

THE SC COMMUNICATION INITIATIVE: COMMUNICATING THE WORK OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE TO IWC COMMISSIONERS AT IWC69 AND BEYOND

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Introduction

The work of the IWC Scientific Committee (SC) has three key audiences.

- 1) The 88 member governments of the Commission and the wider IWC observer community.
- 2) The SC membership and wider scientific community.
- 3) The media and the general public.

For resource and efficiency reasons, the IWC produces material that serves all three audiences wherever possible. In terms of more structured and formal reporting, the scientific community is served well by SC Reports and the media & public are served by the IWC Intersessional Report which contains a section on science.

Information about the SC can be found on the IWC website, organised in three 'layers' of text which range from basic introductory information to technical source material such as workshop reports. Non-technical information is also contained in the quarterly news bulletin and IWC tweets. Circulars are an additional, official method of communication directed at the internal audiences of the scientific and Commission communities. (Groups 1 and 2 above).

SC Communication Initiative

The SC recognises that the Commission is its primary audience and that the Commission has requested and needs the information the SC provides to support its decision making and allocation of resources.

While SC reports provide a record of its deliberations and decisions that serve their immediate scientific community well, the SC recognises that most of its reporting media are not well tailored to the Commission audience.

The SC also recognises that its reports often contain highly technical material and each report summarises a large body of work. The technical nature of SC reports is necessary to document the work of the SC but this results in a report that is less accessible to wider audiences. The length and complexity of SC reports can also make it difficult to easily grasp what decisions and actions the SC is seeking from the Commission.

Objectives

The overall goal of the SC Communication Initiative is to develop new communication tools and material tailored to IWC Commissioners as the principal audience. This material is also likely to have value for other policy makers, non-government organisations, government organisations in non-member countries, the general public and scientists who are new to the IWC. More specifically, the high-level objectives of the SC Communication Initiative are:

- **Improve** the SC's ability to communicate its work programme, recommendations, and issues of concern accurately and understandably to the Commission.
- **Deliver** key technical information required to inform the Commission's decision-making in a format that is appropriate to a non-technical audience.
- **Showcase** specific streams of work conducted by the SC.
- **Highlight** concerns regarding the status of specific species or stocks.
- **Encourage** greater interaction between Commissioners and the SC.

- **Reinforce** support for the work of the SC, its value to the Commission, and the importance of adequate resourcing.
- **Communicate** how resourcing from IWC member governments has contributed to the work programme of the Commission, the importance of SC outputs to global science.
- **Explain** how reduced support of SC activities may affect SC outputs and timelines.

Initiative coordination and decision making

This SC Communication Initiative will be led by a small steering group that has broad visibility of the work of the SC. The role of this group is to design, coordinate and deliver the Initiative, not to select content. (See TOR at Annex B).

It is proposed the inaugural composition of Steering Group will be:

- Current SC Chair (Alex Zerbini)
- Former SC Chair (Robert Suydam)
- SC Vice Chair (Lindsay Porter)
- SC Convenors/Members (Chris Parsons, Meike Scheidat, Thomas Nelson)
- SC Communication Initiative coordinator (Mike Double)
- Secretariat: Head of Science, Conservation and Management (Iain Staniland)
- Secretariat: Communications Officer (Kate Wilson)

The work of this group will be transparent and the group will be mindful of the diverse range of views and interests within the SC.

The Steering Group will engage with other Commission subgroups as necessary to ensure coordination and avoid replication, especially with the Conservation Committee who also provide a presentation to the Commission Plenary.

While this lead group is small for practical reasons, Convenors and the wider SC will have several opportunities to provide input to the development and implementation of this Initiative.

This Steering Group will strive to work by consensus but final decisions will lie with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the SC.

Opportunities to communicate with the Commission

Aside from the material mentioned above, the focus of communication between the SC and the Commission occurs during the biennial Commission meeting and, as such, several communication opportunities associated with this meeting have been identified:

- 1) **Formal proceedings of Commission plenary:** the presentation of SC work delivered during Plenary is the SC's single most important opportunity to inform and influence the Commission. In the past, the SC has also provided relevant information to sub-groups at their meetings in the week prior to the Plenary. The future structure of the SC presentation is discussed below.
- 2) **SC Summary document:** approximately one month before the biennial Commission meeting, a succinct and non-technical document summarising key SC topics covered during the intersessional period will be circulated to all member governments and observers, preparing the Commission for the SC presentation at the meeting.
- 3) **In the margins of Commission plenary:** there is an opportunity to establish a 'science hub' to informally present the work of the SC and make available SC expertise, from across its work programme, to Commissioners to provide clarification and answer factual questions throughout the plenary meeting. A combination of in-person and remote expertise could be

provided and may be particularly useful for smaller delegations that are not able to bring their own scientists to the meeting.

- 4) **Sub-committee Factsheets:** acknowledging how difficult it may be to distil the work undertaken by the SC, summary documents or factsheets can be produced for each SC sub-group or agenda item, to ensure the breadth of SC work is directly communicated where most relevant. Factsheets can be distributed and made available online as well as via the proposed science hub at Commission Plenary (see below).

Consideration of new communication opportunities

1) Formal plenary Presentation

The objective of the SC report to Commission Plenary is to summarise/showcase the work of the SC, demonstrate good value for money, and inform the Commission's decision-making. The most effective approach is likely to be a focused and engaging audio-visual presentation, delivered from the stage and lasting 40-60 minutes.

It may improve understanding of the work of the IWC Committees as a whole if presentation from the Conservation Committee and other relevant Commission groups, used the same template to communicate work programmes. As well as streamlining understanding of the work completed between Commission years, working in parallel across Committees would facilitate efficiency and minimise duplication.

2) SC summary document

The timing of distribution of this summary document is important. It is believed it will be most useful if sent one month before the Commission Plenary when participants are preparing for the meeting and are seeking relevant material on the forthcoming topics.

The document will be visual and engaging, with short, distinct sections. The document will also be as short as possible, providing issues in a broad manner, as the SC report and fact sheets will provide more detailed content. If funding allows, the Secretariat will also produce the SC summary document in the three working languages of the Commission.

The Secretariat will lead on providing draft layouts and editing sections of the text once the topics have been agreed and source materials supplied. Guidance from the Bureau (and the Commission) may be sought on matters of presentation and levels of detail.

3) Commission Plenary Science Hub

A science hub can be set up at Commission Plenary meetings. The objective of the hub would be to provide an informal opportunity for Commissioners, their staff, and observers to communicate with the SC about its reports, conclusions and, recommendations.

A number of SC members usually attend Commission meetings and could make themselves available at specified times. Convenors or other topic leads may also be willing to assist remotely as needed.

This would be an ideal opportunity for members of the SC to introduce themselves and explain their work to Commission delegations and observers and, in turn, provide SC members the opportunity to understand more directly what the Commission needs are.

Ideally the hub would be located very close to the plenary room so that it is visible and easily accessible. Commissioners and other delegates can drop in at designated times or could send questions to a dedicated email or discussion platform. The precise location of the science hub would be determined by the space available at meeting venues, but free-standing exhibition banners could be used to demarcate the science hub, and would also ensure that the hub could be set up in concourses, offices or at the back of meeting halls. Hard copies of the summary factsheets could also be provided on request (mindful of the aim to be as paperless as possible).

Objective presentation of SC discussions, deliberations and recommendations is essential and the science hub will provide an opportunity for SC members representing governments with a wide range of perspectives to participate and convey the rich diversity of work that the SC produces. Scientists able to communicate in French and Spanish, and other languages of the most active member countries, will be encouraged to participate in the science hub.

4) Summary Factsheets

SC Convenors will also be requested to summarise the work of their sub-committee or working group in a 2-page factsheet. The Communications Steering Group will develop a template and style guide to provide consistency across factsheets, however, limited resources will likely mean that each factsheet will be drafted internally. And will be approved by Convenors and the Chair/Vice Chair of the SC. Additional factsheets may be developed by SC leadership, as appropriate.

This SC Communication Initiative is intended to improve the SC's ability to communicate all of its work to the Commission, however, the SC Chair and Vice-Chair will still be faced with the challenge of deciding what material from the vast body of work the SC completes each year should be highlighted at each Commission meeting.

In order to support the Chairs in their decision-making, we propose the following criteria:

- Information specifically requested from the SC by the Commission, such as in past Schedule Amendments, Resolutions, or other requests recorded in the Database of Recommendations;
- Information directly required by Commission to inform their management decisions;
- A recently completed body of scientific work;
- Issues noted by the SC as of immediate concern for the conservation and management of stocks;
- Information that will guide new actions
- Past work that has been supported by the research fund and voluntary contributions.

We will circulate a template to Convenors to obtain their views on topics to be highlighted at the 2024 Commission meeting, based on the above criteria. The template will ask each Convenor to propose priority topics, preferably no more than two, for the SC presentation to the Commission Plenary. This will be a challenging exercise, especially for Convenors with the broadest and busiest agendas, but we feel it is essential to distil the work of the SC into a more easily digestible presentation at the Commission Plenary. The template will also request

information on suitable sources of information on these topics, sources of existing media materials such as infographics and footage, and suggestions for key messages.

Timeline

At IWC68, the SC leadership face the unprecedented task of presenting four reports to the Commission. The Commission itself will be handling the repercussions of a four-year intersessional period during which just one, short virtual meeting took place that focused solely on essential budgetary issues. It is also likely that ongoing travel restrictions and COVID precautions will impact both the size and scope of activities and interactions at IWC68.

In this context, the SC Communications Initiative will be introduced at IWC69 in 2024, when we anticipate a more normal Commission meeting.

At IWC68, the SC will provide a broad explanation of this initiative and will seek the Commission's feedback and support for this future approach. This will provide the SC greater insights to the expectations and desires of the Commission, with regards to SC report communication, and ample time to develop appropriate content.

Resources

- **Financial**
 - Seed funding has been allocated from the SC budget and the final amount will be confirmed after the SC budget is approved at IWC68. It's envisaged that the majority of funds will be spent on graphic design and translation as well as audio-visual tools, production of display banners and purchase of images.
- **In-kind**
 - Australia will provide in-kind support from a Communications advisor
 - Australia may be able to assist in the design/development of media materials

Media outputs

- A succinct and image-rich document summarising the work of the SC since IWC68.
- A multimedia presentation summarising the work of the SC since IWC68 and highlighting the key information sought from the SC by the Commission, as assessed through Schedule Amendments, Resolutions and the Database of Recommendations.
- A series of approximately six self-standing display banners showcasing specific SC work programmes, to be used in the IWC69 Science Hub (and thereafter at events as appropriate).
- SC-generated Factsheets distributed at the IWC69 science hub and through circulars, social media and press releases.

Measuring success and guiding future efforts

- A series of questions about the SC communications efforts will be included in the Secretariat's regular post-meeting questionnaire which is sent to all registered participants.
- Assessment of the Commission response to specific recommendations made within the presentation.
- Feedback from SC convenors on how sub-committee and working group material was presented
- Feedback from SC members who supported the science hub on how well it was utilised and which topics were of particular interest.
- Analytics e.g., page visits and audience breakdown, for materials posted online.

Annex A

Outreach template for Convenors

Selection of topics for the pre-meeting report and presentation to plenary

Each Convenor is asked to identify topics, preferably no more than two, from the SC work programme they lead, which should be highlighted in communication opportunities associated with IWC69 in 2024. Selected topics should meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Information requested from the SC by the Commission for the 2024 plenary meeting (such as in Schedule Amendments, Resolutions or other requests recorded in the Database of Recommendations).
- Information directly required by the Commission to inform their management decisions.
- A recently completed body of scientific work.
- Issues of immediate concern for the conservation and management of stocks.
- Information that will guide new actions or past resolutions.
- Work that has been supported by a significant allocation from the research fund and voluntary donations.

Selecting just two topics may be challenging for some SC sub-groups, but it may be helpful to think in terms of key messages rather than pieces of work. What influential scientific information could Commissioners use during or after the IWC69 meeting? Think how these pieces of work can be packaged together to deliver one message more efficiently and/or powerfully. Consider which topics are time-critical and which could provide material to be presented at a later date or might be better suited to the format of a summary factsheet.

We encourage Convenors to consult to identify and package together similar or related topics. Any convenor who is unable to select just two topics should contact the Communication Initiative Steering Group to discuss further.

The SC will achieve the greatest impact by presenting a small number of topics and messages and repeating them at each of the opportunities identified. The SC summary document delivered to Commissioners prior to IWC69 will introduce topics and messages that are then repeated in the plenary presentation and reinforced by display material in the science hub. The number of highlighted topics will be limited by the number that can be communicated effectively in the oral presentation of the SC Chair at Commission and the final number will depend on how topics are combined.

This distillation of information is essential for effective communication with the Commission. The initial list of topics from Convenors will be subject to further refinement, overseen by the Chair and Vice Chair, and supported by the Communication Initiative Steering Group. Not all topics nominated can be highlighted at IWC69 but a summary reflecting the full breadth of the SC work programme will be presented. Topics not selected for IWC69 can be proposed again for the next Commission meeting or used in other IWC-led communication opportunities not directly linked to IWC69. The SC report will continue to provide the most detailed account of the work of the SC and will always be referred to by those that require to understand the more in depth analyses and discussion that occur at SC meetings

Additional Opportunity – Factsheets

To ensure the breadth of SC work is conveyed effectively, Convenors also have the option of presenting additional material in short factsheets that will be made available at Commission Plenary

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR FA/68/7.2.2/01 AT IWC68 MEETING

via the science hub and online. Sub-committees and groups wishing to make use of the opportunity to distribute factsheets will be provided with a layout and advice on content.

Topic 1

1. SC topic to highlight at IWC69
2. Specific sources of information
e.g. SC report pages XX, Annex Y pages ZZ, SC papers, websites, journal articles
3. Key messages
4. Sources of supplementary material for plenary presentation and SC summary document (e.g. graphics, video footage, photography and other imagery)
5. Key contacts

Topic 2

1. SC topic to highlight at IWC69
2. Specific sources of information
e.g. SC report pages XX, Annex Y pages ZZ, SC papers, websites, journal articles
3. Key messages
4. Sources of supplementary material for plenary presentation and SC summary document (e.g. graphics, video footage, photography and other imagery)
5. Key contacts

Annex B

Terms of Reference for the Communications Initiative Steering Group

Background

The role of the Communications Initiative Steering Group is to design, coordinate and deliver the Communications Initiative.

The work of this group must be transparent, and the group must ensure the diverse range of views and interests within the SC are represented. This group will strive to work by consensus but final decisions will lie with the Chair and Vice Chair of the SC.

Key tasks of the group are:

- Identify the most appropriate platforms for the SC to communicate effectively with the Commission.
- Develop a process of content selection for Convenors, the Chair and Vice Chair of the SC to use.
- Engage with other sub-groups of the Commission (e.g., the Conservation Committee), to coordinate presentations to Commission on connected issues thus avoiding repetition.
- Approve formats, layouts and final texts as developed by SC members, the Secretariat and contractors.
- Conduct a post IWC69 evaluation in order to refine and improve the initiative going forward to IWC70.

Membership

The Steering Group will be composed of the current SC Chair and Vice Chair, the former SC Chair, the Head of Science, Conservation and Management, the IWC's Communications Officer, three SC Convenors, and an Initiative Coordinator nominated from within the SC. The tenure of persons in the Convenor and Coordinator positions will expire after two Commission meetings.