

## Update from the Ship Strikes Standing Working Group

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### INTRODUCTION

The IWC has identified the need to address the effects of ship strikes on cetacean populations, and especially large whale populations, as a global conservation concern. For several years, both the Conservation and Scientific Committees of the IWC have been working to understand and reduce the threat posed by ship strikes. The Conservation Committee progresses its work through the Standing Working Group on Ship Strikes (SSWG)(Annex A), working closely with the Scientific Committee. Since the last CCPG meeting, an Expert Panel has been established, there has been continued use of the Ship Strikes Database, and progress has been made implementing mitigation measures in High Risk Areas.

### PROGRESS/UPDATES

#### Expert Panel

Following Commission endorsement at IWC68 of the CC recommendation to establish an Expert Panel on Ship Strikes, an IWC Circular was distributed requesting nominations to the Expert Panel and encouraging those with expertise on shipping management and knowledge of the shipping industry. The call received 25 nominations, which were reviewed by a small group per the Terms of Reference (see Annex B) and 21 individuals were invited to join the Expert Panel. The remaining four nominees were invited to join the wider Correspondence Group to ensure their skills and knowledge are included, and they will remain informed and provide input as needed. The Ship Strikes Data Review Group and Ship Routing Group are now merged into sub-groups under the Expert Panel. The Expert Panel has since met in July and will continue to meet quarterly to proceed with workplan actions, and will report to the SSWG and the SC.

#### High Risk Areas

Numerous mitigation efforts in a number of the High Risk Areas were updated in the past year:

**NW Mediterranean Sea – fin and sperm whales:** France, Italy, Monaco and Spain submitted a proposal to the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) 79 in December 2022 on the 'Designation of a Particular Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) in the North-Western Mediterranean Sea to protect cetaceans from international shipping' (MEPC79/10). This proposal was subsequently adopted at the MEPC 80 meeting in July 2023. The focus of this proposal was the designation of a PSSA and additional Associated Protective Measures (APMs) to minimise the risk of ship strikes to fin and sperm whales. It was reviewed by a PSSA Technical Group, which the IWC Secretariat, HIM Convenor and SSWG Chair all attended. In addition to voluntary speed reductions and communicating cetacean observations to other mariners, the APMs include instructions for mariners to report any collision with cetaceans to the designated coastal authority, and for this information to be sent to the IWC database.

**Balearic Islands, Mediterranean - fin and sperm whales:** Spain, as part of the LIFE IP Intemares project, is developing a scientific research project to determine distribution and habitat use of sperm whales in the waters surrounding the Balearic Islands, in order to identify and propose management measures to reduce ship strike in this high-risk area. Concurrently, the Centre for Studies and Experimentation of

Public Works (CEDEX) is undertaking a vessel traffic analysis around the Balearic Islands to provide input into these analyses.

**Sub-Antarctic island at 54°15'S 36°45'W – blue, fin, right and humpback whales:** a voluntary slow down zone has been implemented to keep speeds below 10 knots for all cruise vessels visiting the island during the 2022/23 austral summer season.

**Sri Lanka – blue whales:** a recent analysis of AIS data between 01/10/2022 to 15/01/2023 showed 33% of all ships transiting this area, and 50% of ships travelling at greater than 17.5 knots, chose to sail south to avoid the risks incumbent with use of the existing Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS). Shipping industry organisations continue to seek a solution that provides the safety benefits of a TSS established by IMO while avoiding the most important habitat to blue whales in this area.

**Hellenic Trench – sperm whales:** several major shipping companies are now implementing re-routing measures or slowing down in the Hellenic Trench, off Greece, in the area of highest risk to sperm whales identified by the IWC SC. An NGO coalition consisting of IFAW, OceanCare, Pelagos Cetacean Research Institute and WWF Greece, also secured the incorporation of the Hellenic Hydrographic Notices to Mariners into handbooks issued by the British Admiralty, helping to ensure widespread dissemination to raise awareness amongst mariners of the ship strike issue in the area.

**Canary Islands – sperm whales:** Spain, within the LIFE IP Intemares project, is working to determinate distribution and habitat use of sperm whales in Canary Islands waters, in addition to identifying and establish measures to reduce collision risk. Another project is testing thermal detection measures for sperm whales using passive infrared cameras, also to investigate options to minimise strike risk. The CEDEX will then undertake a traffic analysis around the Canary Islands to help analyse collision risk in this area. There are also ongoing efforts to use Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) to identify high risk areas and the existence of several Biosphere Reserves in the archipelago may also be useful in this respect. However, there is a need for ongoing dialogue between stakeholders in the area, including the Spanish Government.

### **Global Ship Strikes Database**

In the past year, there has been consistent use of the database by data providers and data users. During this time, maintenance updates have been made to the Portal to maintain functionality. Data cleaning and updating has been a priority over the past months, but work will soon begin on the 87 reports in need of review with the re-established Data Review Group. A significant number of incidents with sailing vessels, as well as some historic data, are also waiting for inclusion into the database. Since the last report, Australia provided the Australian Ship Strikes Database to be integrated into the IWC Global Ship Strikes Database. This resulted in over 200 ship strike reports either added to the database or updated to the existing reports already in the database. The Data Manager thanks those involved in providing data and answering questions related to integrating the data into the database.

The IWC database has also contributed to the discussions on the NW Mediterranean PSSA, and an update is underway for records for this region. The new APM for this PSSA (see above) has the potential to increase the number of ship strike reports from this area.

Over the past year, there have been 12 requests for data. These requests include several requests for ship strike data in the Mediterranean, two in the Caribbean and a regionally specific one. Data requests for

specific data on vessel type and reports where fluke damage was indicated were provided to support research and management work. Species and region data were also provided to the Head of Statistics and Modelling to support the SC sub-committee on Implementation Simulation Trials work.

#### **UPDATE TO WORKPLAN AND STRATEGIC PLAN**

The current endorsed workplan covers 2022-2024, which supports the endorsed Ship Strikes Strategic Plan 2022-2032. The SSWG, Expert Panel and Data Manager will begin working to develop a new workplan for 2025-2028 and will ask for input and endorsement at the next CC meeting in October 2024.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR THE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE**

The CC is asked to note and provide any comments on intersessional progress made since the CC meeting in October 2022.

**ANNEX A****Current Terms of Reference for Ship Strikes Standing Working Group**

The Ship Strikes Standing Working Group seeks to help governments to address issues relating to ship strikes and in particular their mitigation. It will do this by *inter alia*:

- Evaluation of the effectiveness and practical implementation of mitigation measures;
- Coordination with the Scientific Committee to ensure that new relevant information is considered and evaluated in a timely manner;
- Provision of advice to the Commission on governments' request;
- Liaison and exchange of information with other inter-governmental shipping bodies (e.g. IMO) and international IGOs (e.g. CMS and its agreements such as ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS) and NGOs with ship strike initiatives to ensure complementarity of efforts and regular exchange of information and expertise on ship strike issues;
- Increase public and industry awareness about the issue and measures used to reduce this threat.

## ANNEX B

### Terms of Reference for the Ship Strikes Expert Panel

The Expert Panel will assist in the delivery of the IWC's Ship Strikes Strategic Plan by providing scientific and technical advice to the Data Manager and Working Group on Ship Strikes (WG-SS) in support of implementation of the Ship Strikes workplan including through:

- Supporting the development and use of the ship strikes database, including through providing advice on data use requirements and data access platforms
- Collate information on high-risk populations and areas and on monitoring of impacts of mitigation measures taken including supporting reviews by the Scientific Committee
- Input of technical expertise to support development and application of mitigation evaluation/assessment measures and the review of technological approaches
- Work with the Data Manager, Scientific Committee (SC) and others to develop tailored advice specific to different shipping sectors and related training/capacity development programmes
- Work through the Scientific Committee to provide advice and support to states bringing forward mitigation proposals on stakeholder engagement, design considerations or routing or other measures, and the requirements for proposals made to IMO, considering place-based conservation activities, such as the identification of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs).

### Membership

#### *Required expertise*

The Expert Panel should include a range of expertise including in:

- Coastal and offshore shipping including an understanding of the operational requirements and constraints of different shipping sectors including cargo, passenger, and offshore support vessels
- Cetacean distribution patterns and ship strike risk assessments
- Cetacean health/injury assessment (strandings/bycatch and entanglement/strikes)
- Communication of information on cetaceans to relevant stakeholders
- Ship strikes mitigation, monitoring and assessment approaches (cetacean and other taxa e.g., turtles)
- Marine economics and social science/community engagement
- Policy development/influencing expertise (i.e., in achieving effective change of shipping/cruising etc. and other relevant policies)
- Direct experience in working with shipping industry, IMO and industry bodies

To ensure a diversity of views it could be desirable to have more than one panel member with each type of expertise. However, some experts may have multiple skills. Expertise should be complemented by a regional and gender balance if possible.

The membership of the Expert Panel shall select (by vote if necessary) a Chairperson from among the membership to serve a two-year term of office following which the Chair may be reappointed or replaced.

***Selection process***

IWC Contracting Governments, members of the Scientific Committee and accredited observers, as well as other IGOs relevant for ship strike issues (e.g., IMO, CMS etc.) will be invited to nominate individuals with relevant expertise to the Expert Panel. Such individuals can be experts currently involved in the IWC and its Committees, or external candidates.

It is envisaged that the Expert Panel will be composed of a maximum of 20-25 experts. The panel should be of a manageable size whilst securing a sufficient level of representation of expertise.

The process for agreeing the membership of the Panel is outlined in Annex 1 and the process for re-nomination is outlined in Annex 2.

***Term of service***

The term of service will be four years, following which members may be reappointed according to the process set out in Annex 2. An evaluation of membership will be undertaken by the Secretariat and Chair of the WG-SS before the end of the four-year appointment period based on the availability and participation of members, and action taken to address any vacancies or gaps in expertise.

**Annex 1: Process for appointment of the membership of the Expert Panel**

Nominations will be sought through a Circular that will go out to Commissioners and Contracting Governments, Members of the Scientific Committee and the Conservation Committee and Accredited Observers. The circular will identify the specific gaps in areas of expertise and geography which would be a priority for the Expert Panel membership.

The Secretariat will send formal letters to other IGOs and follow this up with informal contacts and online mailing lists relevant to cetacean conservation and research.

Before making a nomination, people will be asked to discuss with the nominee that they are willing and able to commit to serving on the Panel. Panel members will be asked to commit to active engagement in Expert Panel discussions.

Nominations should be accompanied by a short supporting statement by the nominee (max. 500 words) and a CV setting out the prospective member's expertise, abilities and willingness to serve on the Expert Panel.

A sift of nominations will be undertaken by a smaller group, chaired by the Chair of the Working Group on Ship Strikes and also consisting of the Convenor of Non-deliberate Human Induced Mortality (HIM); Chair of the Conservation Committee (or a nominee); Chair of the Scientific Committee (or a nominee), Chair of the Data Review Group, Data Manager and Secretariat. Proposals will then be presented to the WG-SS for comments and endorsement.

**Annex 2: Process for re-appointment of members of the Expert Panel**

Prior to the end of the four-year appointment period for Expert Panel members, the Data Manager and Chair of the WG-SS will approach Expert Panel members to discuss their willingness, interest and availability to remain on the Expert Panel for another four-year term. Panel members who wish to re-nominate themselves shall provide a brief cover letter indicating that they wish to be nominated and outlining their commitment. Re-nominations will be discussed and agreed by the smaller group described in Annex 1.