

SC/68C/HIM/24

Sub-committees/working group name: HIM

Bycatch Mitigation Initiative – 2021 update on progress

IWC Secretariat



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Bycatch Mitigation Initiative – 2021 update on progress

Bycatch Coordinator, IWC Secretariat

ABSTRACT

The IWC's Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI) is currently implementing its new 2020-2024 workplan. This document provides a progress update on some key areas of work – bycatch pilot projects, fundraising, capacity building and work in the Indian Ocean. The sub-committee is invited to review and provide any feedback to the Bycatch Coordinator. Collaboration with the BMI is encouraged and welcomed.

BMI WORKPLAN 2020-2024

The Bycatch Mitigation Initiative's (BMI) new four-year work plan (2020-2024) was endorsed by the Conservation Committee during its October 2020 meeting. Activities relating to the Scientific Committee were discussed and agreed during SC68B. The BMI workplan is now being implemented, and in 2020-2021 the focus has been on individual pilot project development, exploring fundraising opportunities, the capacity building programme and progressing collaborative work in the Indian Ocean relating to bycatch.

EXPERT PANEL

The Expert Panel on Bycatch has continued to provide technical advice and guidance to the Bycatch Coordinator and the Standing Working Group on Bycatch. This has included: input to the development of pilot projects; participation in external meetings such as the IOTC/IWC meeting on potential collaboration; presentations at conferences alongside the Bycatch Coordinator; leading the development of material for capacity building; review and feedback on IWC documents and those of external organisations (e.g., FAO). The first four-year term of the Expert Panel ends in early 2022, and panel membership is currently being reviewed to fill expertise and geographical gaps.

EXTERNAL FUNDRAISING

Full implementation of the BMI Work plan (2020-2024) will require external fundraising, particularly in relation to pilot projects, the capacity building programme and engagement of RFMOs. The Bycatch Coordinator and others in the IWC Secretariat are exploring possible external funding opportunities for individual pilot projects – in collaboration with national governments and relevant organisations.

The BMI has submitted a draft concept to the GEF/FAO Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Phase 2 project development team. The overall project is focused on improving the sustainability of the world's tuna fisheries. The IWC's proposed concept aims to collaboratively bring about a step-change in relation to assessing and addressing cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries across two ocean basins - the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean but lays the foundation to scale up to multiple ocean basins. Discussions are ongoing with the FAO and potential project partners as to the activities, timeframes and budgets. At regional level, the proposed broad level activities include:

- 1) Assessing cetacean bycatch, and data gaps across an ocean basin to inform RFMOs on the scale and scope of the issue in relevant fisheries and provide a baseline.
- 2) Building regional capacity and awareness on cetacean bycatch and available practical solutions; working with key countries to train fishers and fisheries managers and observers in cetacean bycatch mitigation, monitoring and safe handling and release and the review and dissemination of relevant information on best practices to address bycatch.
- 3) Collaboratively developing recommendations to address cetacean bycatch across multi-lateral environmental and fisheries agreements. The IWC will focus on developing recommendations on cetacean conservation through its own Committees and Commission processes and build a coordinated and collaborative approach with national governments participating in both IWC and the relevant RFMOs.

At the global scale, the proposed cross-cutting activities include: harmonization and sharing of cetacean bycatch data reported to international bodies; participation in the Tuna RFMO Kobe Bycatch Working Group; outreach and communication activities including dissemination of tools relating to bycatch assessment and management;

PILOT PROJECTS

The Bycatch Coordinator, members of the Bycatch Expert Panel, the Standing Working Group on Bycatch and other collaborators have focused on identifying and developing pilot projects for assessing and addressing bycatch. Seven different countries/locations have been prioritised for pilot project development: Peru, Republic of Congo, Kenya, Pakistan, India, Thailand, Malaysian and Indonesian Borneo. The IWC Secretariat has reached out to IWC Commissioners, national governments and national experts to discuss collaboration and project concepts. Each pilot project is particularly focused on small scale fisheries using gillnets, and proven, practical and novel approaches to monitoring, mitigating and managing bycatch. The focus during 2021 is developing project concepts further, applying for external funding, and beginning some activities with existing 'seed funding' which has already been secured.

The Sub-Committee is requested to provide any advice on suitable monitoring and mitigation approaches which could be considered for inclusion in the project.

The BMI would also encourage and welcome any researchers with relevant information to consider sharing this information with the BMI team, and we welcome a discussion on collaboration on individual pilot projects.

PERU

Progress has been made with a small working group formed of representatives from different ministries of the Peruvian Government, and Expert Panel members in relation to developing the concept for a bycatch pilot project in Peru (see also SC/68C/HIM/15). Two locations have been identified as potentially suitable for the project activities, San José - Lambayeque (06 ° 46'S, 79 ° 48'W), in the north; and San Andrés - Pisco (13 ° 46'S, 76 ° 13'W) in the south-central zone of Peru. The pilot project is likely to begin with a synthesis and analysis of existing information (cetacean abundance, fishing effort and practices, bycatch, socio-economic and supply chain information) from different sources. This will enable the project team to modify (if necessary) the selected locations. It will also allow for the development of a comprehensive strategy for the project (e.g. what approaches or technical mitigation are most appropriate to be trialled or implemented). This initial activity may be undertaken by an external consultancy, in collaboration with the project team funded by the BMI's pilot project seed funding.

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The BMI has begun developing preliminary ideas for a pilot project in the Republic of Congo, in collaboration with the Consortium for the Conservation of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (CCAHD) – see Appendix 11 in SC/68C/INFO/22. Discussion is needed with Government representatives, and relevant organisations to further develop this project concept and apply for external funding. The Secretariat is engaged in outreach with the Commissioner from the Republic of Congo.

MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA

The BMI is discussing with researchers in both Malaysia and Indonesia about the potential for a BMI pilot project. Originally the concept was for a trans-boundary bycatch project on the island of Borneo, and the BMI is currently exploring whether this would be feasible, or whether two separate projects in each country would be better. In both Indonesia and Malaysia, additional sites/regions may also be considered for inclusion (for example, the potential for collaboration with work outlined in SC/68C/HIM/08 and other projects being developed in both countries). Further discussion with researchers from both countries is needed, and engagement with national governments to build a collaborative project.

KENYA, INDIA, PAKISTAN, THAILAND,

The BMI is discussing with government representatives and/or researchers in each country in relation to possible collaboration on a pilot project.

AFFILIATED PROJECTS

The BMI continues to explore opportunities to collaborate on existing and new projects focused on bycatch mitigation, particularly in small-scale fisheries and gillnets (see for example: SC/68C/HIM/16, SC/68C/HIM/20 and SC/68C/HIM/21). Collaboration on projects allows the BMI to learn from projects and export these lessons to pilot projects, or to countries requesting advice on technical approaches. An affiliation also provides access to advice from the Bycatch Expert Panel, and a broader dissemination of results and outreach opportunities. If you would be interested in discussing an affiliation, or collaboration on funding proposals, please get in touch with the Bycatch Coordinator.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The BMI is establishing its capacity building programme in relation to various topics relating to bycatch assessment, monitoring and mitigation. This includes:

TECHNICAL WORKSHOPS. In November 2020, an introductory virtual workshop was organised by the BMI and the Government of Colombia on rapid bycatch risk assessments, and the potential applicability of these tools to assessing bycatch in small-scale fisheries in Colombia.

The BMI is keen to explore opportunities for future capacity building workshops, including through links with Small Cetacean Task Teams, existing Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) or CMPs that are being developed.

'BYCATCH MITIGATION APPRENTICESHIPS' – adapted from the successful 'Entanglement apprenticeships' where individuals working in less developed countries who wish to receive technical training could be placed with experts for a short period.

SHARED 'LIBRARY' OF BYCATCH MITIGATION AND MONITORING EQUIPMENT, which could be accessed by researchers carrying out affiliated research. This would lower the initial costs for small-scale bycatch mitigation research projects. The concept for this is still in the early stages of development – and requires further scoping, particularly in relation to how this could be logistically possible.

If you would be interested in discussing how the BMI might assist you technically, please get in touch with the Bycatch Coordinator.

REVIEWING CETACEAN DISTRIBUTION, FISHING EFFORT AND BYCATCH

The BMI is focusing efforts on collating information on cetaceans and cetacean bycatch in the Indian Ocean. Paper SC/68C/ForInfo/109 outlines some potential collaborative activities between the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and the IWC (and others). This includes the collation and analysis of existing information on cetaceans and cetacean bycatch, and the identification of data gaps. This information would be of use for a 'ecological risk assessment' at the scale of the Indian Ocean, and in the Common Oceans ABNJ project and complementary to work classifying fishing fleets such as described in SC/68C/HIM/20. In addition the Standing Working Group on Abundance Estimates, Stock Status and International Surveys (ASI) will discuss SC/68C/ASI/16 in relation to a proposed pan-regional survey initiative for the Indian Ocean, which would aim to provide baseline data on cetacean abundance and distribution for threat assessment work – including bycatch.

The HIM sub-committee is invited to provide any feedback on these initiatives, including on work with the IOTC. Any additional information sources on cetaceans in the Indian Ocean, which could be useful for abundance estimation, or threat assessment would also be welcome.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS ON BYCATCH

Details of IWC collaboration with other organisations is included in SC/68C/O/04 and this includes collaborations on bycatch – such as with the UN FAO (see also SC/68C/ForInfo/108 and the FAO Technical Guidelines for Reducing and Preventing Marine Mammal Bycatch in Capture Fisheries), and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (see also SC/68C/ForInfo 109 and 110).

In addition to the collaborations outlined in SC/68C/O/04, the BMI has continued to have discussions with the Bycatch Management Information System – hosted by the Pacific Community (SPC) about potential

collaborations to review cetacean and cetacean bycatch information held on the web platform. This work has been delayed by disruptions from COVID-19, however renewed efforts to develop this collaboration further will take place in 2021. We suggest that the Working Group formed at SC68B under HIM 'BMIS-Review' continue during 2021-2022.