

Update on the development of the IWC Conservation Database for Voluntary Conservation Reporting

Submitted by the IWC Secretariat

The Commission is requested to:

- *Endorse the prototype conservation database*
- *Request volunteers to test and provide feedback on the database*
- *Discuss and provide input on future steps for the database*

Introduction

At IWC67 in October 2018 the Commission endorsed a proposal from New Zealand to revise the existing template for voluntary conservation reports (VCRs) and develop an integrated database. The detailed proposal, which includes the rationale for changing the reporting template, is in [IWC/67/CC/10](#) (also as CC/68A/INFO/05). This will be a move from static written reports to an online database, publicly accessible from the IWC website and searchable by country or conservation theme. The database would be populated and updated by countries and the template for submission would be revised for alignment with the Strategic Plan and Workplan of the Conservation Committee. Where possible, this would be made interoperable with other IWC databases particularly National Progress Reports submitted to the SC. This would help streamline the reporting requirements on Contracting Governments, and improve the accessibility, effectiveness and reach of information submitted in Voluntary Conservation Reports.

At the Conservation Committee meeting in 2020 the Secretariat requested further input, particularly on the purpose of reporting and database fields, via a series of questions based on the document [CC/68A/04.2/01](#) outlining the proposed structure of the database. Table 1 provides an overview of the responses received. Since that time the Secretariat has been developing this database to finalise the specification and start developing a prototype working model.

Table 1: Summary of responses to questions in CC/68A/04.2/01.

Paper section	Question	Summary of Response
Purpose of Reporting	Does the Conservation Committee agree the overall purpose of reporting and of the database?	Overall agreement
Database population	Who should submit information to the database? Should information be submitted only by Contracting Governments or a wider set of stakeholders?	Focus on CG submitting but there should be an option of others to feed into it (after the pilot)
	How could information from IGOs and non-member governments be captured in the database?	Non-member section for IGOs/NGOs that still feeds into the database
Database fields	The current proposal is for database fields to be defined by themes aligned with the CC strategic plan and workplan. Does the Committee agree with this, and do they have any additional suggestions?	Yes, align with the workplan so can track progress and compare across countries Focus on actions for the SWGs and get feedback on these with regard to implementation

	Should the subheadings under each theme be generic, or tailored depending on the topic in question and the reporting questions that the CC is interested in?	General agreement that it should be generic to allow comparison but some ability to tailor when no specific info is available
	Should CC reporting aim to obtain information on implementation of Conservation Committee recommendations and Resolutions relevant to the CC agenda?	Varied response, some agree it should be looking at recommendations and their implementation others did not think this was the place.
	How could the database capture information on conservation outcomes?	Limited responses- more communication/advice/contact more dialogue rather than one way information
Uptake and rates of reporting	Does the Committee have any further views on means to increase reporting dates into the database? How can the IWC help develop the capacity of countries for IWC reporting?	No responses

Summary of what reports have been received

Calls for reports are made during commission years via circular. The IWC has received 42 reports from 11 countries since 2011, receiving an average of eight per call. These can be found in the IWC [archive](#). Five countries submitted a report in all five years (2011, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018). No call was made in 2020 due to the postponement of the Commission meeting and the virtual nature of the intersessional CC2020 meeting. For IWC68 the Secretariat received a total of four reports, from New Zealand, United States, United Kingdom, and Peru.

In investigating the reports of countries that had submitted reports for multiple years, some sections contained information unchanged from previous years (e.g., legal developments and current government programs). For example, New Zealand’s reports from 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018 all have similar content with a few updates on whale watching and strandings. The same applies to reports from Brazil and the United States. Sections that required updating were commonly those regarding conservation programs implemented and research activities.

Overview of database prototype

Using the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software on which the IWC’s InforMEA database is hosted, the Secretariat has developed a basic prototype website using information in previous Voluntary Conservation Reports. Without logging in users can view the details of countries that have submitted reports. Country profiles will include details such as how long the country has been an IWC member, which Committees/sub-committees the country participates in, as well as more general cetacean information for that country and a link to the country page of the WW Handbook, relevant CMPs and/or Task Teams. Users can search by country, theme, section, status, and CMP to explore report information.

The themes used are the priority topics dealt with by the Conservation Committee as identified in the Strategic Plan. These include anthropogenic underwater noise, bycatch, chemical pollution, climate change, conservation management plans, marine debris, sanctuaries and protected areas, ship strikes, and whale watching. A profile page for each theme is included. These pages define and explain the

main concepts and sources under each theme, as well as links to other useful information. For example, under 'noise' the profile page describes the issue, its effects on cetaceans and sources, and links to important references and relevant IWC webpages. While reviewing past reports several additional themes were identified that could be beneficial to include in the database, these were strandings, cooperation, research and other.

Section topics are from question categories asked in the Voluntary Conservation Report (Annex 1). The section topics are legal developments, information on whale watching operations, current Government programs related to cetacean conservation, current threats to cetacean conservation and management measures taken/proposed, reporting systems for cetacean injuries/mortality/strandings, international cooperation activities and other.

Data submission

There are two methods for adding data.

Option 1: Countries can send information in a template csv file that the Secretariat can upload.

Option 2: To make a report the nominated person or other designated users (e.g., research institutes, universities, NGO representatives) need to log in. Access and permission level is organised by the Secretariat. After logging in, it is a stepwise process for selecting Country, section, theme and details to include. Images and URLs can be included to provide greater details or direct users to more information.

Both options include all updates going into quarantine for the nominated lead person to approve before it is made public.

Information can be time stamped to show when it was last updated.

Further development of database

Two options for next steps to continue development of the database were presented at the CCPG meeting in 2022. Both achieve the goal of having an integrated platform and database for submitting Voluntary Conservation Reports and explore information provided from the reports. However, they varied in their timelines for completion and maintenance requirements. The options were as follows:

Option 1: further develop via the CRM. This can be done relatively quickly with Countries (and domestic entities) sending information that the Secretariat can upload, or users directly entering their data. Continued work on front-end design and user interface updates can be quickly made to meet user needs.

Option 2: collaborate with the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre's (UNEP WCMC) [Online Reporting System](#). This system is being investigated as a potential method for receiving reports from members in parallel to developing the bespoke solution above. Further work is required to establish whether it is a viable option going forward and delays this might incur.

Following discussion at the CCPG and subsequent intersessional work, development has continued via option 1, the CRM, for ease of use, funding and implementation time. Nevertheless, the Secretariat continues to explore options with WCMC with regards to all reporting needs.

Additional Information

At CCPG (CCPG/JUL22/09) members were asked for feedback on whether the addition of the following would be useful:

1. Contacts: This could either be under theme and/or country profiles and would assist in communication and awareness
2. Library and other resources: Sharing successes and failures particularly for issues such as bycatch and strandings, online training modules
3. News page: Highlight recent updates, new publications
4. Reminders: These can be sent to the delegate for them to ensure information in the Database is correct and up to date and review what is in quarantine. **NOTE:** in the current [CC Working Methods](#) (endorsed at IWC67) under **6.2 Voluntary Conservation Reports**, paragraph 2 states, “An annual reminder will be issued to countries to update data, but they can also make updates at any time, as needed.”
5. Review check: Include a checkbox the reviewer can tick to show the information has been reviewed. This could be displayed on the public facing site as a time stamp or similar e.g., the Database of Recommendations has a *Last Reviewed* option.
6. Other suggestions?

Support was given for the additions of points 1, 2 and 3 on the basis that these remain institutional/organisational rather than individuals to ensure continuity. These are now in development.

Further discussion is needed for points 4 and 5 as there are questions regarding the proposed procedure for the submission of information to the Database. It was highlighted that if data entry and approval is dependent on a designated user from the government, they may not know all the information and/or there could be delays for publication. Additionally, there were concerns over approving information that government officials were unaware of (e.g., If an NGO or university submits a summary of an implemented conservation project).

The Conservation Committee is invited to take note of this update and to provide its views on questions 4 and 5. In addition, commitments are sought from Contracting Governments to become pilot countries for the database. These countries would be “early adopters” of the database and commit to populating and testing the prototype database.

Annex 1

Current VCR template

Country:

National Governmental Authority submitting the Report (full contact information):

1. Legal developments (laws, regulations and other regulatory measures related to cetaceans).
2. Information on whale watching operations (scale, target species/populations and relevant management issues).
3. Current Government programs related to cetacean conservation.
4. Current threats to cetacean conservation and management measures taken/proposed.
5. Reporting systems for cetacean injuries/mortality/strandings.
6. International cooperation activities (includes bilateral or multilateral cooperation, assistance and funding programs and appropriate contact information, and other international activities of the Country submitting the Report).
7. Other (at the discretion of the Authority submitting the Report).