

## Report of the Standing Working Group on Conservation Management Plans

*The Conservation Committee is invited to:*

- i) Note and provide comments on the update from the SWG-CMP
- ii) Consider and endorse the CMP nomination for the South American river dolphin

### Background

This paper provides a summary of recent progress and updates from four existing Conservation Management Plans (CMPs), and five prospective CMPs in various stages of development. The CMP program continues to be guided by the revised [CMP workplan 2014 – 2020](#). Technical aspects of the CMPs were discussed by the Scientific Committee in May 2020. Full details and recommendations can be viewed in the [report of SC68b](#). A focus for the Standing Working Group on Conservation Management Plans (SWG-CMP) over the intersessional period is development of a strategic plan (2021-2030) for the CMP program for endorsement at IWC68, and continuation of work plan items including building greater awareness and understanding of the CMP initiative, both within and outside the Commission.

### 1. Updates on existing CMPs

#### Western South Atlantic Southern Right Whale (Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay)

In January 2020, work on this CMP resumed under the coordination of Juan Pablo Torres-Florez, of the Centro Nacional de Pesquisa e Conservação de Mamíferos Aquáticos (Brazilian government agency). This CMP has been dormant since 2017, requiring meetings and significant travel to re-establish interest and commitment from range states, however the COVID-19 pandemic has made this difficult.

The Ministry of the Environment (Brazil) and the Ministry of Foreign Relationships of Brazil have commenced dialogues with their counterparts from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, to identify sub-coordinators in each range state to work together to establish work plans and budgets for CMP actions.

Meetings with researchers from Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina have been held to coordinate possible satellite tagging in Uruguay and Brazil. The priority will be tagging in Brazil, followed by Uruguay and then Chile. Researchers are collating information to update their understanding of the population and priority actions to be carried out in each range state.

#### Eastern South Pacific Southern Right Whale (Chile, Peru)

2019-2020 has seen important advances on this CMP, particularly regarding the Passive Acoustic Monitoring project, the obtention of photo-IDs, new insights into the genetic identity of the population, educational lectures and workshops, and media outreach program.

The focus now is on planning for a joint workshop between Chile and Peru for regional and international whale watching experts to exchange experience on whale watching regulation and research permit systems.

The Commission has approved allocation of Scientific Committee funds for: 1) the continuation of the Passive Acoustic Monitoring Project work in 2021 for the Antofagasta area (northern Chile), and to continue the analysis of acoustic data collected until 2020; and 2) the participation of experts in the joint experience exchange workshop to be conducted in Peru. The Animal Welfare Institute has also contributed funding.

*Acoustic Monitoring Project*

The project has collected one year of data in Isla de Chiloé (southern Chile). Since September 2019 it has also collected data in Chome (Biobio Region, Chile). Both areas are considered possible breeding grounds for the species. COVID-19 has disrupted the work, including resulting in loss of equipment due to access restrictions. The work will continue in Antofagasta in 2021 with spare equipment.

*Bi-national poster*

Thanks to the contribution of the Cetacean Conservation Center and Patagonia Environmental Grants received in 2020, the preparation of a bi-national poster to raise public awareness is underway. Work is being conducted on the development of southern right whale illustrations for the poster, which will be made available to both countries for free use.

*Franciscana dolphin (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay)*

Work over the past year has focused on preparing the review of the status of franciscana by the Scientific Committee, which will guide future conservation efforts under the CMP. A preparatory workshop took place from 12-14 February 2020 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, on abundance and trends, threats, and national management and conservation initiatives for the review. The workshop was hosted by Grupo de Estudos de Mamíferos Aquáticos do Rio Grande do Sul (GEMARS) and supported by Fundo Nacional do Meio Ambiente (FUNBIO) of Brazil. The workshop was attended by 25 participants from the three countries. A second workshop is planned for February 2021 in Santos, Brazil to complete the review of the CMP.

A public campaign is being planned to raise awareness about the conservation challenges facing the franciscana and launched in all range states.

*Western North Pacific Gray Whale (Japan, Russian Federation, USA, South Korea, Mexico)*

The workshop to finalise rangewide population modelling and the associated small scientific drafting group meeting to finalise the scientific aspects of the updated draft CMP for submission to the SC was postponed due to COVID-19. Work has continued via email and it is hoped to hold the meeting later in the year if the COVID-19 situation resolves. The plan will then be to bring the update to the SC68c (2021) and the Memorandum of Co-operation countries (Japan has indicated that it will continue to be a member of that group) in 2021, with the aim to present the revised CMP to IWC69. IUCN (co-sponsor of the original CMP) has indicated its willingness to help organise a stakeholder meeting as part of this process.

**2. Update on Priority Species/CMPs in Development***Mediterranean fin whale*

At IWC68a, the Sub-Committee on CMPs (SC-CMP) recommended the Mediterranean fin whale sub-population be treated as a priority population for CMP development. An updated draft of the Mediterranean Fin Whale CMP was endorsed at the ACCOBAMS SC in February 2020. Relevant IWC and ACCOBAMS Range States are working towards finalising a draft CMP for fin whales for presentation at SC68C.

*Mediterranean sperm whale*

At IWC68a, the SC-CMP recommended the Mediterranean sperm whale population be treated as a priority population for CMP development. This recommendation was reiterated at SC68b.

ACCOBAMS is considering leading the development of a joint ACCOBAMS/IWC CMP that will address the key threats for this population including ship strikes and bycatch.

### Central American Humpback whale

At IWC68a, the SC-CMP recommended the Central American Humpback whale population be treated as a priority population for CMP development. This recommendation was reiterated at SC68b. The proponents intend to prepare a draft CMP for SC68c.

A workshop took place from 9-10 March in Panama City, Panama, to discuss the development of this CMP, including biological and ecological aspects, threats, mitigation and monitoring. The workshop was hosted by the Minister of Environment of Panama and supported by Ministerio de Ambiente, la Secretaría Nacional de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación (SENACYT) de Panamá and Cetacean Society International (CSI). The workshop was attended by 21 participants from eight countries (US, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama).

### Arabian Sea humpback whale (India, Oman)

The SC-CMP has recommended that the Arabian Sea humpback whale (ASHW) be treated as a priority population for CMP development. Work towards the development of a CMP is being led by a dedicated group of researchers in the region, including through the Arabian Sea Whale Network and Environment Society of Oman (ESO). Links with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) ASHW Concerted Action are being explored.

In February 2020, the CMS COP13 approved the extension of the Concerted Action into the next triennium (2020-2023). This proposal includes several activities similar to those normally incorporated in an IWC CMP. The Concerted Action includes the following categories of activity:

- Addressing knowledge gaps
- Information sharing and awareness raising
- Capacity building and development and implementation of mitigation strategies

The last category of activity will hopefully lead to a joint IWC-CMS CMP with active support and participation from government stakeholders. However, considering the current global turmoil caused by COVID-19, the timing is uncertain. It is important to ensure that government stakeholders can focus on these issues, which is unrealistic at present, but every effort will be made to reinvigorate the process as soon as is practicable. India's IWC Commissioner has retired and notification of the new leadership is awaited before continuing discussions with the Commissioners of India and Oman.

The IWC Secretariat and SWG-CMP will work with ESO to continue outreach efforts with Oman and India towards development of a CMP.

## **3. Small cetaceans**

### South American River Dolphins

The Commissioner from Colombia, on behalf of the government of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru presented the proposed CMP nomination for South American river dolphins to SC68b. The main objective of the CMP is to promote the conservation of river dolphin species (*Inia geoffrensis*, *Inia boliviensis*, *Inia araguaiaensis* and *Sotalia fluviatilis*) in the Amazon, Orinoco, and Tocantins/Araguaia basins through a regional concerted strategy. The proposed CMP will facilitate prioritisation of research and conservation actions among the different South American countries where these species live as well as guide national and regional actions.

The proponents are seeking intersessional consideration of the nomination by the Conservation Committee. The SC strongly endorsed the scientific components of the South American river dolphins CMP nomination in principle and encouraged the proponents to prepare a draft CMP, pending consideration and endorsement of the nomination by the Conservation Committee.

The Conservation Committee is invited to review, discuss, and endorse the nomination. If the nomination is endorsed by the Conservation Committee, the range state governments will develop a draft CMP for consideration at SC68c.

#### Asian freshwater small cetaceans

The SWG-CMP and Sub-Committee on Small Cetaceans supported World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) to submit a paper to SC68b seeking advice on whether three threatened species of Asian freshwater cetaceans (South Asian river dolphin, Irrawaddy dolphin and the narrow ridged finless porpoise (also known as Yangtze finless porpoise)) should be treated as a 'priority species/populations' for the purpose of the CMP development process and progress straight to the CMP development stage, therefore not requiring a nomination. The proposal requires further consideration and may be revisited at SC68c.

During CMS COP13, two proposed Concerted Actions relating to Asian river dolphins (Ganges river dolphin and Irrawaddy dolphin) were put forward by the Government of India and these were adopted by the meeting. Assessment of dolphin numbers and threats is a focus of this work, along with community-level programs to address bycatch and direct consumption. The Bycatch Mitigation Initiative is currently scoping opportunities to assist bycatch assessment and reduction efforts focused on river dolphins, particularly in relation to its planned 'pilot projects'. The IWC Secretariat is in discussions with India on how the IWC and BMI could assist with its river dolphin research and conservation efforts.

#### **4. CMP program management and outreach updates**

##### Thematic Strategic Plan

The current CMP Work Plan is due to end in 2020. Australia as SWG-CMP Chair is preparing a thematic strategic plan for thorough consultation with Conservation Committee members and stakeholders. The strategic plan sets out long-term strategic priorities for the program and will assist with outreach by functioning as the primary source of information for anyone wanting to know about the CMP initiative. The new Strategic Plan will be presented at IWC68 for endorsement.

##### Promoting the CMP program

The SWG-CMP launched a newsletter 'CMP Deep Dive' in 2019 to promote the achievements and upcoming priorities of the CMP program (Issue One can be downloaded from the IWC Website: [https://iwc.int/document\\_3705](https://iwc.int/document_3705)). The second issue will be distributed in October 2020. Conservation Committee members are invited to provide content for the newsletter at any time, including upcoming training and workshops, new research, and information about any of the cetaceans that are covered by CMPs. Content can be sent to [whales@awe.gov.au](mailto:whales@awe.gov.au).

The SWG-CMP and IWC Secretariat will also work intersessionally to put together a 'simple guide' to the CMP program. This will be a short document aimed at helping Contracting Governments understand the potential benefits of participating in a CMP, and the roles, responsibilities and expectations.

##### Fundraising

Achieving financial self-sufficiency of CMPs remains a challenge. The SWG-CMP continues to work with the Secretariat to explore external funding opportunities to support CMPs going forward. Australia has prepared a concept note for the CMP program that the Secretariat and others can use when approaching potential funders. We hope to work with co-ordinators to develop fundraising materials for distinct CMP actions.

Funding update

The detail of CMP funding and allocations is in the report on the Voluntary Conservation Fund [see document CC/68A/17.2/01].

Approved in 2019-20:

- Employment of a coordinator for the Southwest Atlantic Southern Right Whale CMP: £19,200 + up to £6,000 for travel to coordination/SC meetings.
- Extension of coordinator contract for Eastern South Pacific Southern Right Whale CMP for 12 months: £2,500 (+ £13,500 unspent from previously approved coordination meeting support)