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Update on progress of the IWC Strandings Initiative May 2020-May 2021

Sandro Mazzariol, Chair of the IWC Stranding Expert Panel



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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a progress update for the IWC Strandings Initiative from May 2020 - April 2021 and details of planned upcoming work. A draft new four-year workplan will be presented at this meeting of the Scientific Committee in 2021 along with a revision of staffing and organization in order to better respond to emergencies and training requests. New members were added and the Chair has been confirmed till 2023. In addition, work is underway to explore the relationship between the IWC Strandings Initiative and other initiatives. In addition, an update is given on Strandings Initiative funding. The Scientific Committee is invited to note this update and comment on questions posed below.

INTRODUCTION

At IWC66 the Commission endorsed the recommendations of the Scientific Committee (SC) and the Whale Killing Methods and Welfare Issues Working Group (WKM&WI WG) with respect to an IWC Strandings Initiative. This included the establishment of a Strandings Expert Panel (SEP) and Strandings Co-ordinator post. Dr Karen Stockin held this position from April 2018 until December 2019. After that period, Dr. Andrew Brownlow was enrolled as a consultant to support the SEP Chair and for the writing of the 4 year work plan and strategic document. He also provided a valuable temporary support for the co-ordination of the Expert Panel for queries relating to discussion of training requests and its provision of emergency response advice.

At its last meeting (SC68a) in May 2020 the Scientific Committee continue to welcome progresses under the Strandings Initiative and encouraged continued support of the initiative. It endorsed the need to expand the membership including representatives from key areas, namely Indian Ocean, Asia and Africa.

PROGRESS

The current pandemic have affected also the activities of the IWC Stranding Expert Panel limiting any training on site and possible support on the field in case of emergencies. Despite these limitations, the request of assistance, advice and support increased in the last 12 months, as reported here below.

Progress since May 2020 has included:

- Expert Panel remote “real time” response to assistance and advice requests associated with stranding events, mainly in the Indian Oceans and African waters including. Besides events followed directly in their own area, the EP provide remote assistance in the following cases:
 - . Honk Kong: unusual mortality event *Neophocena phocanoides* (39) March 20-February 2021 (peak in December)
 - . Mauritius: mass stranding *Penoplocephala electra* (53) August-September 2020 (doc IWC68/E14)
 - . Sri Lanka: mass stranding *Globicephala macrorhynchus* (120) November 2020

. Philippines: mass stranding *Lagenodelphis hosei* (25) January 2021
 . Indonesia: mass stranding *Globicephala macrorhynchus* (32) February 2021
 . Ghana: mass stranding *Penoplocephala electra* (>100) April 2021- ongoing
 Provision of advice from the Expert Panel was facilitated using e mail correspondence, the Expert Panel What's app group" and one to one assistance by cell phone, Zoom and What's app.

- Expert Panel intervened on cetaceans strandings in their area, including Unusual Mortality Events (UMEs), Mass Strandings, epidemics, live strandings, and out of habitat situation, exchanging experience and knowledge within the group.
- Engagement with Arabian Sea Whale Network (ASWN)– the SEP chair with other 2 members participated in a online meeting (Feb 4th 2021) and presented a keynote on the IWC Strandings Initiative.
- Engagement with the Cambodia Government, WWF and Cambodian Mekong Dolphin Conservation Project for a remote training on necropsy and forensic approaches carried out on March 15th 2021. Contacts is still ongoing.
- Continuing engagement with IUCN Wildlife Health Specialist Group (IUCN-WHSG) and CITES to assist in the development of a procedure for transboundary transport of diagnostic specimens for cetacean disease investigations in emergency situations.
- Continuing engagement with IGOs (ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS, NAMMCO, IUCN) and other external organizations (NOAA, IFAW) to strengthen cooperation on training, also implementing remote tools.

STRANDINGS EXPERT PANEL MEMBERSHIP & CHAIR
 After the IWC Scientific Committee in 2020, 8 new members accepted to join the Stranding Expert Panel increasing the possibility to cover key areas (Africa, Asia, Pacific and South America) and capacity of response (for new membership see Annex 1). Prof. Sandro Mazzariol was confirmed as Chair for other 3 years (2020-2023).

DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW FOUR YEAR WORKPLAN
 Dr Andrew Brownlow (Glasgow University) was engaged as a strandings consultant until September 2020 to deliver the workplan. He developed the new four-year costed work programme for the Strandings Initiative including the interaction with the Global Stranding Network and the dialogue with the most relevant international organisations (e.g. ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS, CMS, CITES, IUCN Wildlife Health Specialist Group, OIE) to explore synergies with the work of the IWC and helped to determine the best role of the IWC to be articulated through the new four-year work programme. He helped the Chair in collecting comments from the Steering Committee and the SEP in the Review process of the document as well as in defining a strategic document including the prioritization of action of the workplan, including new strategies for government and for staffing of the initiative.

QUESTIONS FOR THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

The Scientific Committee is invited to take note on this update and provide any comments, in particular to:

- Provide any comments relevant to the development of the new 4 year work-plan regarding prioritization of actions.
- Provide any comments related to the Strategic Document presented with particular regard to the staffing and government issues.
- Make recommendations on carry over of SC funding for strandings to the next biennium budget.

ANNEX I - New Members of the International Whaling Commission Expert Panel

Name	Country	Degree	Skills	Geographical area
Stephanie Plon	South Africa	BSc, PhD	ecology, stranding response, postmortem investigations	South Africa, Africa Indian Ocean
Kristi West	Hawaii	BSc	ecology, stranding response, postmortem investigations	Central and South Pacific
Lonneke Illsedjik	The Netherlands	BSc	stranding response, postmortem investigations	North Atlantic, North and Baltic Sea
Antonio Fernandez	Spain	DVM, PhD, ECVP, ECZM	pathology, infectious diseases, welfare, logistics, forensic	Central Atlantic Ocean, Western Africa
Chalathip Junchompoo	Thailand	MSc	postmortem investigations, logistics and immediate stranding respons	Thailand, Cambodia, Eastern and Central Indian Ocean
Andrè Barreto	Brasil	MSc	Marine biologist, database,	South America
Carlos Sacristan	Brasil	DVM, PhD	stranding response, postmortem investigations, infectious disease	South America
Michel Vely	Carribbean	DVM	stranding responder	Carribbean waters