

Introduction to the CMP Handbook and strategic plan for the CMP Program

Chair, Standing Working Group on Conservation Management Plans

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Background

At IWC66, the Conservation Committee recommended that the Committee's working groups should develop strategic plans and associated work plans to help drive progress forward (IWC/66/CC10). These are intended as outward facing documents that sit under and support the Conservation Committee Strategic Plan 2016-2026.

The CMP work plan 2014 – 2020 is the guiding document for the CMP program. The lifespan of this document was extended due to the pandemic. The focus for the Standing Working Group on Conservation Management Plans (SWG-CMP) Chair (Australia) prior to IWC68 in October is the development of a new strategic plan (2022-2030) for endorsement by the Conservation Committee.

The SWG-CMP Chair will finalise the handbook and strategic plan documents and circulate to the SWG-CMP and SC-CMP groups for consultation and comment in July/August.

CMP Handbook

As well as a strategic plan, there is also a need for a program handbook to capture the various requirements and processes involved in developing and implementing a CMP (currently split between the work plan and IWC website). In 2021, the CC agreed that a handbook should be developed alongside the strategic plan. The handbook will function as the primary source of CMP program information and guidance for IWC members and stakeholders.

CMP Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan will focus on realistic actions to strengthen the CMP program. Key elements include:

Strengthening leadership

Establishing a co-chair or program lead to work with the current SWG-CMP Chair (within agreed roles and responsibilities). Sharing the workload will help to ensure consistent support for CMP leads, and help program administration and planning stay on track. It will also support leadership succession planning.

Strengthening the CMP partnership

Success of CMPs are dependant on all relevant stakeholders (member governments/range states, CMP coordinator, the CC, SC, Secretariat, NGOs, etc) working together and communicating effectively. The strategic plan proposes principles for collaboration (within agreed IWC processes). It will also look at strengthening collaboration with other CC working groups, and potentially other organisations such as the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

Building in flexibility in CMP scope/approach

Since the initiative began in 2008, CMPs have focused on conservation actions for distinct populations. However, the SWG-CMP has received feedback that many CMP actions have co-benefits for non-target populations or other cetacean species and that this should be formally recognised in CMP scope and development. In some regions, focusing on only one population may limit the potential of the CMP and interest from governments. The strategic plan will explore building in flexibility into the CMP program scope. This could include regional neighbours working together to better understand and protect shared species, even if populations are not shared, through sharing resources and expertise, capacity building, workshops, and policies. This is important as some cetacean species inhabit fragmented landscapes (i.e. river systems) or have disrupted migratory routes (due to threats).

Strengthening funding

CMP development and actions have been funded by range state governments, NGOs, and through proposals to the Voluntary Conservation Fund (VCF) and the Scientific Committee's research fund (for relevant research projects, workshops etc).

While the SWG-CMP hopes that IWC voluntary contributions continue to be available, it is important to ensure that the CMP program continues to be sustainable and that CMPs maintain momentum when IWC funded CMP projects or actions conclude.

Range state IWC member governments have always been encouraged to self-fund CMPs. However, the strategic plan will include actions to support fundraising for the CMP program (from IWC governments by way of voluntary contributions, and external stakeholders).

Strengthening communications

To raise awareness of the program and therefore support fundraising. This will include continuation of current workplan items, including developing newsletters and updating website content, and new actions including distributing the handbook and identifying social media opportunities.

Strengthening project administration, monitoring and evaluation

Improving internal communication and reporting without increasing administrative burden for coordinators. Keeping updates records of CMP actions, achievements and learnings will help take advantage of communication opportunities and attract interest in the program.