

IWC Conservation Database for Voluntary Conservation Reporting

Submitted by the Secretariat

Introduction

At IWC67 in October 2018 the Commission endorsed a proposal from New Zealand to revise the existing template for voluntary conservation reports and develop an integrated database. The detailed proposal, which includes the detailed rationale for changing the reporting template, is in Document [IWC/67/CC/10](#) (also available to this meeting as document CC/68A/INFO/05).

This will be a move from static written reports to an online database, publicly accessible from the IWC website and searchable by country or conservation theme. The database would be populated and updated by countries and the template for submission would be revised for alignment with the Strategic Plan and Workplan of the Conservation Committee. Where possible, this would be made interoperable with other IWC databases particularly National Progress Reports submitted to the SC. This would help streamline the reporting requirements on Contracting Governments, and improve the accessibility, effectiveness and reach of information submitted in Voluntary Conservation Reports.

Due to the departure of the Secretariat's IT officer in 2019 there was a delay before the Secretariat could move forward this proposal. Now that the new Secretariat IT & Database Supervisor is in post the Secretariat can proceed but would welcome some further input from the Conservation Committee, particularly on the purpose of reporting and database fields. The Secretariat will then work with the intersessional group for developing this database to finalise the specification and start developing a prototype database.

The Conservation Committee is invited to take note of this update and to provide its views on the questions below.

In addition, commitments are sought from Contracting Governments to become pilot countries for the database. These countries would be "early adopters" of the database and commit to populating and testing the prototype database in the development stage.

1. Purpose and scope of conservation reporting

Views from the Committee are requested to establish what information countries should regularly report to the Conservation Committee via the database, who should populate the database, and to refine database fields.

1.1 Purpose of reporting

The existing Voluntary Conservation Reports template is in Annex 1. In considering further its reporting requirements the Committee might find it useful to reflect on the overall purpose and aims of national reporting to the Conservation Committee. This is proposed below:

To facilitate greater dialogue and sharing of information between countries to inform and improve conservation interventions and to inform future IWC work and recommendations by:

- 1) Obtain and synthesise information on actions undertaken by countries in response to recommendations of the CC and IWC resolutions and, key threats and issues for cetaceans aligned with priority threats and actions in the Conservation Committee strategic plan and workplan
- 2) Obtain information on outcomes of implementing the CC workplan and recommendations including success stories and barriers to success.

Thus a headline purpose of the conservation database is to identify what countries are doing in terms of cetacean conservation and to find out what has been tried and what works.

Does the Conservation Committee agree with this overall purpose of reporting and of the database?

1.2 Database population

The database would be populated and updated directly by nominated focal points in a password protected system. Updates would be allowed at any time, with an annual reminder issued by the Secretariat. The Secretariat could also issue more targeted calls for updates on particular topics in advance of a meeting at which they will be discussed (e.g. a workshop, or in depth discussion at a forthcoming Conservation Committee meeting).

The database could be populated and maintained only by Contracting Governments. An alternative would be to have a hierarchy which allows other stakeholders (e.g. NGOs operating in the country), subject to guidelines on what information can be uploaded, to upload information directly to a country page. This would give richer information about conservation work in a given country but (as is currently the case with SC progress reports) this information would need to be reviewed by the Contracting Government focal point prior to publication. It might be more feasible for this level of review to happen annually rather than on an ad hoc basis.

It might also be useful to allow IGOs and non-IWC member countries to report to the database. They could be invited to populate their own page.

Who should submit information to the database? Should information be submitted only by Contracting Governments or a wider set of stakeholders?

How could information from IGOs and non-member governments be captured in the database?

1.3 Database fields

It is proposed that the database fields are organised according to the priority threats and actions in the CC strategic plan and workplan available [here](#). The database should have the flexibility to add new themes/other fields as the CC strategic plan and workplan develops

Information entered into this database would be in narrative form, rather than “hard data”, and numerical data would continue to be requested through SC progress reports, with interoperability between the two.

A “literature library” would allow countries to add links to key policy/strategic documents or reports on conservation work, and could assist Contracting Governments to meet the Schedule requirement to submit details of cetacean-relevant legislation (See Section 2.2).

Generic subheadings (under each theme or priority action) would be simpler and require less update by countries. Tailoring fields towards the different priorities of particular work areas could be more useful, but would introduce more complexity into the database and could make it more difficult to locate earlier actions.

Annex 2 contains some thoughts from the Chair of the Conservation Management Plan Standing Working Group (CMP SWG) on how the conservation database could be used to achieve more strategic reporting on CMPs. This would increase IWC capacity to quantify or demonstrate the impact

that CMPs have for populations and use this information to strengthen partnerships, contribute to scientific research, and promote the CMP program. The intersessional group will undertake a more detailed consideration of reporting requirements under each of the other themes, or Conservation Committee workplans to determine whether a set of generic subheadings would be suitable, or a more tailored approach.

The Conservation Committee might also consider asking countries to report on implementation of CC recommendations, and of IWC Resolutions relevant to the CC agenda. This would be on the basis of compilations and communication of relevant recommendations from the IWC database of recommendations.

The current proposal is for database fields to be defined by themes aligned with the CC strategic plan and workplan. Does the Committee agree with this and do they have any additional suggestions?

Should the subheadings under each theme be generic, or tailored depending on the topic in question and the reporting questions that the CC is interested in? A proposal for how the database might integrate reporting in CMPs is in Annex 2 and the Committee are invited to comment.

Should CC reporting aim to obtain information on implementation of Conservation Committee recommendations and Resolutions relevant to the CC agenda?

How could the database capture information on conservation outcomes?

2. Technical considerations

2.1 IWC database infrastructure

Following an independent IT review in 2019, the Secretariat has begun to streamline and unify its database and hosting infrastructure, allowing for the development of new databases and applications in-house or the production of standardised specifications that fit the same model for tender if appropriate.

The IWC Portal, which hosts both the Ship Strikes Database and National Progress Reporting Database, is reaching the end of its life and needs to be redesigned and rebuilt over the next year to fit the IWC's needs going forward. This presents an opportunity to begin centralising data held by the IWC and integrating workflows.

2.2 Database interoperability (and synergies in reporting)

Various types of information are already reported to the IWC by Contracting Governments including data held in the SC Progress report database, the ship strikes database, the catch database, and welfare-related information. The IWC database of recommendations aims to capture basic information on implementation of recommendations, but (where recommendations are aimed at contracting governments) this information needs to be available from countries. The IWC Whale Watching Handbook contains country profiles and case studies.

In addition, the IWC Schedule (paragraph 31) requires Contracting Governments to transmit to the Commission copies of its official laws and regulations relating to whales and whaling and changes in such laws and regulations. Such information has been submitted and stored by the Secretariat, with summaries of what is received provided to the Infractions Committee. However, submission is patchy and no new information has been received since 2015. There might be an opportunity to review the purpose of this requirement, how this information might be made more accessible and whether submissions on conservation-relevant legislation could be built into the conservation database. A summary of information currently held is available from the IWC Secretariat (see CC/68A/INFO/06).

At the recent Scientific Committee (SC68B) there was much discussion on issues surrounding data collection and reporting, and databases facilitating access to this information. It included proposals for new databases as well as the possibility of combining current and future databases. The SC recognised the need to consider new databases in light of ongoing IT infrastructure work in the Secretariat and the potential for interoperability with existing databases. The SC *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Databases and Related Issues was requested to develop an intersessional work plan to engage with the Secretariat on IWC databases and related issues, including improvements to National Progress Reports and the review of specifications for new databases in light of ongoing work.

The Conservation Committee may wish to request that the SC *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Databases also consider the specification for the Conservation Database and help refine aspects of the technical specification related to interoperability.

With all this in mind, it is proposed to proceed with two stage development process for the database- (i) Stage 1 in which a stand-alone database prototype is developed in the first stage for population and testing by countries and (ii) Stage 2, a second development stage to further develop interoperability with other databases, address any further needs identified in the testing phase and finalise front-end design. This would be possible so long as the first prototype is built on the correct IT platform and future requirements taken into account in its specification. Even where databases remain separate a single data entry portal could provide access to all databases.

2.3 Harmonisation of reporting with other IGOs

Revising the template for voluntary conservation reporting could enable greater harmonisation with the reporting requirements of other Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) building on opportunities already identified (e.g. for greater data sharing of bycatch data with FAO and RFMOs which is also relevant to national progress reports, and coherence with reporting to the CMS agreements on cetaceans- ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS). It is proposed that this be explored in more detail with the relevant focal points in other IGOs.

3. Uptake and rates of reporting

The number of countries that have submitted Voluntary Conservation Reports is traditionally low with only 8-10 countries providing reports. Despite significant investments to increase the rate of reporting of SC national progress reports this also remains low, with less than 20% of Contracting Governments submitting reports. Careful consideration is needed on how to ensure that enough countries populate and update the conservation committee database to justify the investments in its initial development and ongoing maintenance.

Development of the database will move forwards once some countries have expressed their commitment to be pilot countries and to test the prototype database with their country information.

Other means of incentivising higher levels of reporting into the Conservation database might be:

- *Refining reporting requirements.* Engaging as many countries as possible in refining the reporting requirements for the database and identifying how these might develop in the future to ensure that information collected is useful to countries and to the Conservation Committee
- *Ease of update.* Ensuring initial data entry is as straightforward as possible, with future updates only requested where information has changed or where new information is sought.

- *Flexibility.* It would not be mandatory to complete all database fields. Countries could choose to focus on one or two areas (rather than not reporting at all).
- *Reducing overall IWC reporting burden.* Reducing the need for countries to report through multiple databases. Even where databases remain separate a single data entry portal could provide access to all databases.
- *Demonstrated use.* Provision of succinct reports from the database (automatically generated or compiled by the Secretariat) to aid Conservation Committee discussions, and wider promotion of the database to help ensure its use..
- *Capacity building.* Working directly with countries to provide training on the database and (subject to additional funding) to help develop their capacity to collect and collate IWC-relevant data and to maintain IWC reporting in the longer term.

A questionnaire to Contracting Governments might obtain more information on barriers to reporting and how these can be overcome.

Does the Committee have any further views on means to increase reporting dates into the database?

How can the IWC help develop the capacity of countries for IWC reporting?

4. Costs

It is proposed that a first stage prototype could be taken forward by the Secretariat, at no additional cost. Development time would then be procured to assist in the second stage. A project costing (updated version of the costing originally submitted by New Zealand) is in Annex 3.

New Zealand earmarked a NZD40,000 donation to the voluntary conservation fund in 2018 for this project along with some other conservation priorities. Thus £10,000 has been allocated to this project from that donation. It is currently anticipated that this already-earmarked funding would cover the development time needed for this project.

Annex 1. Current Voluntary Reporting Template

Country:

National Governmental Authority submitting the Report (full contact information):

1. Legal developments (laws, regulations and other regulatory measures related to cetaceans).
2. Information on whalewatching operations (scale, target species/populations and relevant management issues).
3. Current Government programs related to cetacean conservation.
4. Current threats to cetacean conservation and management measures taken/proposed.
5. Reporting systems for cetacean injuries/mortality/strandings.
6. International cooperation activities (includes bilateral or multilateral cooperation, assistance and funding programs and appropriate contact information, and other international activities of the Country submitting the Report).
7. Other (at the discretion of the Authority submitting the Report).

Annex 2. Potential Use of the Conservation Database for CMP reporting

Australia, as Chair of the SWG CMP

1. Introduction

At IWC67 in 2018, the Conservation Committee endorsed a proposal from New Zealand to revise the template for Voluntary Conservation Reports through establishing an integrated database ([IWC/67/REP/05](#); [IWC/67/CC/10](#)).

Reports submitted to the Conservation Committee can be difficult and unintuitive to locate in the IWC's archives; as such, they are rarely accessed by Contracting Governments, let alone other stakeholders who may benefit from them.

It was proposed that the current process for submitting Voluntary Conservation Reports be replaced by a public, online database of cetacean conservation information (working name: "Conservation Database") integrated into the International Whaling Commission's website. This would streamline the reporting requirements on Contracting Governments, and improve the accessibility, effectiveness and reach of information submitted in Voluntary Conservation Reports.

This refresh is an opportunity for content of reports to better align with the IWC Conservation Committee's Strategic Plan and Work Plan, and to better reflect the needs of users. New Zealand proposed that reflecting the Strategic Plan's relevant Priority Actions, Priority Threats and Thematic Strategic Plans may provide a good starting foundation for the themes of the Conservation Database, such as ship strikes, whale sanctuaries, bycatch and whale and dolphin-watching.

Conservation Management Planning (the CMP Program) is also a priority action under the Conservation Committee's Strategic Plan. We would like to explore the possibility of using the database for Conservation Management Plan (CMP) reporting.

It can take a long time to enact the social and policy change needed to reduce threats, and many years for cetacean populations to show signs of recovery. However, with strategic reporting to the IWC in place, we hope to eventually be able to quantify or demonstrate the impact that CMPs have for populations and use this information to strengthen partnerships, contribute to scientific research, and promote the CMP program.

2. Background

Ideally, there should be two categories of ongoing CMP reporting led by CMP coordinators. To the extent possible, this reporting will be mandated under the CMP program's Strategic Plan 2020-2030.

1. Operational reporting: Regular or periodic reporting to the IWC Secretariat on what actions have been taken under the CMP, the resources and time required to implement the actions, and how IWC funds have been spent (required under coordinator contracts)

2. Strategic reporting: Ongoing reporting on population health, threats, risks, and incidents, where known, to demonstrate the cumulative impact of CMP actions over time (quantitative and qualitative).

Operational reporting already takes place on a somewhat ad hoc basis. The Thematic Strategic Plan will set out clear expectations for CMP coordinators around operational reporting requirements and provide templates to help streamline this.

There is currently no formal system in place to collect broader CMP population data and share it with the IWC and stakeholders (outside of Conservation Committee and Scientific Committee meetings).

Further consultation with CMP coordinators is needed to find out what information is being regularly recorded by organisations/universities/governments conducting ongoing research on the different focus species.

3. Benefits of the approach

Using the database for CMP reporting will help the IWC lead on best-practice data sharing among international stakeholders – something that is notoriously difficult for migratory species.

For CMP coordinators, an online, web-based database that facilitates strategic reporting will help them to track progress, and generate interest from governments, other stakeholders, and potential funders. It will help them to set Key Performance Indicators, think about how to measure success, and normalise reporting on outcomes – something that is a requirement of many grants. The database would also help CMP coordinators to fulfil their operational reporting requirements by keeping a record of CMP actions and progress to which they can refer the IWC Secretariat or SWG-CMP. The database could also assist in the nomination and endorsement of new CMPs and assist in the evaluation and review of the CMP program broadly.

In the longer term, having available data will help to generate interest from scientists and researchers who may want to study the population. Some broader applications could include identifying changes in range use or movement, predicting what the structure of the population (age, gender) means for its conservation status, identifying whether actions such as entanglement workshops lead to more successful rescues, engaging industry (i.e. shipping, fisheries) if data shows there is a significant threat (i.e. bycatch numbers increasing in a region), and assisting researchers in different range states to identify and track the same individuals.

4. Examples

Information categories	Sub-categories
Option for information to be viewed by CMP (in addition to by country, or by topic/theme).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western North Pacific Gray Whale CMP (USA, Russia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico) • Southwest Atlantic Southern Right Whale CMP (Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay) • Eastern South Pacific Southern Right Whale CMP (Chile, Peru) • Franciscana dolphin CMP (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay)
Option to further refine output by displaying entries on a theme under a CMP, i.e. 'bycatch' for the 'Gray whale CMP.' <i>It would be most useful if the database could accommodate data on individuals, populations, and species.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions taken under each CMP (i.e. entanglement workshops, awareness raising, population surveys). • Estimated population numbers (and breakdown, i.e. how many breeding females). • Photo identification (i.e. fins, markings) • Tag/ID number for individuals • Bycatch (numbers and locations) • Number of entanglement sightings, and rescue attempts/successful rescues (inc. stakeholders involved) • Range and movements (to document changes due to climate change and food availability) • Known anthropogenic sound issues and locations.

Annex 3 Project Proposal and Budget

Project Title

Conservation Database Pilot

Lead Working Group

Please note which Working Group has recommended the project be taken forward.

Conservation Committee Planning Group recommendation to the Conservation Committee

Additionally, if other Working Groups or Subcommittees have interests in the work of this project, please list them here.

- Ship Strikes Working Group
- Standing Working Group on Whale-Watching
- Standing Working Group on Conservation Management Plans
- Standing Working Group on Bycatch
- Joint CC-SC Database of Recommendations
- Bycatch Mitigation Initiative
- Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Welfare Issues
- Scientific Committee Ad Hoc Group on databases and related issues

Project Description

A very brief overview of the project proposal and its expected outcomes.

The current process for submission of information to the Conservation Committee occurs through National Conservation Reports. Each submission is an individual document that does not contain search disaggregated data. This can make comparisons with other submissions time consuming. This project will improve and replace the existing reporting process through a public, online web-accessible pilot database of cetacean conservation information (working name: "Conservation Database") integrated into the International Whaling Commission's website.

Project Justification

Demonstrate connections to relevant recommendations and Resolutions endorsed by the Commission including, where relevant, the Conservation Committee's Strategic Plan.

The database proposal was endorsed by the Commission at IWC67.

The Conservation Database would serve as a dynamic information and knowledge-sharing platform. It would function as a 'one-stop shop', through connecting to other data products of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). It would draw thematic data (and broader policy positions, where relevant) from those products into a single place, and/or link to those other products for further information.

This would streamline the reporting requirements on Contracting Governments, and improve the accessibility, effectiveness and reach of information submitted in Voluntary Conservation Reports.

The themes for the Database content will be aligned with the IWC Conservation Committee's Strategic Plan and Work Plan. For example, it would reflect the Strategic Plan's relevant Priority Actions, Priority Threats and Thematic Strategic Plans, such as ship strikes, whale sanctuaries, bycatch and whale- and dolphin-watching.

The Database will also:

- increase the visibility of conservation information;

- make the information easily accessible to users (including NGOs and the public)
- enable quicker and easier reporting;
- enable flexible and customisable content searching;
- be a user-friendly, web-based platform;
- encourage greater engagement from Contracting Governments; and
- have synergies with other IWC conservation information products.

Relevant IWC Voluntary Funds

IWC Voluntary Conservation Fund (VCF).

Overview of activities

Activity	Expected Results	Timeline	Budget Implications	
			Type (Salary, Travel, Meeting Services, Equipment, Other)*	Estimated Cost (GB pounds)
Establish Database	An online, interactive product that allows users to view information by country or theme.	Pilot to be launched in time for presentation to the next meeting of the IWC Conservation Committee	Services	Development of first stage prototype can be done in house by the Secretariat £10,000 for further development (based on one month of developer time)
Managed hosting costs	Ongoing hosting, maintenance and servicing of database		Services	£2,000 (£1,000 pa) in addition to Secretariat time
Establish Conservation Database webpage (both webpage code and text)	Conservation Database webpage available under IWC Conservation Committee webpage.	Published in time for presentation to the next IWC Conservation Committee meeting	Services	Costs met from core Secretariat funds
Coordination with countries to refine scope of the database and with pilot countries on initial database population	Contracting Governments are notified of the pilot Database and invited to input their country information to enable development of the pilot.	Ongoing throughout 2020/1	Services	Costs met from core Secretariat funds
Promotion of database	Contracting Governments and other stakeholders are made aware of the database and encouraged to use it	As soon as possible after endorsement by the Commission		Costs met from core Secretariat funds
Annual reminders to Contracting Governments	Contracting Governments input into/check/update their	Annual	Services	Costs met from core Secretariat funds

Provision of outputs from the database e.g. succinct reports to inform conservation committee discussions	country information on the Database	Biennial (or more often)	Services	Costs met from core Secretariat funds
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Core Secretariat support required

Type	Detailed description	Number of days
IT/database	<p>Establishment of a Conservation Database for Contracting Governments to input into via individual country logins, with auto-population of relevant data from other existing IWC information products.</p> <p>Establishment of a Conservation Database webpage under the IWC Conservation Committee webpage.</p> <p>Some of the existing code and functionalities for the National Progress Report Database, Whale-Watching Handbook or Database of Recommendations could be used.</p> <p>A sample design may include a site front-end that interfaces with a database. The back-end of the database could be updated through a browser-based interface, to allow updating access via the web.</p>	<p>14 for initial prototype development</p> <p>5 days for contractor management</p>
Communications	<p>Promoting the launch of the pilot Conservation Database.</p> <p>Explanatory webpage text under the IWC Conservation Committee site.</p> <p>Annual reminder sent via IWC circular to Contracting Governments to input into, check and/or update their country profiles.</p> <p>Moderation of content</p>	3 days initially plus 1 day per year thereafter
Meeting Services	n/a	n/a
Ongoing project management (IT)	Ongoing maintenance of IT and hosting	2 days per year
Management of database outputs	Overview of content being submitted and production of outputs from database to inform CC discussions	1-3 days per year depending outputs requested

Potential partners or funders

- The Conservation Database project is one of the priorities to which New Zealand's June 2018 VCF financial contribution of NZD\$40,000 was earmarked. This remains unspent in the Voluntary Conservation Fund. OUR APPRECIATION TO NZ FOR THIS CONTRIBUTION
- Other Conservation Committee VCR Correspondence Group countries may be interested in providing support.

Project requirements/Permits/Insurances

N/A

Possible Risks

Secretariat unable to resource the establishment and/or management of the database.

- Discuss options for resourcing with Secretariat to ensure adequate funding and staff capacity are allocated.