

**Report of the Joint Conservation Committee and Scientific Committee
Working Group meeting**

Monday 26th April 2021

1. Welcome and aims of the meeting

The meeting was co-chaired by the Chair of the Conservation Committee (CC) (Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho, Mexico) and the Chair of the Scientific Committee (SC) (Robert Suydam, USA). The Secretariat were appointed as rapporteurs.

The Chair welcomed the group to the fifth meeting of the joint CC-SC working group. He noted that IWC Resolution 2014-4 agreed to establish a working group (WG) between the Conservation Committee and the Scientific Committee in order to propose a procedure to facilitate the implementation and follow-up of conservation recommendations. He drew attention to the Terms of Reference (Annex A).

2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted (Annex B), with the addition that Lindsay Porter would show a video at the end of the meeting. The list of documents available to the meeting is at Annex C and the list of participants is given at Annex D.

3. Review of Terms of Reference and future work plan of the Joint Conservation Committee and Scientific Committee Working Group

The SC Chair outlined the document *Introduction to revised ToR April 2021* (Annex E) which contains Appendix 1 with the current terms of reference and Appendix 2 the Draft Revised terms of reference. He explained that as part of the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness (WGOE) process it was suggested that working groups have clear, fit for purpose terms of reference. He indicated that there were minimal changes besides adding some introductory language and rewording the bullet points. He emphasised point (a) in the Revised ToR (Appendix 2) where deciding priorities for conservation issues is always difficult and suggested a small group be formed to discuss a process for determining these priorities. The following members volunteered to be in the small group: Alex Zerbini (SC Vice-chair), Robert Suydam (SC Chair), Iain Staniland (Secretariat), Catherine Bell (UK), Lindsay Porter (SM Convenor), Mel Cosentino (Luxembourg), Marguerite Tarzia (Secretariat) and Mi Ae Kim (USA). The Chair of this group will be determined at a later date.

Other than a minor grammatical change there were no other comments.

The SC Chair noted that the revised ToR would not be presented to the Commission until next year¹. WG members were encouraged to give comments during the intersessional period and these will be reviewed at the next meeting in 2022.

4. IWC Database of recommendations

The Chair recalled that, at IWC66 in October 2016 the Commission approved a recommendation from the Conservation Committee to establish a web-accessible database of recommendations. Following a generous voluntary contribution from the UK, the database was developed, and initial population of the database has been undertaken by the Secretariat. The Chair thanked the Secretariat for their work and invited an update.

The Secretariat described the current content of the Database of Recommendations (DoR) and full details can be found in Table 1 of the document SC/68C/GDR/01. The DoR is publicly accessible, and

¹ 18 May 2021 circular communication AB/JAC/32927: Postponement of IWC68 and Virtual Special Meeting (VSM) in September 2021. There is the possibility of presenting the ToR to the Commission this year at the VSM.

all contents can be searched and extracted; no login is required for this. It was highlighted that entering historic records and keeping entries up to date with status is a work in progress. The Secretariat are currently prioritising the entry of Resolutions and workshop recommendations.

For the last SC and CC meetings and this SC the Secretariat have provided extractions of recommendations for each sub-committee. This is to enable sub-committees to update existing recommendations and use them in developing workplans and writing new recommendations. It is hoped that this will be an ongoing exercise based on SC feedback. The Secretariat have also been using the DoR to track their work, such as writing requested letters, and record progress.

Minton, supported by SC Chair and Svoboda (Netherlands) agreed the database is a fantastic tool and a good example for other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). The SC Chair noted that the SC excel at making recommendations which is one of the strengths of the IWC, however, following up on the recommendations to see where SC have succeeded has been more limited. This will hopefully improve with use of the database.

5. Topics of overlap between the CC and SC

The Chair of the WG presented an update (Annex F) summarising intersessional progress on topics of mutual interest between the SC and CC. Convenors, SWG Chairs and topic leads were invited to add brief additional updates for species of urgent and emerging concern, anthropogenic underwater noise, chemical pollution and the BMI, and brief comments from participants were provided. Further detail of the discussions is summarised below.

5.1 Species of urgent and emerging concern

Simmonds gave a brief update on the production of a new webpage on extinction which is now published and being viewed. The Secretariat (Wilson) added that a template had been developed and trials are underway with vaquita and franciscana. The next steps are 1. To develop a mechanism for using the template and obtaining Commission endorsement and 2. Prioritise which species should be the focus. Iñiguez (Argentina) noted that he has almost finished his franciscana template. Rojas-Bracho (Mexico) needs time to complete the vaquita focused one.

The working group established by the CC will start its work soon after the SC and report to the next CC meeting.

SC Chair mentioned that the SC is working on the Extinction Initiative and it would be discussed at Plenary (Item 19). A number of species are declining rapidly, and the SC try hard to make recommendations about these species but perhaps not enough is being done to make sure they do not disappear. It is hoped that CC and SC and this WG can move forward collectively to raise awareness of the situation generally, and for particular species/populations. The SC Chair emphasised that this is not just an issue for small cetaceans and given the IWC convention is focused on baleen whales there are stocks of these that are small and declining.

Simmonds recalled the small cetacean Task Teams (TT) which have a similar function. He suggested a need for joint discussions to coordinate actions. The Convenor of Small Cetaceans (Porter) also underscored the work of Sub-committee on Small Cetaceans and TT and noted the new and updated pages for these and the [Voluntary Fund for Small Cetacean Conservation Research](#) on the IWC website. Reviewers are currently working through new project proposals for funding.

5.2 Anthropogenic Underwater Noise

The Convenor of Non-deliberate human induced mortality (HIM) (Leaper) noted that underwater noise is under the sub-committee for Environmental Concerns and went on to describe the involvement with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and their Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) on this topic. MEPC will be meeting in June 2021 and will hopefully be discussing the proposal from Australia, Canada and US to add Noise onto the agenda. IWC has submitted a comment paper supporting this proposal. Co-convenor of E (Cholewiak, USA) noted that E will cover underwater noise on Monday 3 May.

The Anthropogenic Underwater Noise intersessional correspondence group (AUN-ICG) was established at the CC in October 2020. The AUN-ICG leads Iñiguez (Argentina) and Andriolo (Brazil), reported that the group held a virtual meeting in December 2020 and two objectives were defined: 1. Develop a review paper on seismic activity and impacts on cetaceans; and 2. Update and develop the paper *Review of recent Underwater Noise work undertaken in other International Organisations* to be discussed at the next ICG meeting. Cosentino (Luxembourg) asked to be a member of the ICG and was accepted. All involved in drafting this paper were thanked. Simmonds offered to assist the further development of the paper.

The plan to review impacts of seismic activity (SC/68C/E/WP01) will be presented during the SC68C meeting (E session on 3 May 2021). Further details of the December 2020 meeting can be found in the report SC/68C/E/WP02.

5.3 Chemical pollution

The Chair invited the Convenor of the Sub-committee on Environmental Concerns (E), Holm (Switzerland), to summarise the work of the SC on this topic. Holm highlighted work with the Secretariat researching how other fora have addressed this problem such as the Stockholm Convention and some of the measures introduced recently. A pre-meeting focused on this and the review papers showed problems and success stories (reduction in pollutants) with some success in recommendations that were put in place.

Two important pieces of work were prepared: 1. Looking at cumulative effects as part of the Pollution 2025 programme; and 2. work on updating the modelling and contaminant mapping tools. These will help measure exposure of cetaceans to contaminants.

The SC Chair thanked Holm and the sub-committee for Environmental Concerns for their progress; pollution has been an important issue for decades and there has been incredible progress in SC and CC in the last five years, so it is important to keep this in the spotlight.

The Chair reported that the CC has a group looking at pollution from the management side, but this is still in the development stage. The Secretariat and Convenor of E **agreed** that it would be beneficial to join up this work and will contact the CC topic lead (Pierce).

5.4 BMI- Collaboration with other organisations and regional efforts to address bycatch (Indian Ocean)

The IWC Bycatch Coordinator gave an update of activities. The BMI has been focusing efforts on identifying and developing pilot projects in priority regions, and in developing collaborations. These efforts include engaging closely with FAO by participating in the Committee on Fisheries COFI Meetings and two FAO Expert workshops. In addition, the Secretariat has been following up on opportunities to collaborate with the FAO on dissemination and outreach relating to the recently published [Technical Guidelines](#) to prevent and reduce marine mammal bycatch in capture fisheries.

The BMI has submitted a draft proposal to the GEF funded, FAO led, Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Project – Phase 2. The concept includes working with Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organisations in the Indian Ocean and the Central Pacific on cetacean bycatch. This includes collating existing information and carrying out a regional bycatch risk assessment and raising awareness and capacity to address bycatch at national and regional level. This project, should it be successful, will require input and collaboration across both the SC and the CC.

The Indian Ocean is a priority area for the BMI, and as such, the BMI held a workshop in 2019 in advance of the SC meeting in Nairobi, which helped identify shared challenges, opportunities and priorities for bycatch in the region. In September 2020, the IWC, with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), held a technical meeting to develop ideas on potential collaborative activities. A follow-up meeting is being planned this year.

The BMI is keen to hear any feedback or suggestions on how to improve the collaborations with other organisations, particularly the FAO and RFMOs – and on how to raise the profile of cetacean bycatch (and the solutions available) at relevant scientific and technical meetings.

Bell (UK) thanked the Bycatch Coordinator for her work and offered support for assisting with engaging other countries with regards to RFMOs. Slooten (Luxembourg) asked about the scope of the work with tuna fisheries regarding different methods and the Coordinator clarified that the BMI focus is currently gillnet fisheries.

The IWC Secretary thanked the contracting governments and NGOs that contributed funding to the BMI and noted the need for help in making that bridge from IWC to RFMOs.

5.5 Pan-regional cetacean surveys in the Indian Ocean

The BMI Coordinator introduced paper SC/68C/ASI/16 which aims to prompt discussions in the Working Group on Abundance Estimates, Stock Status and International Cruises on the need for coordinated pan-regional survey initiative for cetaceans in the Indian Ocean. It outlines the need to collate existing information and acquire new baseline data on species and populations to adequately monitor and address the impact of threats. In the context of bycatch discussions, the lack of baseline information on cetaceans at the local, national and regional scale has been raised regularly for this region and is limiting conservation efforts. A coordinated initiative would allow the synthesis and analysis of existing information (visual, acoustic, photo ID, tracking data) and the systematic collection of new data.

Finally, the paper suggests some next steps for the IWC Scientific Committee, contracting governments and the IWC Secretariat in exploring this proposed initiative further. Whilst the discussions are yet to take place in ASI it would be useful to have any preliminary feedback from the Joint Working Group on this proposed initiative, including on the suggested next steps.

The Convenor of ASI reiterated that this paper will be reviewed in an ASI session and they will make recommendations then. He thanked the BMI Coordinator for producing the paper as it was relevant to several sub-committees. Slooten asked whether observer programs in this region could be used to fill gaps. The BMI coordinator noted that the focus of the bycatch program was in small scale gillnet fisheries so observers are not generally used but there is lots of scope for development of alternatives.

6. Matters to transmit to SC68C and IWC68

The Chair explained that this item will allow for agreement of any issues from the joint CC-SC discussions that require the attention of the SC and allow for agreement on issues that should be brought to the attention of Commissioners at the planned September 2021 meeting.

A question was raised on how to transmit the recommendations from this meeting. The Secretariat confirmed that normally the report would be transmitted via the CC meeting then to the Commission. SC Chair noted that the likelihood of an in-person meeting of the Commission in 2021 is low but there would potentially be a virtual option where urgent items could be presented. He added that he did not believe anything from this meeting needed to be presented to Commission or communicated with Commissioners this year. The IWC Chair clarified this, pointing out that the Bureau conveyed opinion that full participation at an in-person meeting in 2021 cannot happen, so it is very unlikely that an in-person meeting will happen in 2021. There are some matters that must be adopted in 2021 and how to adopt them is being considered. He asked the WG to consider if there are matters that would benefit from an in-person debate and can wait until 2022 or whether they need to be adopted in 2021 and don't require much debate.

The Secretariat reminded the group that the SC workplan and budget will be adopted this year. There is still the question whether the CC will meet virtually this year² and whether their workplan needs to go before the Commission to continue. The CC Chair confirmed that the CC needed a new costed workplan and possibly new ToR.

Simmonds raised the point that issues of grave concern will not be highlighted in the same way without an in-person meeting and suggested issuing a statement of concern that points to these issues and demonstrates the work of the IWC. The IWC, CC and SC Chairs all supported this idea, and it was agreed that a statement would be drafted and put forward by both committees.

The CC Chair asked the Chair of the WW SWG for a brief summary of how the WW SWG and sub-committee for WW are improving communication. The WW SWG Chair reported briefly on their recent meeting with the Convenor of the SC WW Subcommittee which discussed proposals for closer communication including SC input to the WW handbook (using the editorial protocol which was recently agreed for the handbook), and SC representation on the WW SWG. g These proposals will be presented to SC for further feedback.

The CC Chair thanked the WW SWG Chair and praised this work as a good example of how the CC and SC can collaborate effectively.

7. Any other business

Porter introduced a promotional video on the Chilean Dolphin Project funded by the Small Cetacean Conservation Fund titled *First Region-wide estimates of population size and status of endemic Chilean Dolphins* (*Cephalorhynchus eutropia*). This will be available to watch on the website.

² Following discussion with CC Chair and Vice Chair and following current RoP there will not be a CC meeting in 2021. It is hoped the current workplan will be extended a further year and new workplan developed for IWC68 in 2022.

Annex A. Terms of Reference for the Joint Conservation Committee and Scientific Committee Working Group

The Joint CC-SC working group (CC-SC WG) is tasked with facilitating the communication, implementation, and follow-up of conservation recommendations.

The CC-SC WG shall:

- review, collate and prioritise conservation recommendations made by the Scientific and Conservation Committees where further efforts/actions are needed, in the first instance focussing on those from 2010 onwards;
- report, as appropriate, to the Commission on progress in delivering conservation recommendations;
- develop clear procedures/strategies for effectively transmitting and facilitating the implementation of conservation recommendations to and from the SC-CC WG to the appropriate Committees and sub-committees/working groups, including for further technical work;
- provide advice to the Conservation Committee on those priority conservation recommendations it could assist in implementing;
- provide feedback to the Scientific Committee on further advice and/or actions to assist in the implementation of conservation recommendations;
- respond to specific requests for support in facilitating the implementation of conservation recommendations from the Scientific and/or Conservation Committees.

The CC-SC WG will be comprised of nominees from the Scientific Committee, Conservation Committee and Contracting Governments. Additional expertise may be included as appropriate at the discretion of the Scientific Committee and Conservation Committee Chairs.

Annex B. Agenda

Agenda

Joint Conservation Committee and Scientific Committee Working Group

Monday 26 April 2021 (1600h Two hours)

Location: Virtual via zoom

- 1. Welcome and aims of the meeting**
 - i. Appointment of Co-chairs
 - ii. Appointment of Rapporteur
 - iii. Terms of Reference and aims of the meeting
 - iv. Review of documents available to the meeting
- 2. Adoption of the agenda**
- 3. Review of Terms of Reference and future work plan of the Joint Conservation Committee and Scientific Committee Working Group**
- 4. IWC database of recommendations**
 - i. Status update
 - ii. Update on database use
 - iii. Use by the Joint CC-SC WG.
- 5. Topics of mutual interest between the CC and SC**
 - i. Species of urgent and emerging concern
 - ii. Anthropogenic Underwater Noise
 - iii. Chemical pollution
 - iv. BMI- Collaboration with other organisations and regional efforts to address bycatch (Indian Ocean)
 - v. Pan-regional cetacean surveys in the Indian Ocean
- 6. Matters to transmit to SC68C and IWC68**
- 7. Any other business**

Annex C. List of documents

<i>Document Reference</i>	<i>Title</i>
[See Annex B]	<i>Annotated Agenda</i>
[See Annex E]	<i>Introduction to Revised ToR April 2021</i>
[See Annex F]	<i>Update on topics of mutual interest CC-SC</i>

Annex D. List of Participants

ARGENTINA

Miguel Iñíguez

AUSTRALIA

Mike Double

BELGIUM

Jan Haelters
Stephanie Langerock

BRAZIL

Alex Zerbini

LUXEMBOURG

Mel Cosentino
Liz Slooten

NETHERLANDS

Anne-Marie Svoboda

NEW ZEALAND

Dave Lundquist

NORWAY

Arne Bjørge
Lars Walløe

SLOVENIA

Andrej Bibič
Branka Tavzes
Dasa Majcen

SPAIN

Elvira García-Bellido

SWITZERLAND

Patricia Holm

UK

Cat Bell
Mark Simmonds
Russell Leaper

USA

Danielle Cholewiak

Debi Palka
Dave Weller
Mi Ae Kim
Robert Brownell
Ryan Wulff
Tom Gleason

Scientific Committee

Chris Parsons
Fernando Trujillo
Gianna Minton
Helena Herr
Jooke Robbins
Jorge Urban
Juan Pablo Florez Torrez
Karina Groch
Lars Walloe
Leslie New
Lindsay Porter
Naomi Rose
Paula Olson
Ralph Tiedemann
Toshihide Kitakado
Txema Brotons

Chair of the Conservation Committee:

Lorenzo Rojas Bracho

Chair of the Scientific Committee:

Robert Suydam

Observers

Osmar Sandino (Paso Pacifico)

IWC Secretariat

Rebecca Lent
Alisha Falberg
David Mattila
Iain Staniland
Imogen Webster
Kate Wilson
Lydia O'Loughlin
Marguerite Tarzia
Sarah Smith

Annex E. Introduction to revised ToR April 2021

Revised Terms of Reference for the Joint Working Group of the Conservation Committee and Scientific Committee

Lorenzo Rojas Bracho (CC Chair), Robert Suydam (SC Chair), Catherine Bell (CC Vice-chair), Alex Zerbini (SC Vice-chair)

BACKGROUND

In 2014, the Commission voted in favour of Resolution 2014-4 and agreed to establish a Working Group of the Conservation Committee and the Scientific Committee (CC-SC WG). The purpose of this working group was to facilitate the interaction between the two Committees regarding the implementation and follow-up of recommendations related to the conservation of cetaceans that overlap the two Committees. At its first meeting, the -CC-SC WG developed and adopted the Terms of Reference given in Appendix 1.

The Working Group has had four meetings since 2015 but has not met since 2019 because of some of the financial challenges in 2019, and due to COVID-19 restrictions and a virtual meeting of the SC in 2020. During the four meetings the WG made progress related to the development of guidelines on language to be used in recommendations; development of a draft structure and process for populating a web-accessible database of recommendations (and outcomes); and recommendations relating to the timing and agendas of Conservation Committee meetings. In 2018 the CC took note that some conservation themes identified by the Scientific Committee do not appear on the Conservation Committee agenda. When developing its workplan, the Conservation Committee agreed to consider:

- i) The need to amend its agenda to reflect additional themes identified from this analysis (i.e. topics related to the conservation of small cetaceans, including bycatch and entanglement) and the value of establishing intersessional working groups for priority areas to further the workplans of both Committees; and
- ii) The need to recommend to the Commission an annual Conservation Committee meeting (whilst this would have cost and logistical implications it would allow the Committee additional time to consider in more detail the progress made intersessionally to deliver on key conservation issues).

Seven years after the CC-SC WG was established, six years after the first Terms of Reference (ToR) were proposed and following guidance from the Governance Review of the IWC, the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of both Conservation and Scientific Committees agreed to review the WG's ToR. A draft of the revised ToR, provided in Appendix 2, has attempted to keep in mind not only the original intent of the Commission to facilitate communication between the two Committees, but to improve it. The CC and the SC will discuss overlapping priority conservation issues with a focus on reviewing recommendations, promoting their implementation as possible, and presenting these recommendations to the Commission.

Appendix 1. CURRENT Terms of Reference for the Joint Conservation Committee and Scientific Committee Working Group

The Joint CC-SC working group (CC-SC WG) is tasked with facilitating the communication, implementation, and follow-up of conservation recommendations.

The CC-SC WG shall:

- review, collate and prioritise conservation recommendations made by the Scientific and Conservation Committees where further efforts/actions are needed, in the first instance focusing on those from 2010 onwards;
- report, as appropriate, to the Commission on progress in delivering conservation recommendations;
- develop clear procedures/strategies for effectively transmitting and facilitating the implementation of conservation recommendations to and from the SC-CC WG to the appropriate Committees and sub-committees/working groups, including for further technical work;
- provide advice to the Conservation Committee on those priority conservation recommendations it could assist in implementing;
- provide feedback to the Scientific Committee on further advice and/or actions to assist in the implementation of conservation recommendations;
- respond to specific requests for support in facilitating the implementation of conservation recommendations from the Scientific and/or Conservation Committees.

The CC-SC WG will be comprised of nominees from the Scientific Committee, Conservation Committee and Contracting Governments. Additional expertise may be included as appropriate at the discretion of the Scientific Committee and Conservation Committee Chairs.

Appendix 2. DRAFT Revised Terms of Reference for the Joint Conservation Committee and Scientific Committee Working Group

The Joint Conservation Committee/Scientific Committee working group (CC-SC WG) is tasked with facilitating communication between the two Committees on matters related to the IWC's conservation priorities. The main benefit of the WG is to jointly discuss recommendations addressing those priority issues, and efforts to implement and track their progress by the Commission, relevant subsidiary bodies, Contracting Governments, intergovernmental organisations, accredited observers and other relevant organizations.

The CC-SC WG shall develop and promote a clear strategy and mechanism for:

- (a) review, collate, and suggest priorities to the Commission about conservation issues and associated recommendations made by the Scientific and Conservation committees, while respecting the direction provided by the Commission to both Committees;
- (b) the effective transmission of identified priority recommendations to the appropriate entities and stakeholders likely to implement the recommendations (e.g., Commission, its subsidiary bodies, Contracting Governments, and Intergovernmental organisations);
- (c) review and report progress to the Commission, through the CC and SC committees, including use of the database of recommendations

An important component of the CC-SC WG is the facilitation of communication between the Committees on proposed work required by each to address priority conservation issues, including the direct communication and collaboration between convenors and standing group chairs and topic leads, the identification of the need for further technical work and/or more clear advice on the practical implementation of priority recommendations (e.g. identifying resources required, key actors and any socio-economic implications and if needed, identify the obstacles to achieve these recommendations).

The CC-SC WG will comprise at least the Chairs and Vice-chairs of the Scientific and Conservation committees, with encouragement of SC convenors and leads of the CC SWGs to attend. Additional expertise (or requests for participation by specified Contracting Governments) may be included as appropriate at the discretion of the Chairs of the SC and CC. Temporary working groups may be established to address topics requiring consideration at a more detailed or focused level. The group will be supported by the Secretariat.

Annex F. Update on Work Across Topics of Mutual Interest

Update on Work Across Topics of Mutual Interest

IWC Secretariat

INTRODUCTION

This Annex provides a brief update on intersessional progress made by the Conservation Committee (CC) and Scientific Committee (SC) across their common work areas since IWC67 2018. It also includes brief updates of progress at and since the subsequent SC meetings (SC68A and B) and the virtual meeting of the Conservation Committee in September/October 2020.

TOPICS OF MUTUAL INTEREST

Anthropogenic Underwater Noise

Scientific Committee

Resolution 2018-4 on underwater anthropogenic noise was adopted at IWC67. The Resolution called on both the SC and CC to work on aspects of underwater noise and its impacts on cetaceans and their prey, as well as mitigation and management (Recommendations CO1880 and CO1881).

IWC recommendations relevant to shipping noise were presented to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in 2018. This was followed by the Secretariat attending an IMO workshop on Quieting Ships in 2019 which considered ship-based noise limits and technical means of noise reduction.

It was anticipated that IWC would attend the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) 75 in early 2020 but the meeting was postponed due to COVID-19. The modified agenda of the meeting, held virtually November 2020, did not include Noise items. It is currently planned that Noise will be considered at MEPC76 in June 2021. A short information paper is being prepared on this topic for presentation at SC68C.

The IWC SC Sub-committee on Human Induced Mortality (HIM) held a 3-hour online pre-meeting to SC68B on 11 May 2020 which discussed advancing efforts to address underwater noise from shipping, with talks focused on ambient sound, noise budgets and indicators ([SC/68B/REP/06](#)). The establishment of a database of ship source levels and intersessional work to further collaborate with the CC was encouraged.

Conservation Committee

In 2018 the IWC Conservation Committee established a small intersessional working group to consider and propose initial steps in addressing underwater noise. The IWC's Anthropogenic Underwater Noise Intersessional Correspondence Group (ICG) held a meeting 3 December 2020 to develop a work plan. Two working groups were established during this session. The first will develop a paper on effects of seismic activity and a second will further develop the paper on IWC history of work on noise. It is hoped that the seismic activity paper will be presented to SC68C after a ICG meeting in April 2021.

Bycatch Mitigation Initiative

Programme Coordination

The Bycatch Mitigation Initiative's Costed work plan (2018-2020) and ten-year Strategic Plan (2018-2028) was endorsed by IWC67 and subsequently implemented.

At its meeting in 2020 the CC endorsed the new, four-year BMI Work Plan (2020-2024). The CC re-affirmed the importance of addressing cetacean global bycatch and underscored that bycatch remains one of the priority issues for the IWC. During the intersessional period, the BMI will continue to focus on bycatch in gillnets and other fixed fishing gears and prioritise information gathering in currently identified and future priority pilot project locations.

The SC at SC68B agreed to support the BMI work plan (2020-2024) activities, including the following: (1) request new bycatch information in advance of annual Committee meetings from priority locations for the BMI (and for focal species within pilot project countries/region); (2) review new information with a view to providing recommendations for fisheries or locations which should be prioritised for BMI work (e.g. pilot projects or capacity building); (3) assist the BMI to identify bycatch hotspots and review existing data available on cetacean

distribution, bycatch and fishing effort; and (4) continue to review mitigation and monitoring strategies and provide appropriate technical advice including assisting the BMI intersessionally on reviews of mitigation measures. The Committee also encourages the ongoing collaboration among the BMI, RMFOs, independent researchers and NGOs. It requests that relevant NGOs and researchers contact the BMI regarding their specific geographical interests and expertise.

At its meeting in 2020 the CC endorsed the SWG-Bycatch proposal for the allocation of existing funds to support BMI Work Plan activities in 2021 and noted the intention for possible future submissions to the Voluntary Conservation Fund (VCF) for seed funding or co-funding of pilot projects (if needed). It also encouraged wider fundraising efforts to support the full implementation of the 2020-2024 work plan activities.

Collaboration and engagement with other international organisations on bycatch

The IWC has continued to engage with the FAO on the issue of cetacean bycatch, including through participation of the BMI (Coordinator, Standing Working Group and Expert Panel members) and members of the SC in two expert workshops (2018 and 2019) to develop the recently published [FAO Technical Guidelines to prevent and reduce bycatch of marine mammals in capture fisheries](#). The IWC Secretariat has continued to engage with the FAO Secretariat in relation to potential collaboration to promote the guidelines and update the technical information.

The IWC Secretariat has attended two FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) meetings (2018 and 2021), where IWC interventions were provided in relation to the need to address cetacean bycatch, and for collaborative opportunities between fisheries management organisations and the IWC.

The IWC Secretariat commissioned a review of 16 RFMOs in relation to how they are addressing cetacean bycatch in their relevant fisheries. This review was discussed during SC68B and in the Conservation Committee meeting in 2020.

The IWC Secretariat participated in the Joint Tuna RFMO Bycatch Working Group meeting in 2019, where a side event was organised to raise awareness about the BMI and the issue of cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries.

The IWC Secretariat has engaged with the GEF/FAO Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Phase 2 project development team and has prepared and submitted a project concept focused on understanding and addressing cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries. The proposed concept includes IWC collaboration with two RFMOs (IOTC and WCPFC), NGOs, IGOs and other partners, focused in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

Bycatch work at a regional scale

In 2019 a workshop was held in Nairobi prior to the Scientific Committee (SC68a) on [Bycatch Mitigation Opportunities in the Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea](#). This workshop identified priority activities, collaborations and priority regions to focus regional efforts to address cetacean bycatch.

IOTC

The BMI has engaged extensively with the IOTC. The Bycatch Coordinator has participated in two IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch meetings (WPEB 2019, 2020), and representatives from the IOTC (WPEB Chair and Secretariat) have participated in BMI workshops (2019) and the IWC Scientific Committee meetings (2020). A joint IOTC/IWC workshop was held in 2020 to discuss cetacean bycatch in the Indian Ocean and potential collaborative activities. The Bycatch Coordinator is working with the IOTC to prepare a funding requests under Common Oceans ABNJ Phase II (FAO/GEF) for collaborative work on cetacean bycatch.

Pilot projects - bycatch

The Bycatch Coordinator continues to work with the Bycatch Expert Panel, the Standing Working Group on Bycatch and other collaborators on identifying and developing pilot projects for 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 and novel approaches to monitoring, mitigating and managing bycatch.

Capacity building - bycatch

The BMI has continued to develop its capacity building programme to assist countries to assess, monitor and mitigate cetacean bycatch. This has included engagement and a preparatory workshop (in collaboration with Expert Panel members) with the Government of Colombia in November 2020 on the potential applicability of rapid bycatch risk assessment methods to assess bycatch within national waters. The Bycatch Coordinator has also engaged with some Small Cetacean Task Teams, and proponents of CMPs in relation to how the BMI can assist in bycatch assessment and mitigation activities. The draft project concept submitted by the IWC to the Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Phase 2 project has a specific focus on capacity building activities.

Cetaceans and Ecosystem functioning

In response to the Commission Resolution 2016-3 asking for advice on the role of cetaceans in ecosystem functioning the SC were to hold a workshop to: (a) define short- and medium-term objectives to be addressed; and (b) to identify what further research is required in order to begin initial modelling of the contribution of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning. Considerable progress was made towards organising the Workshop before SC68B, but it had to be postponed due to COVID19. The Committee recommended that the workshop be held during the intersessional period and the report submitted to the 2021 meeting SC68C. The Committee re-established the Workshop Steering Group under Ritter.

The workshop will now be held virtually over three days, during the week of April 19-23. This will be the first of two workshops and will focus on the more general aspects of cetacean ecosystem functioning, notably: (1). nutrient circulation that includes carbon sequestration, nutrient flux, etc.; (2) ocean fertilization that includes whale pump (vertical) and whale conveyor belt (horizontal) dimensions; (3) whale falls; and (4) cetaceans as predators. COVID permitting, the second workshop will be held in person later in 2021 and will focus on the specific issues around modelling cetacean ecosystem functioning. A full discussion of the project is expected at SC68C.

In 2018, the IWC also endorsed the proposal to hold a Conservation Committee workshop to assess the socio-economic dimensions of the contribution of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning outlined in IWC/67/CC/16.

During the 2020 virtual CC meeting the committee received the Report of the Intersessional Working Group on Cetaceans and Ecosystem Functioning (CC/68A/13.00/01) containing an update on progress and in particular a proposal to hold the virtual workshop on this topic in 2021. It is expected that this CC ecosystem workshop will be conducted prior to the 2021 CC meeting and the report submitted to the CC. Preparations are underway for this workshop and a draft Agenda is being refined.

Socio-economic experts are being invited by the CC to attend the SC workshop as observers so they can contribute to the design of the CC workshop agenda.

Chemical pollution

SC/68B/E/02 provided a summary of the major activities that occurred during the three phases of the Environmental Concerns Pollution Initiative (2000, 2000+, 2020). Among other important outcomes, an individual based model to assess risks to cetacean populations was developed and is now available as open-source model through the IWC website which also includes a contaminant mapping tool (<https://iwc.int/chemical-pollution>).

The new SC program, POLLUTION 2025, will look at multiple stressors and contaminants, using a One Health approach. There was a SC pre-meeting April 2021. Results from this may help find areas where CC work can be focused.

The CC has established a small group to consider the CC Work Plan for Chemical Pollution. This group is currently not active but will look at results from the Pollution 2025 pre-meeting to determine possible actions.

Climate change

The impact of climate change has been considered an overarching topic by the Environmental Concerns Subcommittee of the SC since 2017, interacting with almost all stressors of concern to the SC. The Commission has noted the importance of collaborating with other relevant international bodies on this topic and initiating specific activities in the future. The September/October CC meeting received an update on SC work on this topic including plans for the workshop. The CC was asked if it wished to hold a joint workshop, provide funding, and/or appoint people to the SC steering group. The CC supported a combined workshop and the CC Chair offered to join the steering group.

The joint CC/SC Steering group has held two meetings and aims to refine plans for the full workshop which will be held later in the year around 12-14 October. The objective of the workshop is to review the latest information about the implications of climate change for cetacean populations – based on observed and predicted effects - and would help to define and develop the role of the IWC in helping to address this issue.

The focus would include advice on: (1) how to better integrate this issue into the Scientific Committee's work plan; (2) identification of research programme/areas to fill priority knowledge gaps; and (3) identify areas/issue for which mitigation and management issue are likely to be a priority for the IWC and other international and national authorities.

Conservation Management Plans

Progress on Current Conservation Management Plans (CMP)

Western Pacific Gray Whale

The joint IUCN/IWC CMP for western gray whale had planned to hold a workshop to update the scientific components of the CMP that would in turn be reported to SC68C. However, this has been postponed due to COVID-19, which in turn has delayed a subsequent stakeholder workshop. A Virtual meeting of the IUCN Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel took place in November 2020 and was attended by SC members as well as the IWC Secretariat Head of Science, Conservation and Management and the Executive Secretary. The report from this meeting is now available online (<https://www.iucn.org/western-gray-whale-advisory-panel/panel/meetings/a-glance-meeting-reports>).

The SC encouraged the range states and signatories of the Memorandum of Co-operation on western gray whales to continue to work with the CMP Steering Group and Secretariats of IWC and IUCN to plan and hold these meetings.

South-west Atlantic Southern Right Whale

This CMP has been dormant since 2017 but work resumed under the coordination of Juan Pablo Torres-Florez (Brazil) in January 2020. Progress includes identifying sub-coordinators in each range state to work together to establish work plans and budgets for CMP actions. Researchers from Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina have met to coordinate possible satellite tagging in Uruguay, Brazil and Chile. Researchers are collating information to update their understanding of the population and priority actions to be carried out in each range state. There is a SC Premeeting planned for April 2021.

South-east Pacific Right Whale

Since IWC67 significant progress was made with priority actions including. Passive Acoustic Monitoring project, photo-ID matching efforts, new insights into the genetic identity of the population, educational lectures and workshops, and media outreach programs. The Government of Peru has offered to host the third coordination meeting and workshop on whale watching and research permits, however this was postponed due to COVID-19. The SC has allocated funding for the continuation of the Passive Acoustic Monitoring project work in 2021, including analysis of acoustic data and the participation of experts in the joint workshop. A pre-meeting for the South-east Pacific Right Whale was held April 2021.

Franciscana

Since IWC67 work has focused on preparing the review of the status of franciscana by the SC, which will guide future conservation efforts. This will include an initial assessment of population structure and of abundance estimates. A Workshop was held for this during February 2020, and the review was completed during a 3-day pre-meeting to SC68C (7-9 April 2021). Brazil announced the introduction of Franciscana Day (1 October). This is to raise awareness of the problems faced by the species throughout its range and to promote its conservation. The review and progress will be presented to SC68C.

Future: Updates on Potential New CMPs

South American River Dolphins

An initial technical workshop was held mid-2019 and the Terms of Reference (Challenges and Conservation Management Proposals June 2019, Bogota, Colombia) were agreed. A virtual workshop was held 29-30 April 2020 to finalise coordination for the IWC SC meeting. At SC68B in May 2020 the proposal was presented and endorsed, and an ICG established to further discuss the proposal. The CC endorsed the CMP Nomination for a Conservation Management Plan for South American river dolphins (genus *Inia* and *Sotalia fluviatilis*) to proceed to a draft CMP and looked forward to the endorsement of the CMP at IWC68. The proponents will incorporate CC and SC recommendations and present the final proposal at SC68C and IWC68.

Central American Humpback Whales

In 2019 SC proposed Central American humpback whales as a priority population for CMP development. An ICG was established at SC68A for initial evaluation of available data for input to development of a CMP and a workshop considering biological and ecological aspects, threats, mitigation and monitoring took place from 9-10 March 2020 in Panama City, Panama. At SC68B The Committee recommended the continuation and increased collaboration of the Range States and a further workshop to develop a draft CMP. A pre-meeting was held to discuss and develop this CMP in March 2021. The proponents have prepared a draft CMP for SC68C.

Asian River Dolphins (discussed in SM SC68B)

Paper [SC/68B/CMP/10](#) provided an update on several Asian freshwater cetacean populations and reported that all three genera are subject to multiple threats and that additional coordinated action is required throughout their range as a matter of priority.

A proposal was presented to CC and requires further detailed discussion and will be revisited at SC68C. There are strong synergies with the two other CMS Concerted Actions relating to Asian river dolphins (Ganges river dolphin and Irrawaddy dolphin) adopted at CMS COP13. The IWC Secretariat is in discussions with India on how the IWC and BMI could assist with its river dolphin research and conservation efforts.

Mediterranean Fin Whale

In 2018 a CMP for Mediterranean fin whale was proposed and endorsed by ACCOBAMS. Subsequently, a workshop funded and organised by ACCOBAMS was held in Spain, to develop an initial draft CMP. The ACCOBAMS plan is that: (1) the initial draft be examined by the ACCOBAMS SC; (2) the IWC SC review the CMP from a scientific perspective; (3), the revised CMP be sent to member states; and (4) a stakeholder workshop be held to develop a final CMP (to which IWC as well as other IGOS, NGOs, local and national authorities will be invited). Relevant IWC and ACCOBAMS range states are working towards finalising a draft CMP for Mediterranean fin whales for presentation at SC68C.

Mediterranean Sperm Whale

ACCOBAMS is considering leading the development of a joint ACCOBAMS/IWC CMP that will address the key threats for this population including ship strikes and bycatch. It was hoped that a New IUCN Redlist regional assessment should be ready by the end of 2020.

Arabian Sea Humpback Whale

There has been continued positive response from Oman and India for the development of a CMP for the Arabian Sea humpback whales since 2018. Research activities for this population were reported to the SC meeting in 2019 and 2020. The SC68B recommended that the IWC Secretariat and SWG-CMP continue efforts with Oman and

India towards development of a CMP in partnership with CMS. It further recommended continuation of research by scientists within the region to guide the development of a CMP.

The CC 2020 meeting reported that the IWC Secretariat and SWG-CMP will work with Environment Society of Oman and the CMS to continue outreach efforts with Oman and India towards development of a CMP.

Work of the CC Standings Working Group Conservation Management Plans

A Mid-term review of SWG CMP was conducted and presented to IWC67 and recommended that SWG develop a thematic Strategic Plan. The CMP Chair is undertaking to develop a handbook in parallel with this work that will support IWC members and stakeholders to engage with the program. Principles and a draft handbook and strategic plan were presented at the 2020 CC meeting. This “CMP Handbook” will function as the primary source of information on the CMP programme and takes a flexible approach to CMP development. This represents a change in program definition/scope and requires consultation with the CC, SC and endorsement by the Commission. Three strategic objectives will be put forward for consideration, covering financial self-sufficiency of CMPs, strengthening CMP partnerships and improvements to monitoring and evaluation of the CMP program.

The Handbook and Strategic Plan for 2021-2030 CMPs remains in development.

Marine Debris

At IWC67 the CC established the ICG for Marine Debris. In 2019 this group assisted the SC in holding a joint workshop (December 2019) on marine debris and plastics, their occurrence in marine mammals and potential impacts on their health. The [report](#) and recommendations from the workshop were endorsed at SC68B and CC in 2020. The focus is now on the need for standardised data collection, including for post-mortem examinations of marine mammals, and will continue to advance efforts in this regard.

At its meeting in 2020 the CC endorsed the Marine Debris Work Plan 2020-2021 as proposed by the intersessional working group and asked that the intersessional processes, which will now take work on this topic forward, consider the issues raised in its discussions.

The joint CC/SC ICG met at the beginning of April to review progress with recommendations and to identify some priority issues to discuss at the Scientific Committee.

There is ongoing work to engage with other organisations on marine debris, taking forward recommendations from the 2019 workshop and existing recommendations. Recently this has included the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) statement of support and joining the Global Partnership on Marine Litter.

Ship Strikes

For the Scientific Committee the focus since IWC67 has been on data validation and assessing new reports. These efforts have resulted in nearly 1,000 separate cases entered into the ship strikes database.

Through the 2019 workshop with IUCN and ACCOBAMS, the SC recognised the potential to detect overlap in vessel movements based on Automatic Identification System (AIS) data with Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), and thus identify high risk areas. To this end the Secretariat and the HIM Convenor have met with Marine Traffic in regards to a potential MOU for improving access to AIS data. They agreed to review methods of estimating vessel traffic for vessels without AIS and for reducing ship strike risks for specific shipping sectors such as fast ferries.

The Secretariat and members of the Committee have continued to work with IMO on ship strike related issues.

The position of Chair for the WG-SS was advertised late in 2020 but there were no applicants. In order to avoid delays in any ongoing work Russell Leaper (HIM Co-Chair) agreed to cover the position on a temporary basis. No new initiatives will be implemented until the new Chair is in place.

A new Ship Strikes Work Plan for 2020-2022 has been developed by the WG-SS and was endorsed by the CC in 2020 as a living document, subject to further refinements before IWC68, in particular after a new Ship Strikes Strategic Plan has been developed. The CC supported the proposed IWC Data Manager post to be included in the Ship Strikes Work Plan. Because of the postponement of the in-person Commission meeting until September 2021 the CC agreed that an initial one-year contract for this position will be included in the CC Work Plan 2020-21 to allow the work of the CC to advance under these unusual circumstances and extended intersessional period.

The Data Manager position has been filled and the Secretariat will add this staff member effective 19 April 2021. This position will cover ship strikes and strandings.

Small cetaceans

There are currently three task teams in place focusing on the South Asian River dolphin, Africa-focused Sousa and Lahille's bottlenose dolphin.

South Asian River Dolphin Task Team (SAR-TT)

This team was formed in 2017 (IWC, 2018h) to assess emerging issues from across the range of *Platanista gangetica*. In July 2019, a workshop was convened in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, that included Committee members and South Asian river dolphin experts and managers from each range state; Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan and was reported to SC68B (SC/68B/REP/04). It was suggested that a proposal for possible CMP should be developed as more concerted action is needed to address threats. Some of the recommendations made in the SAR-TT workshop report have been met, and others, through the engagement of SAR-TT team members in the WWF coordinated "Ganges River Dolphin Initiative", are currently underway. The SAR-TT will report these in detail to SC68C.

Africa Sousa Task Team (AFS-TT)

In 2019, a list of potential participants was compiled, and the team was established in 2020 and now comprises 35 members from 14 African countries. The first online meeting of the AFS-TT was held immediately prior to SC68B. Due to the large number of participants, and the size of the region that the team is tasked to cover, the AFS-TT is currently developing a process for carrying out its work efficiently. Some members of the AFS-TT, who work specifically on *Sousa teuszii* assisted in the development of a comprehensive action plan for this species which will be presented at SC68C.

Lahille's Dolphin Task Team (LD-TT)

The team was proposed in 2020 in order to initiate, guide and co-ordinate implementation of conservation strategies for populations in Brazil and Uruguay, and also to investigate the causes of population declines in Argentina and Uruguay. The Team is seeking ways to work cooperatively with fishing communities and fisheries authorities to reduce bycatch. This Task Team will report to the Task Team Chair intersessionally and provide a detailed work plan to the SC in 2021. LD-TT will present a detailed workplan to SC68C.

The Secretariat has developed a new webpage to highlight the Task teams (<https://iwc.int/task-teams>) and their purpose.

A call for proposals for research projects was announced in early 2021 and 56 applications were received. The call was circulated widely, through IWC channels as well as on the European Society, the Society of Marine Mammalogy and SOLEMAC's listserves, as well as via social media groups in Asia and South America. Applications were received from South America (28), Asia (9), Europe (8), Africa (6), Oceania (3) and the Caribbean (2) and incorporated research projects as well as community awareness and capacity building programmes. The Burmeister's porpoise and the finless porpoise were highlighted by many applicants as species of emerging concern.

The Secretariat has updated the Small Cetacean Voluntary Fund webpage with completed projects and new publications from the last call for proposals (https://iwc.int/sm_fund). A short video has been compiled highlighting aspects of the 2016-2020 projects, and will also be uploaded to the website after CC.

Species of urgent and emerging concern

In 2020 the CC established a small working group convened by Mark Simmonds and comprising USA, the Chair of the CC, IUCN and other interested parties to further review how to improve IWC response where populations are in decline, especially small, threatened populations. This small working group will report to the next meeting of the CC.

The SC and Secretariat has developed templates for statements on three scenarios of extinction and endorsed the proposal for a dedicated IWC webpage on extinctions. The website has now been published <https://iwc.int/cetaceans-and-extinction> along with a new page highlighting the Task Teams (see above).

Whale Watching

Scientific Committee

At its previous two meeting the SC discussed the need for ongoing promotion of scientific models to assess the impacts of whale watching on baleen whales and regional reviews of whale watching in various locations. The SC expressed concern regarding the growing number of illegal or unregulated whale watching operations in some locations. In 2018 the Committee recommended that a 3rd workshop on Modelling and Assessment of Whale Watching Impacts (MAWI) be held. This was in the process of being planned for early 2020 but was postponed due to COVID-19.

Whale watching Handbook

The 2021 workplan for the Whale Watching Handbook is focused on consolidating existing content including completing translations (funded by CMS), modest updates to existing content and further promotion. The Handbook's [searchable table of literature](#) had been updated with papers published since May 2018 along with new information provided by the Scientific Committee at SC68A and a further update was undertaken after SC68B. All updates (as new content) will be guided by the Editorial Protocol endorsed by the SC and the CC.

At SC68B the Scientific Committee noted an ongoing need to effectively interact with the CC and the SWGWW generally, but with particular regard to the Whale Watching Handbook. This was recently discussed by the Convenor WW and Chair of the SWG and it was agreed that the process for SC input to the Handbook was now well set out in the Editorial Protocol. This would be facilitated by Gianna Minton during 2021 (under contract to the Secretariat) but the SC would also be notified of a dedicated Secretariat contact on this.

General Principles for Whale Watching

At its meeting in 2019 (SC68A) the SC drew attention to the need to review the IWC General Principles for Whale Watching, which had not been updated since 1996, and recommended the approval and adoption of a revised document, which was drafted and approved by the SC WW Subcommittee during SC68A. SC68B reiterated this recommendation. The primary areas considered were the impacts of swim-with operations, platforms of opportunity and citizen science and the emergence of new technologies. These revisions were subsequently endorsed by the SWG WW and transmitted to the CC meeting in September/October 2020 for further discussion.

One proposed revision was the strengthening of the swim with provisions. However, due to concerns raised in the discussions at CC about imposing additional regulations on the industry at a time it was struggling to recover from the COVID pandemic, the CC was unable to endorse the SC revisions. The CC and asked the SWG WW to further consider the proposed SC amendment and incorporate recommendations into its report to the CC at IWC68.

The CC SWG on WW report to the SC68C will include a summary of comments received at the SC to enable the SC WW subcommittee to respond.

Workplan

The 2020 Conservation Committee agreed that a new four-year workplan would be developed for consideration at IWC68. The SWG welcomes input to this from the SC.

SC representation on the CC SWG

In 2011 the CC SWG formally added some representatives from the SC to its membership- the Chair and Vice Chair of the SC (then Debra Palka and Toshihide Kitakado), and the Convenor and co-convenor of the SC WW subcommittee (then Jorge Urban and Carole Carlson). This has not been updated when the holders of these positions changed and it would be useful to review SC representation on the WW SWG.

Chair of the WW SWG and Convenor of WW subcommittee propose that SC representation on the SWG WW be revised to constitute the Convenor of WW, along with either the Chair or Vice Chair of the SC and one more SC representative. The subcommittee is also asked for suggestions for industry representatives.

Other

Pan-regional cetacean surveys in the Indian Ocean

A proposal for a coordinated survey initiative across the Indian Ocean will be discussed during SC68C (Standing Working Group on Abundance Estimates, Stock Status and International Cruises) in a paper drafted by the IWC Secretariat (SC/68C/ASI/16). The Bycatch Mitigation Initiative has focused its efforts on the Indian Ocean and in collaborating with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). In the context of bycatch discussions (BMI 2019 Workshop, IOTC/IWC 2020 joint meeting IOTC WPEB 2020) the lack of baseline information on cetaceans at the local, national and regional scale has been raised regularly. Detailed information on cetacean species distribution and abundance is necessary to understand, monitor and address threats through conservation and management actions. The lack of information in the region on cetacean diversity, distribution, abundance, population units and population trends, limits national and international conservation efforts – for both bycatch and other threats. A coordinated initiative would allow the synthesis and analysis of existing information (visual, acoustic, photo ID, tracking data) and the systematic collection of new data in both Exclusive Economic Zones and the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. The paper suggests that the proposed initiative could coordinate and collaborate with existing survey initiatives and make use of platforms of opportunity. It further identifies possible roles for both the Scientific Committee and national governments, and possible next steps for further developing the initiative.