

IWC68 Conservation Committee

Summaries of Conservation Committee Workshop Reports 2019-2022

IWC Secretariat

1. Workshop on Socio-economic Values of the Contribution of Cetaceans to the Ecosystem Functioning, held virtually, 5-6 and 11 April 2022

[For CC 68 Agenda Item 13.1]

The increased interest in the role of whales in nutrient cycling and carbon sequestration is reflected in resolutions adopted by the IWC in 2016 and 2018. A joint IWC-CMS workshop in 2021 identified research gaps and priorities and served as a basis for this workshop focused on methods to assess the socio-economic value of ecosystem services provided by whales in combatting climate change and increasing fishery production. The workshop included presentations by experts in market and non-market valuation who provided a review of techniques to estimate the socio-economic value of cetaceans in ecosystem functioning. The workshop participants were presented with fresh ideas on the policy implications of the socio-economic values of ecosystem contributions of cetaceans, which led to consideration of novel approaches such as Common Asset Trusts and other nature-based solutions. The workshop recommended the development of a pilot project to assess the socio-economic values of a single species as a test case for application of these analytical tools and possible nature-based solutions.

2. Conservation Committee Workshop on Climate Change, held virtually, 30 November – 3 December 2021

[For CC 68 Agenda Item 12.2]

The workshop was attended by 66 participants from 21 countries. Note was taken of the previous work by the SC on climate change and recent scientific publications on cetaceans and climate change. The workshop also considered the latest contributions from the IPCC, which highlighted that global warming of 1.5 or 2°C (the upper limit defined in the Paris Agreement) will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions occur. However, even if this is achieved, there are many changes caused by greenhouse gas emissions that will remain irreversible for centuries or even millennia, especially in the oceans. Examples include the melting of the Greenland and Antarctic Ice Sheets, global sea level rise, ocean warming, deep ocean acidification, and deoxygenation. The workshop received and discussed a number of presentations including the situation in the Southern Ocean for baleen whales; recent developments in the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Sea; population viability analysis (PVA) for beluga (*Delphinapterus leucas*) that included climate change; climate change effects in the Baltic Sea; the Climate Smart Conservation Cycle; the use of Climate Vulnerability Assessments; and Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs). Additionally, synergies between the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and IWC were considered.

The Workshop noted the importance of long-term monitoring programmes to detect climate-driven changes in cetacean populations and habitats. It made a number of recommendations, including that climate change should be considered explicitly in recovery efforts for endangered species, that the IUCN Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA) assessment process include an evaluation of the effects of climate change, and that there be stronger collaboration between the IWC and CCAMLR. The review of multiple case studies generated recommendations for highlighted species, including that the range

states for the Baltic harbour porpoise take action to improve the resilience of the population, and that expert networks, translocation protocols, and hydrological monitoring be established to address climate-related threats to river dolphins.

The Workshop also produced several over-arching recommendations, including prioritising climate change-related research in regions known to be experiencing intense climate change impacts, shifting management focus from sustainability to building resilience in cetacean populations, and including climate change impacts in investigations on cumulative effects of multiple stressors. The workshop noted that due to its truncated virtual nature, not all elements of the planned agenda had been completed. A further in-person workshop was recommended.

3. Marine Debris Workshop, La Garriga, Catalonia, Spain, 3-5 of December 2019

[For CC 68 Agenda Item 11]

Experts from nine countries attended this workshop that aimed to progress the IWC's work on debris by:

- (i) Reviewing the latest evidence on interactions with cetaceans (both ingestion and entanglement) and considering evidence for associated toxicology;
- (ii) Identifying best protocols for gross pathology, pathology for microdebris and the standardised classification of recovered plastics and other debris; and
- (iii) Developing liaison with other relevant expert bodies.

The Workshop considered published and unpublished information, including reviews of the latest literature and a comprehensive overview of marine debris-related activities by other international organisations. Several regional reports were also reviewed, including from the Adriatic, the Spanish Canary Islands, German and Dutch waters and the Mediterranean. The Workshop agreed that the scale of the actual and projected increase in plastics is alarming. Cetaceans can die after marine debris ingestion, due to gastric impaction/occlusion, perforation, or the associated lesions. Besides direct lethal effects, presence of plastic debris could affect marine mammals' health if they persist in the gastrointestinal tract (GIT), for example by reducing the space for food and, subsequently, reducing their fitness and the nutritional condition. Presence of foreign bodies could also cause inflammatory changes to the GIT and/or induce stress and pain. An additional concern is related to the potential role of plastic debris as a carrier or vector of toxins and pathogens.

The Workshop also considered the relationship between marine debris and entanglement in fishing gear and received new information on Fisheries Aggregation Devices. Noting that approximately 640,000 tonnes of Abandoned, Lost and otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG) enters the oceans every year, the workshop also called for actions to address this threat, including for bowhead whales in the Bering Sea which may be at particular risk. Several detailed recommendations were offered, including emphasising the importance of long-term studies; the need for standardised approaches to post-mortem studies; the importance of strandings networks; the assessment of floating debris during aerial surveys and the integration of marine debris concerns into the IWC's Conservation Management Plans, where appropriate. The vulnerability of some species was highlighted and the potential of some to be used as indicator species. The workshop also called on the IUCN to consider marine debris in its next assessment of the sperm whale. Other recommendations covered engagement with international bodies and the development of a marine debris database of information from post-mortem examinations. The joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS document on 'Best practice on cetacean

post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling' was strongly welcomed and commended to the Scientific Committee for its consideration. Communication and outreach on debris is critically important.

4. Bycatch Mitigation Opportunities in the Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, 8-9 May 2019, Nairobi, Kenya

[For CC 68 Agenda Item 7]

This inter-disciplinary workshop was attended by 50 participants working in 17 different countries, with half of the participants coming from within the Indian Ocean region. The focal region of the workshop extended from South Africa, north to the Arabian Sea and east to Sri Lanka, including both national waters and high seas.

The primary objectives of the Workshop were to develop a broadscale picture of cetacean bycatch across the region in both artisanal and commercial fisheries; explore the challenges and opportunities in monitoring and mitigating threats; identify key gaps in knowledge and capacity within the region and tools needed to address these gaps; and introduce the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI) to Indian Ocean stakeholders including the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC); explore collaborative opportunities and assess how the IWC can contribute to addressing bycatch threats, including through BMI pilot projects.

The Workshop recognised bycatch as one of the most significant threats to cetacean species and populations in the Indian Ocean region and concluded that there was an urgent need to raise awareness at local, national, regional and international levels. Within the Indian Ocean region there was a need to focus on gillnets (set and drifting) as the fishing gear most likely to be causing the highest and most significant bycatch of cetaceans, and for which few effective solutions currently exist. The Workshop concluded that a more systematic assessment of bycatch is critical, particularly for small scale and medium-scale fisheries. The Chair of the Conservation Committee noted the applicability of such a focused regional approach to understanding and addressing cetacean bycatch in other parts of the world.

The IWC's Scientific Committee endorsed the workshop report and its recommendations, particularly highlighting the need for integration of social-economic information and multi-disciplinary approaches to reduce bycatch.

5. Joint IWC-IUCN-ACCOBAMS workshop to evaluate how the data and process used to identify Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) can assist the IC to identify areas of high risk for ship strikes, 6-7 April 2019; Messinia, Greece

[For CC 68 Agenda Item 10]

The workshop investigated the utility and process of using IMMAs to help identify areas of high risk for ship strikes (convergence of areas of high volume/numbers of marine mammals and shipping), using the Mediterranean Sea as a test case. The concept of IMMAs was first developed by the IUCN and new IMMAs are identified through a consistent expert process using eight selection criteria, with the goal of providing input about marine mammals into national and multilateral conservation tools. The current IMMA network covers three areas: the Mediterranean, Pacific Islands and North East Indian Ocean and South East Asian Seas; two more regions, the Southern Ocean and Western Indian

Ocean and Arabian Seas, were under consideration at the time of the workshop. A review of IWC's work on ship strikes covered the progress of IWC's Scientific and Conservation Committees and the Strategic Plan to Mitigate Impacts of Ship Strikes. The Strategic Plan objectives include reduction of ship strike mortality and injury; increased use of measures to reduce the probability of collision; improved reporting and public awareness; and improved international collaboration. The IWC holds data relevant to ship strikes, including records of ship strikes. The Workshop reviewed shipping data available for analyses of the risk of ship strikes, which varies according to vessel type and speed and other factors. AIS data were seen as particularly useful to analyse risks of ship strikes, and useful to industry as well. The use of area-based management tools and shipping data can lead to identification of high-risk areas for ship strikes, as discussed in several presentations at the workshop. Case studies shed light on mitigation strategies for high-risk areas, including re-routing shipping, reduce vessel speeds, and real-time notification to vessel operators. The Workshop agreed that IMMAs are a useful tool in addressing and reducing the threat of ship strikes as well as other threats to cetaceans, including bycatch. Successful reduction of ship strikes will depend on scientific information on cetacean migration, emphasis on avoiding these times/areas and/or reducing vessel speed, and considerable interagency and multilateral cooperation.