

Report of the Conservation Committees Work on Marine Debris

Submitted by the co-chairs of the Intersessional Correspondence Group on Marine Debris

The Conservation Committee is requested to:

- *note the intersessional progress made by the Marine Debris group*
- *endorse the joining of Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI)*
- *note Scientific Committee recommendations on marine debris*
- *adopt the proposed workplan of the Marine debris group*

BACKGROUND

The IWC has undertaken extensive work to understand and mitigate potential threats from a range of different types of marine debris and marine debris is a priority threat on the Conservation Committee (CC) strategic plan. At IWC63 in 2011 the Commission endorsed a CC recommendation to include a standing agenda item on marine debris. Two joint Scientific Committee (SC) and CC workshops on marine debris held in May 2013 and August 2014 produced a range of recommendations that were endorsed by the Commission. At IWC67 in 2018 the CC endorsed a proposal for a further joint workshop and established an intersessional correspondence group (ICG) to further scope this work.

The workshop “Marine Debris: The Way Forward” was held in La Garriga, Spain in December 2019 and covered a wide range of issues and made recommendations related to: (i) the latest evidence on marine debris; (ii) methodologies for determining the extent of marine debris and its implications for cetacean conservation and welfare including some detailed considerations for cetacean necropsy; and (iii) mitigation approaches for cetaceans. The report of the workshop [[SC/68B/REP/03](#)] was presented to the Scientific Committee at SC68B and to the Conservation Committee at its 2020 virtual intersessional meeting. The workshop recommendations were endorsed by both committees.

PROGRESS ON THE INTERIM WORKPLAN

Due to the postponement of IWC68 and based on a review of the recommendations of the marine debris workshop, the correspondence group presented an interim workplan at CC2020, for work on marine debris in 2020/21 and into 2022. Progress on this plan is provided below.

Workplan action	Progress
Dissemination of the workshop report and recommendations and ensuring recommendations are considered in other IWC work programmes particularly those of the Scientific Committee, Strandings Initiative and GWERN in addition to BMI and CMPs	The workshop report has been widely disseminated and considered. Action completed.
Further consideration on the recommendation of a Marine Debris database in liaison with Strandings Expert Panel and Ad Hoc Group on databases and related issues	Discussion and scoping is underway on how this might be workable in parallel with the possible development of a strandings database

Setting up an IWC roster of experts to provide advice and facilitate input to other expert processes	The Secretariat now holds a list of experts to be used for this. Action completed.
Engagement with other organisations (Secretariat with support of Contracting Governments, intersessional group/roster of experts): including - IUCN regarding species assessments and FAD Resolution - UNEA and ad hoc expert group - To explore synergies with work on impacts of marine debris ingestion in humans including undertaken by WHO and FAO and potential for a presentation to future SC meeting; and -Global Ghost Gear Initiative.	Participation in the UNEA workshops and meetings considering the Resolution- details below Proposal to join the GGGI will be presented at this meeting (IWC68) (see CC/68/11/02)
Exploring potential for pilot projects to address ALDFG, including gear removal in collaboration with the GWERN/BMI and potentially with the Global Ghost Gear Initiative	Details below
Identify and implement ways to obtain information on ALDFG and its mitigation from contracting governments and other stakeholders could be obtained through Voluntary Conservation Reports through the new Conservation Database.	Conservation database will be presented here and includes areas for reporting ALDFG/marine debris
Promoting leadership by the IWC in eliminating single use plastics including in its day-to-day operations, COVID response and at IWC meetings.	Ongoing- The Secretariat has been working from home since early 2020. Limited meetings have resulted in a significant reduction of the need for any single use plastics. Where needed, alternatives are being found.

Some members of the ICG collaborated to produce a new [paper](#) detailing what is known about the effects of marine debris on all cetaceans, with an emphasis on pandemic-generated plastic wastes, has been published in 2022. This new open-access review discusses the IWC's work, as well as the 2019 workshop. Even though this is not a direct result of the intersessional group, the IWC's discussions clearly inspired and informed the paper.

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Several resolutions of the International Whaling Commission direct the Scientific Committee to provide regular updates on environmental matters that affect cetaceans. One such resolution is Resolution 2000-7 (IWC, 2001) which requested the annual submission of a State of the Cetacean Environment report (SOCER) to the Commission. Each SOCER includes a focal area/ocean and a Global section addressing the

newest information that applies generally to the cetacean environment. The 2021 SOCER featured the Pacific Ocean, summarising key papers and articles published from ca. 2019 through 2021 to date. The 2021 (SC68C) [report](#) focused on the Pacific Ocean and included a significant section on marine debris including ALDFG, micro and nano- plastics and interactions between marine debris and large marine organisms.

Discussion in the SC Sub-committee on Environmental Concerns (E) at SC68C covered the surge in waste (primarily personal protective equipment (PPE)) related to the COVID-19 pandemic, progress towards a new international treaty on marine plastic pollution initiated by UNEA-5 and growing concerns about abandoned or lost Fisheries Aggregation Devices (FADs). the following recommendation was made concerning marine debris:

[SC2185](#): The Committee recommends consideration of how multiple existing and potential IWC databases (ship strikes, strandings, marine debris) could be successfully integrated to enable better comparison and cross-referencing of multiple data sources.

In November 2021 the Sub-committee on Environmental Concerns, who's current workplan is Pollution 2025, held a workshop with a particular focus on the topic of 'cumulative effects' and 'multiple stressors/factors' ([full report](#)). With regards to marine debris the workshop reiterated a recommendation from the 2019 workshop (SC19195) on the development of an international treaty for the management and mitigation of marine debris and recommended a) the report of the Pollution 2025 workshop be shared with the UN initiative (UNEA) and b) where possible workshop participants continue to provide input in the form of new research/elements to the initiative regarding mitigation of marine debris.

Additional recommendations specific to marine debris included:

- encouraging member states to review national level implementation of MARPOL and other conventions relevant to prohibition of dumping of waste/marine debris
- requesting the Secretariat and members of the Sub-Committee on Environmental Concerns and the marine debris ICG to continue international engagement on debris tracing and prevention to pursue solutions on marine debris and to suggest mitigation strategies.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

In March 2022, Heads of State, Ministers of environment and other representatives from UN Member States endorsed a historic resolution "End Plastic Pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument" at the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5). The [resolution](#) is aimed at addressing plastic pollution and forging an international legally binding agreement by 2024. It addresses the full lifecycle of plastic, including its production, design and disposal. There should be future opportunities for the IWC to engage in the process as it goes forward. Taking this into context and potentially other processes, the Secretariat has compiled a list of experts drawn from the joint correspondence group who may be called upon to represent the IWC at relevant meetings.

The IWC has signed up to the [Global Partnership on Marine Litter](#), a multi-stakeholder partnership that brings together actors working to prevent marine litter and plastic pollution. By providing a unique global platform to share knowledge and experience, partners are able to work together to create and advance solutions to this pressing global issue. The Secretariat is currently looking at how to use this resource and also contribute to it. The IWC has also been invited to join the [Global Ghost Gear Initiative](#) focused on solving the problem of abandoned, lost, discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) worldwide. The letter formalising

this partnership will be presented at IWC68 for endorsement (see CC/68/11/02). Additionally, in response to recommendation SC19208, the Secretariat is actively working with the Alaskan native community and the USA, to convene a workshop of stakeholders to assess, discuss and recommend mitigation for bowhead whale entanglement in ALDFG, primarily ghost crab gear.

The development of new partnerships and the other work detailed above all move the IWC 2018-3 [resolution](#) forward, which aims “to work constructively towards the development of best practices to avoid ALDFG, and consequently to reduce the entanglement of whales and dolphins in ghost fishing gear and to develop techniques to locate it and to clean up what is already accumulated in the ocean.”

PROPOSED WORKPLAN FOR 2022-2024

A detailed workplan for the next intersessional period 2022-2024 is presented here for comment and endorsement.

- Monitoring the relevant literature on marine debris, with a particular focus on interactions with cetaceans and the effects of microdebris;
- Following up on the recommendations of the IWC marine debris workshop;
- Working with the secretariat to facilitate the collection and collation of relevant information;
- Monitoring international processes on this topic;
- Facilitating the interactions between the IWC and other international bodies and processes dealing with this topic; and
- Reacting to any other instructions that may come from the Commission meeting.

COST IMPLICATIONS

It is anticipated that work will be undertaken with core Secretariat support and voluntary contributions from the Intersessional Correspondence Group at no additional cost. There is a possibility that members of the group could attend meetings on marine debris, such as the UNEA and GGGI meetings. For example, the sixth meeting of the Assembly (UNEA-6) is scheduled to take place from 26 February to 1 March 2024 at the UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The price per person per night would be approximately £115 (hotel + per diem) in addition to the cost of flights. Should detailed proposals be developed for meeting attendance, an application would be made to the Voluntary Conservation Fund. In addition, if experts on the roster are already going to a meeting, they could report back to IWC, potentially saving on costs.