

Update on Conservation Committee Work on Marine Debris

Intersessional Correspondence Group on Marine Debris

The Conservation Committee is invited to:

- Endorse the report and recommendations of the IWC Workshop on “Marine Debris: The Way Forwards” held in December 2019
- Note Scientific Committee recommendations on marine debris
- Endorse the proposed interim Conservation Committee workplan on marine debris for 2020/2021

Introduction

The IWC has undertaken extensive work to understand and mitigate potential threats from a range of different types of marine debris and marine debris is a priority threat on the Conservation Committee strategic plan. At IWC67 in 2018 the Conservation Committee endorsed a proposal for a joint Scientific Committee/Conservation Committee workshop on marine debris and an intersessional correspondence group to further scope this work.

IWC workshop on Marine Debris: The Way Forward

In December 2019 the IWC held a workshop aiming to progress IWC’s work on this threat by (i) reviewing the latest evidence on interactions with cetaceans (both ingestion and entanglement) and considering evidence for associated toxicology; (ii) identifying best protocols for gross pathology, pathology for microdebris and the standardised classification of recovered plastics and other debris; and (iii) developing liaison with other relevant expert bodies. Based on its discussions, the workshop made a series of detailed recommendations, emphasising the importance of long-term studies; the need for standardised approaches to post-mortem studies; the importance of strandings networks; the assessment of floating debris during aerial surveys and the integration of marine debris concerns into the IWC’s Conservation Management Plans, where appropriate. The vulnerability of some species was highlighted and the potential of some to be used as indicator species. Other recommendations covered engagement with international bodies and communications. The full report and its recommendations are available [here](#).

At its meeting in May 2020 the IWC SC welcomed the workshop report and endorsed its recommendations. It recognised that the impacts of marine debris on cetaceans are more substantial than was previously thought and further noted the importance of continued work on this topic. The SC tasked a marine debris intersessional group with several follow up actions, which will be reported back to the next SC meeting in May 2021. This included further consideration of a potential database on marine debris.

Proposed workplan 2020-21

Based on a review of the recommendations of the marine debris workshop, the correspondence group recommends an interim workplan, below for work on marine debris in 2020/21 (before IWC68). It will propose a more detailed and costed workplan on marine debris at IWC68.

It is proposed that the activities below be undertaken in 2020/21. Leads are specified in brackets:

- Dissemination of the workshop report and recommendations and ensuring recommendations are taken into account in other IWC work programmes particularly those of the Scientific Committee, Strandings Initiative and GWERN in addition to BMI and CMPs (*Secretariat, with relevant CC SWG Chairs and topic leads and SC intersessional group for marine debris*).

- Further consideration on the recommendation of a Marine Debris database in liaison with Strandings Expert Panel and Ad Hoc Group on databases and related issues (*SC Intersessional group for marine debris, Secretariat in liaison with Secretariat, SC Ad hoc group on databases, Strandings Expert Panel*).
- Setting up an IWC roster of experts to provide advice and facilitate input to other expert processes (*Secretariat, in liaison with SC intersessional group for marine debris*).
- Engagement with other organisations (*Secretariat with support of Contracting Governments, intersessional group/roster of experts*)
 - IUCN regarding species assessments and FAD Resolution
 - UNEA and ad hoc expert group
 - To explore synergies with work on impacts marine debris ingestion in humans including WHO and FAO and potential for a presentation to future SC meeting
 - Global Ghost Gear Initiative
- Exploring potential for pilot projects to address ALDFG, including gear removal in collaboration with the GWERN/BMI and potentially with the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (*Secretariat including GWERN coordinator in liaison with relevant members of the Commission and SC*).
- Identify and implement ways to obtain information on ALDFG and its mitigation from contracting governments and other stakeholders could be obtained through Voluntary Conservation Reports through the new Conservation Database (*Secretariat*).
- Promoting leadership by the IWC in eliminating single use plastics including in its day to day operations, COVID response and at IWC meetings (*Secretariat*).

Cost implications

It is anticipated that work undertaken before IWC68 would be undertaken with core Secretariat support at no additional cost. Should detailed proposals be developed for pilot projects to address ALDFG then an application would be made to the Voluntary Conservation Fund.