

SC/68C/SH/07

Sub-committees/working group name: SH

The Southern Right Whale Consortium

Vermeulen E, Charlton C, Burnell S, Carlyon K, Groch K, Rayment W, Rowntree V, Sironi M, Smith J, Watson M



Papers submitted to the IWC are produced to advance discussions within that meeting; they may be preliminary or exploratory.

It is important that if you wish to cite this paper outside the context of an IWC meeting, you notify the author at least six weeks before it is cited to ensure that it has not been superseded or found to contain errors.

The Southern Right Whale Consortium

Vermeulen E, Charlton C, Burnell S, Carlyon K, Groch K, Rayment W, Rowntree V, Sironi M, Smith J, Watson M

Introduction

A southern right whale circumpolar photo identification (Photo-ID) consortium (SRWC) was proposed to facilitate multi-ocean collaboration and development of data quality control standards. The development of the SRWC is a key objective of the International Whaling Commission Southern Ocean Research Partnership (IWC-SORP) funded project "*Multi-ocean assessment of southern right whale demographic parameters and environmental correlates*" (SC/68a/SHWP19 and SC/67b/SHWP12). The collaborative research group involves 22 researchers from 7 countries, and aims to compare population demographics across the main Southern Hemisphere wintering grounds, by applying a common demographic model to the populations in each region (South Africa, Argentina/Brazil, Australia, New Zealand), in order to eventually investigate correlations between southern right whale (SRW) reproductive success and environmental variables. This work forms a critical component of the IWC-SORP Theme 6 "*The right sentinel for climate change: linking foraging ground variability to population recovery in the SRW*".

Memorandum of Understanding

During initial discussions on the outline of the intended SRW Photo-ID Consortium, it was agreed that global research on southern right whales would also benefit from an agreement outlining the intent to collaborate on global comparative studies to progress priority research questions for the conservation and management of southern right whales. It was therefore decided that the best way forward was to create a broad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the formation of a general SRWC, to which different projects can be annexed, detailing respective project partners, aims and objectives, confidential information to be shared, and expected deliverables.

With this aim, a MoU is being developed (currently in second draft) with regard to the establishment of a collaborative relationship in areas of research on southern right whales. The objective of the SRWC is to formalise and facilitate the multi-national collaborations forthcoming of the IWC-SORP Theme 6, as to allow the generation of scientific information on, and management strategies for, southern right whales on a global scale, which would not be achievable by individual research groups. Ultimately, the SRWC aims to improve the conservation status of southern right whales on a global scale. The MoU specifies the ways in which Partners will work collaboratively with each other, and share data, towards the achievement of the aims and objectives of the Consortium. Project and region specific formal data sharing agreements may also be developed and annexed to the broader umbrella MoU.

Mutual benefits from this collaboration will include improved knowledge on the species transferred into scientific publications, research-informed conservation recommendations, better-quality opportunities for fundraising, increased media outreach and public involvement.

Branding

A logo was developed for the SRWC (see below). Ideally, an independent website will be developed in the future, outlining its partners, aims and objectives and different research projects.



Going forward

Due to the urgency and the need of the work of the intersessional group “*Multi-ocean assessment of southern right whale demographic parameters and environmental correlates*” to move forward, the first project encompassed under, and annexed to, the MoU of the SRWC relates to the sharing of long-term sighting histories of adult female southern right whales of the main breeding grounds, with the aim to allow for a comprehensive assessment of the global population status of southern right whales under a common statistical and biological model, as specified in document SC/68b/O01.

Under the existing IWC-SORP project for development of the common demographic model, these shared data will be used for the achievement of the following objectives

- a. Develop quality control standards
- b. Identify analytical biases
- c. Assess population parameters under a common biological and statistical model

Results of this project will be converted into reports for the scientific committee of the International Whaling Commission and the Southern Ocean Research Partnership, as well as peer reviewed publications, in ways established under the MoU.

The MoU is purposely very broad to allow for future collaborations including, but not limited to, photo ID matching across regions and assessment of movement patterns between established breeding grounds. Future projects will be detailed under separate annexes and inter-regional data sharing agreements formalised where necessary.

Going forward, additional partners to the Consortium, and SRW related research projects, are strongly encouraged! **Ultimately, it is aimed that the SRWC provides a platform for the development of standardized circumpolar southern right whale databases and a global photo-identification catalogue, including partners working on the species from all over the world. Thus, if you are keen to become involved, please contact Consortium coordinators Els Vermeulen (els.vermeulen@up.ac.za) and Claire Charlton (claire.charlton@live.com.au)**