

Report of the Working Group on Cetaceans and Ecosystem Functioning

Submitted by the Chair of the Ecosystem Functioning Working Group

The Commission is requested to:

- *note the intersessional progress made by the Working Group and the Conservation Committee*
- *endorse recommendations from the workshop*
- *endorse the ToR and proposal to conduct the pilot project recommended by the socio-economic workshop to advance work on this issue*

BACKGROUND

[Resolution 2016-3](#) on Cetaceans and their Contributions to Ecosystem Functioning resolves to review the ecological, management, environmental, social and economic aspects related to the contributions of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning to people and natural systems, as a matter of importance and directs the Conservation Committee to undertake this review.

In 2018, the Commission adopted a second resolution that further strengthened the IWC work on this topic ([Resolution 2018-2](#)). In addition, the Conservation Committee established a working group (WG) on Cetaceans and Ecosystem Functioning. At IWC67, the Commission endorsed a proposal to hold a workshop on the socio-economic values of the contribution of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning.

Currently, the WG consists of IWC representatives from the governments of Belgium, Chile, Germany, Kenya, Slovenia, United Kingdom, and United States, as well as the observer organizations Animal Welfare Institute, Centro de Conservacion Cetacea, Fundacion Conservare, Fundacion Promar, Grupo de Estudios de Mamiferos Marinhos da Regiao dos Lagos, Instituto de Conservacion de Ballenas, and Whale and Dolphin Conservation. Membership remains open and any other interested party or observer organization is encouraged to join.

RESULTS FROM THE 2021 SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE WORKSHOP

In 2017, the IWC Scientific Committee established an intersessional working group and began planning a workshop to review scientific aspects on the role of cetaceans to the ecosystem functioning. This included a review of current knowledge on nutrient circulation, ocean fertilization, whale falls, trophic cascades and modelling approached.

The Workshop was held virtually from 19-21 April 2021, co-hosted by the IWC-Scientific Committee and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) with funding provided by the Animal Welfare Institute, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, Pro Wildlife, OceanCare, and the IWC-SC. The workshop reviewed existing knowledge on the contribution of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning based on two dedicated expert review reports and additional presentations given by invited scientists. The two primary key-note presentations provided background and perspectives on this relatively new area of research. The series of expert presentations then provided information under three main topics: whale falls; nutrient circulation and ocean fertilization and cetaceans as predators.

The 2021 workshop [report](#) includes information on the main ecosystem functions of cetaceans, importantly it produced a table with selected traits of cetaceans and their related ecosystem functions

and services. The outcomes of the workshop, mainly the table, provided an important foundation for a planned second modelling workshop, as well as for a separate Conservation Committee (CC) workshop.

RESULTS FROM THE 2022 WORKSHOP

The Conservation Committee established a working group (WG) on Cetaceans and Ecosystem Functioning in 2018 and the Commission endorsed a proposal to hold a workshop to assess the socio-economic values of the contribution of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning as outlined in [IWC/67/CC/16](#).

The Conservation Committee workshop, 'Socio-Economic Values of the contribution of Cetaceans to Ecosystem Functioning' was conducted virtually in April 2022. The participants received information on the importance of marine megafauna traits related to ecosystem functions and services and the importance of considering cetacean carcasses in management policies. A study on how climate change and other threats could affect ecosystem services was also presented. The UN System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA), market and non-market techniques of economic valuation for ecosystem services, and good governance to integrate socio-economic data in marine science policy were introduced. Common Asset Trust and Nature-Based Solutions were introduced as possible financial and institutional frameworks to support marine species conservation.

A small working group was established to review the IWC-CMS table of cetacean traits. The small group clarified concepts and discussed how cetacean traits could be related to socioeconomic valuation. The workshop's final report ([CC/68/REP/SEVCEF/01](#)) will now be presented to the Commission for endorsement at IWC68.

In the short term, the workshop proposed the development of a pilot project to assess the socio-economic values of a single species to simplify the number of services to be valued. The Conservation Committee Intersessional Working Group on Cetaceans and Ecosystem Functioning is developing a proposal, including terms of reference for such a project, to be presented at the IWC68 meeting for consideration. The pilot project is expected to be implemented during the intersessional period.

The Conservation Committee is asked for input regarding the proposed next steps and future work.