concern around a declining species and they make a request for projects to address this concern and mitigate the impact, this would mean there is not a specific project on the table and therefore a general call for projects is required. In this case, a procedure for agreeing the projects which are submitted is needed.
- b) There are two options for a possible allocation process outlined below. These are both based on the current cycle of meetings (i.e. biennial) but if Conservation Committee meetings become annual then the intersessional process may not be necessary.
 - i. **The Conservation Committee takes the final decision on the funding of projects:**
 - 1. The submission of project proposals is invited prior to the full meeting of the Conservation Committee.

2. The CC may decide to restrict the invitation for proposals to specific thematic issues identified in the Strategic Plan or covered by thematic plans developed by its Standing Working Groups.
3. Project proposals should be submitted on the project template developed by the ICG-SF.
4. Proposals will be received by the VCF-SG within a specific timeframe and subsequently evaluated against the relevant criteria and, where in place, thematic plans developed by SWGs.
5. The VCF-SG will then provide funding recommendations to the CC for discussion and endorsement (at the full biennial meeting of the CC). The Secretariat will then draw up contracts and administer the funds.

Pros: Using the VCF-SG to prepare funding recommendations saves time in the CC meeting. However, the final decision on funding remains with the CC ensuring full oversight.

Cons: Waiting for a decision on funding at the biennial meeting could mean a greater than two year gap between receipt of a voluntary contribution and commencement of a project. This could be mitigated if the CC moved to annual meetings or an intersessional correspondence process was established. Aligning projects with the Strategic Plan removes the need for Commission endorsement (as the Strategic Plan has already been endorsed).

ii. **The Conservation Committee devolves decision making on funding to the VCF-SG:**

1. The submission of project proposals is invited following agreement by the full meeting of the Conservation Committee, or during the intersessional period at the discretion of the CC Chair and VCF-SG Chair (at the point sufficient funds are available in the voluntary fund).
2. The CC may decide to restrict the invitation for proposals to specific thematic issues identified in the Strategic Plan or covered by thematic plans developed by its Standing Working Groups.
3. Project proposals should be submitted on the project template developed by the ICG-SF.
4. Proposals will be received by the VCF-SG within a specific timeframe and subsequently evaluated against the relevant criteria and, where in place, thematic plans/work plans developed by SWGs and endorsed by the Conservation Committee.
5. The VCF-SG will then decide which projects should be funded and the Secretariat will draw up contracts and administer the funds.
6. In the event of disagreement, the Chair and Vice Chair of the CC will be asked for advice. If no resolution is possible the decision will be referred back to the full CC.
7. The VCF-SG will provide a report to the Conservation Committee of the outcome of the process at its next meeting.

Pros: Gives intersessional flexibility to fund projects when new donations are received and reduces the burden on the CC.

Cons: Would have to mandate the VCF-SG to recommend funding for projects intersessionally – reducing oversight by the CC and Commission. This may be mitigated in part where proposals are delivering thematic plans/work programmes already identified by the CC and its SWGs. It may be difficult to get representation that fairly reflects the make-up of the full CC.

- c) The proposed evaluation criteria for potential projects can be found in Annex A. Prior to detailed evaluation by the steering group, each project will be screened to ensure it passes the general eligibility criteria (found in Annex B). Part of this screening will include a check that any conflicts of interest are declared, and where there is an actual or perceived conflict the proponent will recuse themselves and leave the discussion.
- d) Roles of groups:
 - *Finance and Administration Committee* – To endorse the overall process of allocation and project evaluation. As projects will not be applying for central funding, we would not require sign-off from the F&A committee on each individual proposal.
 - *Steering Group* – To provide advice to the Conservation Committee on the robustness of proposed projects and recommendations on what projects to fund.
 - *Conservation Committee* – To discuss research and development, provide a steer on the prioritisation of projects and make the final decision on what projects are funded.
 - *Secretariat* – To deal with contractual arrangements and to administer the funds as instructed by the Conservation Committee/VCF-SG and to advise on budgets as necessary.

4.2 Proposed actions

- 1) Endorse the evaluation criteria in Annex A.
- 2) Agree on which of the proposed allocation processes to endorse and put forward a proposal to amend the wording in the Rules of Procedure and Financial Regulations, Appendix 3 to provide flexibility for letting projects intersessionally and to take account of the evaluation criteria.
- 3) Update the Terms of Reference (Annex C) for the group to reflect the new process and roles of each group.

4. Other funds

5.1 Key issues

- a) At its meeting in 2017, the Scientific Committee recommended the establishment of a Carole Carlson Memorial Fund on whale watching in recognition of her long and important association with whalewatching work at the IWC. The fund is intended to support research, education and outreach in the context of whalewatching activities and to ensure that whalewatching is sustainable, educational and humane.
- b) Funding to support the establishment and delivery of Conservation Management Plans (CMP fund) are currently overseen by the CMP Standing Working Group (CMP-SWG) held outside the VCF.
- c) As both of these funds are associated with Working Groups which sit under the Conservation Committee, it would make sense for them to sit under the VCF umbrella and follow the same process of letting projects while maintaining control over what projects are let and over their own budget line.

5.2 Proposed actions

- 1) Liaise with the Scientific Committee to seek endorsement to establish the proposed Carole Carlson Memorial Fund in place of the whale-watching budget line.
- 2) Rename the whalewatching budget line the "Carole Carlson Memorial Fund".
- 3) Bring the CMP fund and Carole Carlson Memorial Fund under the same rules and regulations of the VCF while the Working Groups maintain control over the projects, approvals process and their budget lines.

Annex A – Proposed evaluation criteria

	Criteria	Weighting	Score
1	Do the expected outcomes of the project address the identified priority areas in the Conservation Committee's strategic plan?	0 – Not addressed 1 – Poorly addressed 2 – Reasonably addressed 3 – Well addressed 4 – Very well addressed 5 – Excellently addressed	
2	Does the methodology outlined effectively and efficiently address the objectives outlined in the proposal?	0 - Not demonstrated 1 - Poor methodology 2 - Reasonable methodology 3 - Good methodology 4 - Very good methodology 5 - Excellent methodology	
3	Does the project involve good participation and engagement of regional participants?	0 - Not demonstrated 1 - Poor engagement proposed 2 - Reasonable engagement proposed 3 - Good engagement proposed 4 - Very good engagement proposed 5 - Excellent engagement proposed	
4	Is the proposed project feasible, well organised and timeline achievable?	0 - Not demonstrated 1 - Feasibility, organisation and timeline unrealistic 2 - Feasibility, organisation and timeline not properly addressed 3 - Feasibility, organisation and timeline sound 4 - Feasibility, organisation and timeline demonstrated well 5 - Feasibility, organisation and timeline very well demonstrated	
5	Have the project leads demonstrated that they are capable of carrying out the proposed work and disseminating the outcomes accordingly?	0 - Not demonstrated 1 - Poor record 2 - Reasonable record 3 - Good record 4 - Very good record 5 – Project leads have an excellent record relevant to the proposed work	
6	Does the project demonstrate good value for money?	0 – Not demonstrated 1 – Poor value for money 2 – Reasonable value for money 3 – Good value for money 4 – Very good value for money 5 – Excellent value for money	

Annex B – Eligibility Criteria

Projects eligible for IWC endorsement will be those that can be demonstrated to be consistent with the principles also established for financial arrangements in the Financial Regulations paragraph C2(a) (*programmes or activities decided on by the Commission and/or to advance programmes and activities which are consistent with the objectives and provisions of the Convention*), particularly projects supporting the objectives of the conservation committee, AND:

- a) can be demonstrated to deliver concrete cetacean conservation outcomes, with additional priority given to projects targeting cetacean populations and species most at risk;
- b) clearly identify conservation targets and milestones;
- c) are technically and financially coherent and feasible and provide value for money;
- d) have identified funding partners and institutional affiliations (with in-kind contributions clearly demarcated);
- e) have identified a project team and team members' credentials with clear illustration of the capacity to produce quality research that will be communicated to a wide range of stakeholders;
- f) have been endorsed by the process to be determined in accordance with the fifth term of reference;
- g) have the endorsement of one or more range states;
- h) are consistent with legislative responsibilities of any relevant range states;
- i) incorporate mechanisms to ensure periodic review and reporting;
- j) have an outreach and capacity building component targeting identified stakeholders and local communities (where appropriate);
- k) meet appropriate ethical guidelines with respect to the treatment of animals involved, ensuring interference with cetaceans is within acceptable levels and does not cause distress to cetacean individuals intersecting with the project;
- l) research methods are non-lethal only;

fund only actions that are not otherwise the core responsibility or business of governments or industry, and that do not subsidise commercial enterprises.

Annex C: Terms of Reference (agreed at IWC65 in 2014)

The Conservation Fund Project Steering Group (the Steering Group) is responsible for enhancing cooperation between the International Whaling Commission's Scientific and Conservation Committees in an effort to oversee the selection and prioritisation of projects to support the rebuilding and maintenance of healthy whale populations.

Membership

The Steering Group is open to all contracting governments but shall include the Chair and/or Vice Chair (or their nominated representatives) of both the Scientific Committee and the Conservation Committee.

The Chair of the Steering Group shall be elected from amongst its members and may hold the position for a period of up to four years. The current chair may be re-elected if the group so chooses.

Duties

The main duties of the Steering Group include:

- overseeing the selection and prioritisation of conservation projects;
- identifying the resource requirements of each project proposal;
- recommending projects for funding to the Finance and Administration Committee;
- liaising with Contracting Governments and external partners to develop a compendium of conservation projects; and
- monitoring and reporting on project outcomes.

The Steering Group will assess all project applications to ensure each application meets the eligibility criteria agreed at IWC64 in 2012 (**APPENDIX 1**). The Steering Group will also identify resource requirements of each project and receive advice from the Finance and Administration Committee on the amount of funding available for conservation projects.

The Steering Group shall prioritise projects, and recommend in priority order, the proposals it judges best meet the objectives of supporting the rebuilding and maintenance of healthy whale populations set out in the eligibility criteria. Projects relating to the categories agreed by the Commission (**APPENDIX 2**) will be considered a high priority. The Steering Group shall also aim to ensure that projects are representative of different regions, so that funding can be targeted at particular range state areas where it may be difficult to secure local financial support.

The Steering Group shall submit a prioritised list of conservation projects to the Commission for agreement, through the Finance and Administration Committee.

Recommendation making

Consistent with the Commission's Rules of Procedure, the Steering Group will make every effort to reach consensus on its recommendations. Where this is not possible, the Steering Group will report this to the Commission.

Meetings

The Steering Group shall primarily undertake its work electronically, but may meet face-to-face to facilitate decision making on the prioritisation and agreement of conservation projects.

Annex D: Workplan

Date	Task	Actions
September 2017	Develop work plan to IWC67 in 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair to circulate proposed work plan to the Steering Group for comment/agreement
April 2018	Review of the eligibility criteria taking into account: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The project categories included in the Conservation Committee Strategic Plan How project categories with both welfare and conservation elements are managed The types of projects/activities to be funded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair to circulate discussion paper to seek WG views
April 2018	Develop and implement a process for the allocation of donated funds (including those earmarked for specific activities) including consideration of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How existing IWC conservation-related recommendations are prioritised for funding The relationship with other funds e.g. SC Research Fund, CMP Fund and welfare funds The role of Standing Working Groups in the process of project submission and prioritisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair to circulate discussion paper on the allocation process to seek WG views. This will include a diagram to show the proposed process for funding allocation and input from the Secretariat on administrative considerations for the VCF.
May 2018	Review the Terms of Reference of the Voluntary Conservation Fund Steering Group as appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair to circulate updated ToR for comment/agreement
Ongoing	Provide guidance to the ICGSF on the information required from costed work plans and support this process as appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair of Steering Group to liaise with Chair of ICGSF on an ongoing basis and consult with Steering Group as appropriate.

Ongoing	Oversee the reporting on income and expenditure to the Voluntary Conservation Fund	
July 2018	<p>Develop Steering Group report</p> <p>- Note that any changes to the Financial Regulations will have to be submitted by 12th July, 60 days in advance of the Commission meeting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair to circulate Steering Group report and draft recommendations for comment/agreement before submission to Commission.
September 2018	Report to IWC 67 on progress and make recommendations as appropriate	