

Report of the intersessional work on Chemical Pollution

Submitted by the Chair of the Intersessional Correspondence Group

The Commission is requested to:

- *note the intersessional progress made by the intersessional correspondence group and the Conservation Committee*
- *provide input on the suggested future work*

BACKGROUND

Chemical Pollution is identified as a Priority threat in the Conservation Committee's (CC) Strategic Plan and is addressed within the Scientific Committee's (SC) Sub-committee on Environmental Concerns.

According to the 2019 Report of the Sub-Committee on Environmental Concerns [see Annex K [here](#)], there are several SC recommendations that are relevant for the development of a CC workplan because they refer to (i) monitoring and mitigation of chemical pollution and its effects on cetaceans, (ii) effects of other stressors which may be exacerbated by exposure to chemical pollution or (iii) actions which could provide new data on exposure to chemical pollution.

At the 2019 CC Planning Group (CCPG) meeting, document [IWC/Jul19/CCPG/05](#) was presented and proposed ways chemical pollution could be developed within the CC workplan, with a focus on developing proposals for mitigation and management actions and collaboration with other bodies.

The following tasks were proposed:

1. While avoiding duplication of work by the SC, it would be useful to review published evidence of effects of chemical pollution on cetaceans, e.g. in relation to PCBs and reproduction / immunocompetence, quantitative information on effects including risk assessment results, and experimental evidence (e.g. results for seals are relevant).
2. Review information on the geographical distribution of threats due to chemical pollution, possibly following the Jepson *et al.* (2016) [doi:10.1038/srep18573] approach of identifying hotspots in Europe (for PCBs these include western and central Mediterranean Sea and SW Iberia, the Gulf of Cadiz and Strait of Gibraltar, coastal waters off SE Brazil, SE Asia (Hong Kong and China Sea)).
3. Identify those species and populations most at risk from effects of chemical pollution based on conservation status and the importance of threats (from chemical pollution and cumulative), distribution and other evidence. The evaluation may include both formal risk assessment results, where available, and expert judgement.

4. Review information on existing protection from chemical pollution, e.g. legislation and agreements, competent authorities, and success and efficacy of implementation, in relation to all identified threatened populations, prioritising as appropriate.

5. Define the role of the IWC CC in addressing chemical pollution and identifying appropriate working methods and structures to achieve this, e.g. Working Group(s). This might include:

- Developing proposals for new and improved management actions, mitigation measures and legislation to address threats to cetaceans from chemical pollution
- Reviewing existing collaborations with external bodies and where appropriate establishing new contacts and dialogue with other bodies working in the field (e.g. SMM, ECS, ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS, ICES, PICES, CIESM, OSPAR) and of course coordinating with the IWC SC initiatives on chemical pollution
- Developing measures to enhance the efficacy and successful implementation of new/improved management measures and legislation, e.g. through public engagement and lobbying of relevant governments and other competent authorities and influential bodies.
- Developing mechanisms to ensure that IWC recommendations are acted upon (be they directed at IWC member countries or external bodies)

FUTURE WORK

A small group was formed at the virtual CC meeting in 2020 to further develop this priority area and will work with the SC Sub-committee on Environmental concerns to identify appropriate actions to take. Additional members are invited to join this group.

A review of literature on exposure, impacts, and mitigation approaches is in its final stages and it is hoped a paper will be presented to SC at its next meeting. This paper along with the report and recommendations from the recent SC Pollution 2025 workshop (November 2021) ([link to report](#)) will assist in developing how the CC can engage with this topic.

Currently within the CC workplan chemical pollution has the following activity:

Aim	Deliverable/Action	Progress	Responsibility	Timescale	Costs (If applicable)
Other Threats					
Consider and act upon, as appropriate, the advice and recommendations from the SC on the impacts of chemical pollution on cetaceans.	Recruit representatives to join the CC intersessional group for development of a CC workplan on chemical pollution group, in liaison with the SC	Ongoing	Conservation Committee Scientific Committee		-

The Conservation Committee is asked for

- suggestions for additions to the intersessional group that would assist in its development;
- suggestions on additional next steps for the workplan.