

## Overview of the IWC Initiative to Mitigate Non-deliberate, Lethal Impacts to Whales: September 2018 to September 2022

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### INTRODUCTION

At the 67th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Florianopolis, Brazil, a summary of previous activities conducted under this initiative was received, commended and urged to continue ([Report of IWC 67](#)). The work is carried out in partnership with the Center for Coastal Studies (Provincetown, MA, USA), by a shared staff member. The work supports a welfare initiative begun by Australia, Norway and the USA concerning the sometimes severe welfare issues associated with large whale entanglement in manmade materials. Given the growing evidence that large numbers of whales are accidentally wounded or killed each year, incidental to human activities, this IWC initiative has been timely and well-received by participating countries, IGOs and NGOs. Significant, specific progress has been made between IWC67 and IWC68, although in person capacity building was impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. However, despite this slowdown in training over 160 trainees, representing at least 5 countries were trained during the time period (Table 1).

Work on several key aspects of this initiative is planned to continue between IWC 68 and 69, including: 1) continue to **build capacity**, for better welfare and management outcomes, 2) help to collect better data to understand the issue (e.g. through capacity building), 3) work toward prevention by working with the new IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative Coordinator and with other relevant IGOs, 4) facilitate dialog between stakeholders to investigate and address Arctic bowhead entanglement in ghost gear, and 5) continue to integrate this work into other IWC initiatives where appropriate (e.g. Conservation Management Plans, Stranding Initiative...etc). Much of this work will be facilitated, complemented and expanded by continuing to work with relevant IGOs (e.g. CCAMLR, FAO-COFI, IOTC, UNEP, IUCN...etc).

The following is a brief summary of the some of the primary work carried out on the initiative between IWC67 and IWC68:

### KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Working closely with the Secretary, Commissioners from relevant countries, Commission sub groups and panels (esp. the entanglement expert panel), as well as cooperating organizations (e.g. UNEP, CPPS, SPREP, NGOs...etc.), the technical advisor has helped to organize, conduct and/or represent the IWC at the following

Table 1. **Entanglement response training for**

Dates of Training	Host country	Classroom only Trainees	At sea trainees	Trainers
13-16/11/2018	Lima, Peru* (including Chile)	29	30	Mattila and Ulloa†
23-24/05/2019	Watamu, Kenya	16	14	Mattila and Meyer

<sup>1</sup> International Whaling Commission Secretariat and Center for Coastal Studies.

17/06/2019	Puerto Madryn, Argentina	34	16	Mattila and Aranha††
31/10/2019	Ullapool, Scotland	4	20	Mattila and BDMLR
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>83</b>	<b>80</b>	

* First official combined entanglement and stranding response training
† Training under SE Pacific Right Whale CMP
†† Training under SW Atlantic Right Whale CMP

At all large whale entanglement response trainings a second trainer assisted (often a former apprentice). The goal, beyond managing the large number of trainees, is to increase the number of individuals qualified to give the IWC endorsed training (i.e. training the trainers). This has resulted in the first fully Spanish-Speaking IWC trainers, and a regionally resident trainer for Africa.

*Other activities prior to Pandemic:*

- Supervision of entanglement response apprentices from Peru and Norway at CCS (USA)
- Convened and organized a Joint IWC-IUCN-ACCOBAMS workshop on using IUCN Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) to identify areas of high risk for ship strikes in the Mediterranean (Greece, 2019). ([SC/68A/HIM/07 Rev1](#))
- Represented IWC as panelist at 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas (Greece, 2019)
- Participated and presented at IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative workshop (Nairobi, Kenya, 2019)
- Represented IWC and gave presentations at IWC Marine Debris workshop (Spain, 2019) ([SC/68B/Rep/03](#))
- Participated in IWC stranding workshop at World Marine Mammal biennial Conference, December, 2019
- Presented IWC historical catch and sighting data, and its potential use for identifying cetacean hot spots on the high seas, at an IUCN workshop on data sources for high seas IMMAs, at WMMC, December, 2019

*Virtual activities during Pandemic:*

Gave multiple seminars and summaries on entanglement (e.g. what we know and prevention) and entanglement response:

- Universities and public (Italy, USA, Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission)
- Governments (USA, Colombia, Wider Caribbean through SPAW Regional Activities Center, and Oceania through SPREP)
- Helped convene several virtual workshops, including one on South American River Dolphin entanglement response for researchers from the region and an Orca entanglement response virtual workshop.
- Represented IWC at several virtual meetings of the Caribbean SPAW Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC).
- Supervised two “Joanna Toole interns” (marine debris), Provincetown, USA, 2020 and 2021

- Gave presentations about entanglement and the IWC entanglement initiative to SPREP Regional Marine Species Programme Action Plan meeting for whales and dolphins, and for SPREP meeting of CMS MoU for cetaceans.
- Through discussions with France, arranged for IWC entanglement response training to be listed in the capacity building “catalog” of their Office of Biodiversity, thus making it more available to French overseas territories.

Costs of attending most of the conferences and workshops were provided by the host organizations, or by the USA, UK, France and NGOs through voluntary contributions to the IWC entanglement fund.

**UPCOMING WORK**

Much of the work undertaken by the IWC under this initiative has been well received by the participants and partnering countries, and organizations (i.e. IGOs, NGOs). As such, the requests for both capacity building and collaboration on technical matters with other IGOs have continued and expanded. The following are some of the tasks expected to occur between IWC68 and IWC69:

- IWC entanglement response training for:
  - Firm: Italy, Reunion and Mayotte, El Salvador, Vietnam
  - Likely: French Caribbean, Gabon, Costa Rica, Ecuador,
  - Possible: French Polynesia and New Caledonia, Namibia, Iceland
- Co-convene small group to produce “best practices” for releasing entangled, free-swimming small cetaceans.
- Convene steering committee for a possible workshop on understanding and mitigating bowhead entanglement in ghost gear in the Arctic.

These and other tasks are listed in the MoU with the Center for Coastal Studies