

CHAIR'S NOTES ON THE DRAFT TENDER – September 2023**Selection of Target Populations:**

After broad consultation, the Advisory Group reduced the number of possible candidate populations for the pilot project. These included the North Pacific humpback whale; the Southern Ocean whale species assemblage (humpback, blue, fin, and minke whales); the Southwest Atlantic southern right whales; and the North Atlantic minke whale.

The selection of candidate species was presented to the Scientific Committee (SC) to get advice on which of the proposed candidates would be better to include in the pilot project. The SC preferred to wait for the second IWC-CMS workshop on cetacean and ecosystem functioning (Bonn, Germany, 14-16 November 2023) before providing advice on this matter.

Scope of Work proposals:

Based on previous work of the Conservation Committee (CC) Cetacean and Ecosystem Functioning working group, CC socio-economic workshop, and documents presented to the IWC68, the draft tender focused initially on three major areas of work.

The first two areas of work (Part A and Part B) are related to the current levels of scientific knowledge on the ecological functions that cetaceans have in the ecosystems. The third area of work (Part C), based on medium-term recommendations of the CC workshop that were endorsed by the Commission in 2022, is directly related to the governance of similar financial mechanisms that are used in other international forums.

There have been ongoing discussions and diverse views around parts A and B, specifically regarding which ecosystem functions have more reliable estimates, which services could be valued, etc.

There is currently limited knowledge of the contribution of cetaceans to carbon cycling. The only estimates that are reasonably accurate are carbon stored in living biomass and carbon sequestered in carcasses (whale falls). There is still more research needed to understand how much cetaceans contribute to Carbon sequestration via nutrient cycling, or if/how they enhance fisheries.

Regarding part A:

Part A addresses the valuation of ecosystem services that could be accurately obtained, and therefore only climate regulation through carbon sequestration within biomass, including body and carcasses could be considered. However, it is anticipated that these estimates would likely represent only a small component of the contributions to this sequestration that could be valued economically. Some concerns have been raised in this regard as they will under-represent the total value of the cetacean's contributions.

In addition, it was also proposed to consider comparing the economic valuation between the current population size and the pre-exploitation population size. The IWC-CMS second workshop is also considering, among others, modeling work on current whale biomass in the Southern Ocean and the North Atlantic and comparing them with pre-exploitation levels. Therefore, this specific task will also have to be re-considered after the IWC-CMS workshop.

Regarding part B:

Part B addresses all these ecological functions that are still not adequately understood and therefore their link to any specific ecosystem services can't yet be well established.

One of the components that has generated more discussion has been the proposal to “provide broader economic valuation estimates” (for these ecosystem services not well understood). Some participants consider that no economic estimates should be made until the science of ecological function is better understood. Other participants believe they can provide valuable insights into the likely extent of the economic value of cetacean contributions, particularly, considering that part A is only estimating a small component.

The other two components of part B have been widely accepted as they refer to the work of economists in conjunction with scientists to develop a framework for what data inputs are needed for an economic model of a particular ecosystem service.

In particular, it has been highlighted that the nutrient cycling and climate regulation derived from the whale pump and conveyor belt are of great interest. They influence primary productivity (phytoplankton) and thus provide additional carbon sequestration, and it may also ultimately be linked to krill or fish populations in the future. Studies on these ecological processes are ongoing but are still not well understood. Due to the anticipated importance of these contributions, it is recommended that support to the ongoing research on whale ecology, biological oceanography, and carbon dynamics be granted, and funding provided.

Regarding part C:

Part C was included at IWC68 to advance exploratory work on one of the medium-term recommendations of the CC workshop that was endorsed by the Commission in 2022. As stated before, this part is not related to any science but rather to the governance of such mechanisms that are being explored in other international forums. It is aimed to provide a state of the art on the existent financial mechanisms and make proposals that could be helpful to support cetacean conservation in the future.

Some members believe that it is still premature to work on part C as the ecological process and ecosystem services are not well understood. Others consider it as an important starting point to advance future discussions on the potential implementation structures needed to generate funding derived from these services and to reinvest them to improve the conservation and restoration of cetacean populations.

Budget

The budget has been previously consulted with experts on economic valuation and the suggested amount would be around £50,000-60,000. Alternatively, the budget may not be included in the tender, and ask the proponents to suggest a budget.

The budget will still have to be reviewed after the draft tender is finalized.

Additional comments and follow-up

The advisory group considered that it was convenient to wait for the results of the IWC-CMS workshop to define the ToR more precisely. Some economists will be invited to attend the IWC-CMS workshop.

After the IWC-CMS workshop, it will likely be necessary to review and continue discussions on the draft tender proposal for the pilot project consultancy. The CC working group on cetacean and ecosystem functioning will be approached to request guidance after the November workshop on how to proceed and the Advisory group members will be contacted to know their availability to further continue after the November workshop.

Considering that the Conservation Committee Planning Group (CCPG) meeting is scheduled on 5th October, the Chair proposed to send the draft Tender to the CC working group on cetacean and ecosystem functioning to receive further feedback, with a note on the advisory group views and comments related to the draft tender scope of work (these notes). These documents will then be submitted to the CCPG for consideration.