

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

Submitted by the Secretariat

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 Document [IWC/67/CC/10](#) (also as document 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 Db
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.

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 test website

Using the CRM on which the IWC's InforMEA database is hosted, the Secretariat has developed a basic test 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 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. Users can search by country, theme, section and status 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. 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.

The database currently contains a country profile page. The next planned steps include creating similar profile pages for each of the themes. The theme page would define and explain the main concepts and sources under each theme, as well as links to other useful information sources. For example, under 'noise' the profile page could describe the issue, its effects and sources, link to important references and relevant IWC webpages. The whale watching profile page could link to other IWC initiatives such as the Whale watching handbook, and once endorsed, the General Principles.

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. The access 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 data going to quarantine for the delegate to approve before it is made public.

Information can be time stamped to show it is up to date and still correct.

Further development of database

There are two options for next steps to continue development of the database. Both achieve the goal of having an integrated platform and database for submitting Voluntary Conservation Reports and explore information provided from the reports. The options vary in timeline for completion and maintenance needs supported by the Secretariat. The options are as follows:

Option 1: further develop via the CRM. This can be done relatively quickly with Countries (and domestic entities) sending info that the Secretariat can upload, or users can directly enter 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 [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.

Additional Information

Would the addition of the following 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
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?

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).