

Virtual Special Meeting of the IWC - September 2021

Update from the Conservation Committee (*VSM Agenda item 3.2.2*)

Prepared by CC Chair Lorenzo Rojas Bracho and CC Vice-Chair Cat Bell (UK)

On behalf of the entire team at the Conservation Committee, I am pleased to provide the Commission with an update from the Conservation Committee.

The Conservation Committee was created by the Commission at IWC55 in 2003 with the adoption of the '[Berlin Initiative](#)'. As mandated by the Commission, the CC considers a wide range of cetacean matters that have all been identified by the IWC's Scientific Committee. At the founding of the IWC 75 years ago, it was hardly anticipated that by-catch in fishing operations, ship strikes, marine pollution (underwater noise and chemical), marine debris among others could become primary threats to healthy cetacean populations. The list of these threats to cetaceans due to human activities has indeed expanded over the history of the IWC, and the SC and CC have responded accordingly in the scope of their scientific and stewardship roles. The CC plays a key role in ensuring the dissemination of the scientific work of the IWC and the search for effective and practical mitigation by collaborating with the partners who have the relevant mandates.

The work of the CC responds to recommendations raised by the Commission, such as the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative, and to recommendations made by the Scientific Committee, such as the impacts of whale watching. The CC's work is guided by a 10-year [Strategic Plan](#) as well as a 5-year [Work Plan](#). The Strategic Plan identifies priority threats to cetaceans, priority actions, measures of success, key partnerships and resourcing. A mid-term review of the Strategic Plan is currently underway and a Conservation Committee Planning Group meeting will be held later this year to address this review, among other tasks. The Work Plan is a living document that can be adapted as circumstances evolve. Together, these plans establish a long-term vision for healthy, well-managed and recovered cetacean populations worldwide.

The Conservation Committee continues to meet every two years as agreed by the Commission. The primary purpose of the [2020 virtual CC meeting](#) was to agree on a one-year extension of the CC Work Plan. This will now be extended by an additional year given the postponement of IWC68 to October 2022. The primary work areas of the CC at this time include: mitigation of bycatch, ship strikes, and underwater noise; guidance for the fast-growing whale watching industry; development of

Conservation Management Plans that have been approved by the SC; and working jointly with the SC on marine debris and ecosystem functioning, climate change and chemical pollution. We should stress that a [Voluntary Conservation Fund](#) supports the work of the CC. A dedicated Steering Group reviews and awards funding requests according to the Work Plan priorities. Contributions to this fund are welcome from member governments, international organisations and other appropriate donors. We would like to show our appreciation to those member countries, civil society organizations and other organizations that have contributed to our work.

It is noted that the leaders of the various CC subsidiary bodies (Chair, Vice-Chair, Chairs of Standing Working Groups) have agreed to extend their roles until the IWC68 meeting.

Many thanks to the Commission for providing this opportunity for an update from the Conservation Committee.