

SC/68C/SM/22

Sub-committees/working group name: SM

Report from the Task Team Steering Committee (TTSC)

Mark Simmonds, Lindsay Porter, Fernando Trujillo, Iain Staniland, Arne Bjørge, Greg Donovan, Tilen Genov, Chris Parsons, Randy Reeves, Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho, Peter Thomas



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Report from the Task Team Steering Committee (TTSC).

The Task Team Steering Committee is:

- Coordinator: Mark Simmonds.
- The Chair and Co-chair of the Small Cetaceans Sub-Committee: (Lindsay Porter and Fernando Trujillo) and the IWC Head of Science, Conservation and Management (Iain Staniland).
- Other members: Arne Bjørge, Greg Donovan, Tilen Genov, Chris Parsons, Randy Reeves, Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho, Peter Thomas

The steering committee has been meeting and otherwise conferring in the weeks leading up to the scientific committee and this has included a meeting with the conveners of the South Asian river dolphin TT. This document provides a brief report on the statuses of the existing task teams and presents some proposed revisions to the Terms of Reference (TOR) for this initiative proposed by the Steering Committee (Annex 1). These amendments are intended to clarify some issues around roles and reporting.

1. BACKGROUND

Task Teams aim to provide rapid and targeted responses to situations where significant and swift population decline of a species or population is known or suspected to be occurring. Initiated in 2015, Task Teams focus exclusively on small cetaceans. Three teams are currently operating.

The first Task Team was formed in 2015 in response to the declining population of franciscana, a dolphin found in coastal waters off Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. The Task Team's actions included developing a CMP proposal focused on long-term habitat protection and minimising threats, particularly bycatch in fishing gillnets. The urgent actions of the Task Team were completed and effectively handed over to the long-term CMP which was endorsed in 2016.

The Task Team initiative is overseen by a Steering Committee which advises on populations that are at-risk and facing unsustainable mortality rates. The Steering Committee also considers whether a population is likely to respond effectively to this type of support. Several factors are likely to increase the impact of a Task Team. These include the existence of local expertise and the willingness of relevant authorities and governments to receive help.

2. BRIEF REPORT ON EXISTING TASK TEAMS

2.1 Lahille's dolphin

The Task Team membership was recently reviewed and approved by the Steering Committee and the two coordinators (Pedro Fruet and Els Vermuleun) are working with the rest of the team to set goals for the next five years. The Task Team was scheduled to meet on April 20th. More information about this species and the task team is provided in SM17.

2.2 African Sousa¹

The situation related to the African humpback dolphins *Sousa teuszii* and *Sousa plumbea* was discussed by the TTSC. The Consortium for the Conservation of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (CCAHD) is now progressing work on *Sousa teuszii* and this would seem to mean that the work

¹ The establishment of this Task Team is referenced in the recommendations database SC19124.

previously envisaged to be covered by the Task Team is being addressed adequately. However, this still leaves the other species, and the team might refocus around this.

The Steering Committee will take into account any advice from the Scientific Committee and further evaluate this situation in coming months.

2.3 South Asian River Dolphins

The coordinators (Dipani Sutaria and Nachiket Kelkar) have provided a thorough review of progress on previous recommendations to the SC in document SM07. Some of the original targets of the Task Team have been achieved. In this case, other excellent initiatives are now also in play. Again, it may be desirable for a refocused Task Team to continue and the Steering Committee will take into account any comments from the Scientific Committee and consider this further.

Other points raised in the discussions of the TTSC included:

- the difficulty of accurately assessing progress during the pandemic;
- the relatively low profile of the TTs – noting, however, that they are now more clearly advertised on the IWC website;
- A possible lack of clarity in terms of what the TTs have to offer;
- The somewhat unclear relationship between the TTs and the CMPs; and
- It was also noted that the first Task Team (which concerned the franciscana and which is now closed) had worked very well.

3. NEW TASK TEAM PROPOSALS

The Steering Committee has not been notified of any new proposals.

4. TASK TEAM TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR)

The Task Team TOR were reviewed and agreed by the Steering Committee and this included clarifying the lines of reporting and the role of the coordinator. The revised TOR are provided here as Annex 1 as both a clean copy and marked-up text.

5. FUNDING

To date, the Task Teams Initiative has been supported by funds donated by countries and NGOs, as well as funds from the SC general research fund. Some £36,000 has been spent on Task Teams to date via the IWC.

The Small Cetaceans Fund currently has £1,550 ringfenced for TT work.

Further support for the initiative would be welcomed.

6. FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE TTSC

The Steering Committee will meet shortly after the Scientific Committee meeting concludes and thereafter will aim to meet at least quarterly.

ANNEX 1

Revised TOR proposed by the Steering Committee

Small Cetaceans Task Team Initiative (SCTT) Revised ToR – clean version.

The Small Cetacean Task Teams (SCTTs) are an initiative of the Scientific Committee (SC) of the International Whaling Commission.

Initiated in 2015, Task Teams are intended to provide fast response in situations where a population of cetaceans is known or suspected to be in danger of a significant decline that could ultimately lead to extirpation or extinction. Specifically, Task Teams are created to provide timely conservation advice on immediate actions to support recovery and threat abatement activities.

1. STRUCTURE

1.1 The SCTT will have a steering committee that shall oversee the work of individual Task Teams:

1.2 The Steering Committee shall comprise a convener and members of the SC, who are appointed by the SC, the chair and/or co-chair of the Small Cetaceans Sub-Committee and the IWC Secretariat Science Lead²;

1.3 The Steering Committee shall report annually to the IWC Scientific Committee via the Small Cetaceans Sub-Committee and to the Conservation Committee;

1.4 The role of the Steering Committee convener is to organise its meetings and to facilitate information exchange within the Committee and with the Task Teams;

1.5 The role of the Steering Committee is to recommend which populations may be suitable for the development of new Task Teams, subject to the approval of the Scientific Committee, and otherwise provide support and advice to the TTs as appropriate;

1.6 The Steering Committee shall appoint one or more coordinators to the Task Team and request that the coordinator(s) propose a Task Team membership list, to be approved by the Steering Committee;

1.7 The Steering Committee will also provide advice on Task Team-related funding opportunities to any relevant funding sources and works with the IWC Secretariat to help secure funds for Task Team activities.

2. TASK TEAM ACTIVITIES

Each Task Team:

2.1 Continues to monitor and review information about the focal population(s);

2.2. Defines the specific purpose, aim(s) and broad activities, to include a timeline if possible;

2.3 Submits a detailed workplan of priority actions for the approval of the Steering Committee;

2.4 Works with the IWC Secretariat and Steering Committee to:

(a) Establish dialogue with the relevant country/countries;

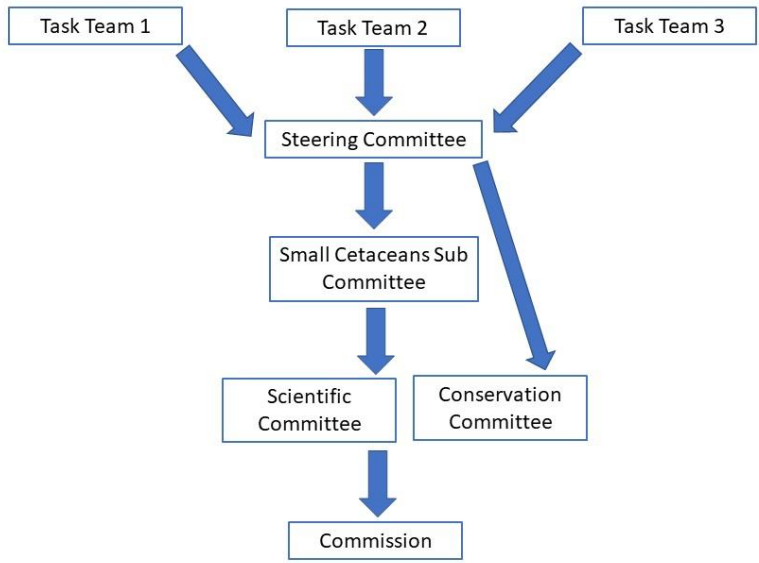
(b) Provide advice and assistance to others concerned with the conservation of the focal population as proves appropriate;

(c) Identify funding sources for its activities

² Usually, the membership of the Steering Committee and the Task Teams will not overlap.

2.5. Provides a succinct annual report of its activities to the Steering Committee one month ahead of the meeting of the SC.

Task Teams reporting structure



4. NOTES

There is no limit on the number of Task Teams that can operate simultaneously.

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Marked up copy of the TOR showing changes (NB the majority of these reflect reorganisation of the text). The diagram is new.

SMALL CETACEANS TASK TEAM INITIATIVE (SCTT) REVISED TOR.

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The role of the Steering Committee is to recommend which populations may be suitable for the development of new Task Teams, subject to the approval of the Scientific Committee, and otherwise provide support and advice to the TTs as appropriate;

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- 9 (a) Establish dialogue with the relevant country/countries;
- 10 (b) Provide advice and assistance to others concerned with the conservation of the focal population as proves appropriate;
- 11 (c) Identify funding sources for its activities
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