

SC/69B/O/06 Rev1

Sub-committees/working group name: O

Update on Cooperation with other Organisations and Observer Reports

IWC Secretariat (Revised 11 April 2024)



**INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION**

Papers submitted to the IWC are produced to advance discussions within that meeting; they may be preliminary or exploratory.

It is important that if you wish to cite this paper outside the context of an IWC meeting, you notify the author at least six weeks before it is cited to ensure that it has not been superseded or found to contain errors.

Update on Cooperation with other Organisations and Observer Reports

Contents

FAO, COFI AND RFMOS	2
IOTC	2
WCPFC	3
CCAMLR	3
SPAW OF THE CARTAGENA CONVENTION FOR THE WIDER CARIBBEAN	4
CBD AND LIAISON GROUP OF BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS	4
CITES	5
COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO	5
SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME (SPREP)	5
CMS AND ITS DAUGHTER AGREEMENTS	5
PELAGOS SANCTUARY	6
ICES	6
GLOBAL GHOST GEAR INITIATIVE (GGGI)	6
OCEAN GOVERNANCE PROJECT	7
IORA	7
OCEAN PROJECT	7
Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR)	7
CABES MSc lectures	7
MINAMATA	8
NOAA	8
NAMMCO	8
Observer Reports	9
Report on IUCN activities 2023-2024 By Randall Reeves, Gianna Minton, Gill Braulik, Justin Cooke, Barbara Taylor, Grant Abel, Frank Cipriano, and Simone Panigada.....	9
Cooperation with IMO 2023-2024 By Russell Leaper.....	13
Scientific Committee of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (2023) by Nat Kelly (Australia).....	14
Report from the 2023 activities In ICES by Guðjón Már Sigurðsson.....	17
Report from ASCOBANS to IWC SC69A by Jenny Renell and Mark Simmonds.....	20
Report from CMS to IWC SC69A by Jenny Renell and Mark Simmonds.....	21
Observer Report of the 2023 PICES Annual Meeting by Tsutomu Tamura (Japan).....	22
NAMMCO SC 2024 – Issues of Relevance to IWC by Guðjón Már Sigurðsson.....	24

Over the years, the Commission and the Scientific and Conservation Committees have adopted several recommendations to strengthen collaboration with other organisations. The IWC Secretariat, in collaboration with members of the SC and CC, has been working to carry out these mandates while also exploring new opportunities for collaboration. This paper provides an update on engagement from April 2023 to April 2024.

Highlights:

- *The Secretariat collaborated with various organisations and projects globally.*
- *The Secretariat attended approximately 45 meetings with 17 organisations.*
- *There was substantial collaboration with organisations of the Indian Ocean, Africa, and the Caribbean.*
- *Eight observers provided updates, appended to this report.*

FAO, COFI AND RFMOS

The IWC Coordinator of the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative attended the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Committee on Fisheries (COFI) Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management virtual meeting from January 15-19, 2024. The meeting focussed on illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, climate resilience, the collaborative work between the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and FAO and new stocks to be included in the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) reports.

The FAO hosts the Regional Secretariats' Network (RSN), which is a group of Executive Secretaries/Directors of Regional Fishery Management Organizations and other Regional Bodies, such as the IWC. The IWC Secretariat (Campbell) joined the RSN's intersessional meeting in January 2024. This meeting focussed on planning for the Tenth RSN Global Meeting and looking ahead to other events of 2024.

The IWC Secretariat collaborates with the FAO, providing annual statistics on anthropogenic cetacean mortality for their annual publication of fishery data, using information from the IWC Progress Reports or submitted directly to the IWC. The IWC Secretariat participates in a number of task groups under the Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics, including the ad-hoc task group on reference harmonization standard, the ad-hoc task group on fishing effort concepts and the ad-hoc task group on catch concepts. Additionally, the IWC is a co-financing partner of the GEF/FAO/UWI-STA project "Strategies, technologies, and social solutions to manage bycatch in tropical Large Marine Ecosystem Fisheries" (REBYC-III CLME+). This project's objectives are to manage bycatch and reduce discards in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems (CLME+), thereby promoting sustainable and responsible fisheries that provide economic opportunities while ensuring the conservation of marine living resources. The IWC Bycatch Coordinator attended the Inception Workshop & First Project Steering Committee Meeting virtually on 22-23 January 2024.

IOTC

As part of the activities under the FAO/GEF **Common Oceans ABNJ Program Tuna Project**, the IWC participated in person at the IOTC's 19th Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB19) between 11 and 15 September 2023. During this meeting, the WPEB noted that the new Resolution 23/06 on the conservation of cetaceans includes calls for the IOTC-SC to provide advice on appropriate measure for mitigating the effects of interactions with cetaceans by IOTC fisheries and to develop best practice guidelines for the safe release and handling of encircled cetaceans by 2025. The WPEB19 participants acknowledged the recently signed Cooperation Agreement between IOTC (FAO) and IWC, and noted that at the next meeting of the WPEB the IWC will provide advice on what is considered to be the best practices on the issue of release and handling guidelines for review by the group.

At IOTC-WPEB19, the IWC presented paper [IOTC-2023-WPEB19-25](#), which summarized IWC's previous work and planned activities under capsule project that are relevant to the assessment of cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries focused in the Indian Ocean. The IWC requested IOTC-WPEB19 for advice on how to continue to strengthen collaboration between IWC and IOTC, as well as what should be considered when defining the terms of reference for planned activities under IWC's capsule project (within the Tuna II project) to ensure they are in line with and complementary to the IOTC's workplan and progress, avoiding duplication while meeting the capsule project's objectives. The WPEB noted the IWC work reported in the paper, including the activities planned in IWC's capsule project, and welcomed an offer from Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO) to share cetacean sightings data from their observer programs onboard purse seine and longline vessels which can contribute to better understand distribution of cetaceans in this region. The WPEB encouraged other CPCs and organisations to make data like this available to the IOTC. The WPEB also noted that the IWC has not yet defined the countries where training workshops will be held but that they would be defined according to the needs in the region and so will likely focus on member countries with gillnet fisheries.

Other papers discussed at IOTC-WPEB19, which are relevant to IWC-SC were: an ecological risk assessment of cetaceans to Indian Ocean tuna fisheries (IOTC-2023-WPEB19-24); and a study quantifying drift gillnet vessels based on space low-cost data for understanding a data-poor fisheries (IOTC-2023-WPEB19-28).

WCPFC

Between 16-24 August 2023, WCPFC-Scientific Committee 19 hybrid meeting was held. The Bycatch Coordinator attended virtually presenting a paper summarizing the IWC's previous work and planned activities under capsule project that are relevant to the assessment of cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries in the western central Pacific Ocean ([SC19-EB-WP-10](#)). In the paper, the IWC welcomed and invited the WCPFC-SC19 to: note the possible benefits to member countries to collaboratively work with the IWC in addressing cetacean bycatch; endorse the IWC capsule in the context of the GEF/FAO Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna project Phase 2; provide inputs and advise on how best to fulfil the objectives of IWC capsule project; and provide suggestions on possible means of collaboration between IWC and WCPFC and its member countries in assessing cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries. However, SC19 did not support the proposal from the IWC to engage in an ABNJ project focussed on assessing and mitigating cetacean bycatch and its impacts on cetacean populations in the WCPO (WCPFC20-2023-SC19-01).

Paper [SC19-EB-WP-08](#) highlighted that bycatch and interactions with commercial fishery vessels appears to be the most serious threat to cetaceans in the Pacific Islands region. The paper mentioned numerous caveats and limitations to the data, and provided initial suggestions to progress the understanding on the scope and extent of the issue (e.g. targeted training and resources for observers, review of historical data to guide future refinements and improvements in quality control and reporting by observers, introduction of single species and taxonomic-specific statistical modelling approaches, and a more substantive and finer-scale statistical analysis of relevant data). The paper nor any of its suggestions were noted by SC19.

CCAMLR

An intersessional group was established at the meeting of the IWC Scientific Committee (SC68D) in May 2022 following discussion of paper SC/68D/HIM04 which provided details of three entanglements of humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) in the Antarctic krill trawl fishery in CCAMLR subareas 48.1 and 48.2. The aim of this intersessional group was to help provide further advice on: 1) Understanding the likely causes of trawl bycatch; 2) What factors likely contributed to the incidents (spatial, temporal, operational, behavioural factors of both whales and vessels)?; 3) How should future incidents be investigated and what information should be recorded?; 4) Determining routine data collection to put bycatch incidents into context (e.g. whale sightings, net monitoring devices).

The IWC Secretariat (Staniland) and Chair of the Joint SC-CC Climate change ICG (Simmonds) attended CCAMLR's WS-CC-2023 workshop on climate change (3-8 September 2023). Staniland presented a summary of the IWC's last climate change workshop held at the end of 2021. Additionally,

the paper “Draft data collection form for whale incidental mortality events in the krill trawl fishery” resulting from the work of the intersessional group was presented to the CCAMLR-IMAF working group at its 2023 meeting 5-13 October which Staniland attended virtually. More information on CCAMLR can be found in the Observer Reports by Kelly.

SPAW OF THE CARTAGENA CONVENTION FOR THE WIDER CARIBBEAN

The IWC’s Stranding programme received a grant from the Caribbean Marine Megafauna and Anthropogenic Activities (CAMAC) Project. The project “Capacity building workshops on marine mammal stranding response for the networks contributing to the stranding group of the CARI’MAM” aimed to strengthen the capacity of marine mammal stranding monitoring networks in the Caribbean region. Its primary objectives were to enhance skills, organisation, cohesion, and equipment within these networks. Furthermore, it sought to validate the effectiveness of the standard protocol and training kit developed by the CARI’MAM network. These workshops were tailored for members (naturalists, scientists, managers) of marine mammal stranding networks actively contributing to the CARI’MAM network stranding group and based in specific areas: Jamaica, Dutch Islands, St Kitt and Nevis, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Suriname. The IWC Strandings Team presented an appraisal of the training toolkit developed by CAMAC at the Interactions Between Human Activities and Marine Megafauna of the Caribbean: Progress Made Through the CAMAC Project and Potential for Future Actions workshop held at the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute Annual Meeting (GCFI76) on 4th November in Nassau, Bahamas. Feedback from workshop participants and recommendations for Phase II of the project were also shared during this concluding session. The Stranding Coordinator also attended the COP12 virtually.

CBD AND LIAISON GROUP OF BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS

As a member of the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions (BLG), the IWC has been invited to participate in various discussions as part of the development of the post 2020 framework for biodiversity and associated targets and indicators. The Secretariat has compiled the information on potential elements of the post-2020 CBD process in terms of indicators and programmes. These include the IWC compilation of population estimates and status as provided on the IWC website, the SC and CC work on the BMI, ship strikes, underwater noise, pollution, and other programmes. The IWC Secretariat also notes the key role of IWC in working with ASW countries to establish whaling quotas. The BLG had a virtual meeting in August 2023. It was focused primarily on updates from the various Secretariats and a review of opportunities to participate in the CBD new framework; Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) now branded *The Biodiversity Plan*. The IWC Secretariat (Webster) participated and shared progress from the IWC.

The Secretariat attended the Bogis-Bossey Expert Meeting 2023: “Workshop on Cooperation among the Biodiversity-related Conventions for the Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in preparation for the Bern III Conference” on June 27-30, 2023. The Secretariat also took part in the Sustainable Ocean Initiative Global Dialogue virtual workshop, which took place from August 1-3, 2023, and discussed, among other things, the implementation of the Treaty of the High Seas and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The Secretariat continues to engage with this process based primarily on how the IWC’s ongoing scientific and stewardship work can contribute to tracking and reaching the KM-GBF goals and targets.

On January 23-25, 2024, the Executive Secretary and the Lead for Project Development attended the Bern III meeting with four Commissioners (Argentina, Ghana, Netherlands and Switzerland). The Secretariat prepared two case studies to present as posters, based on the CMP Programme and the WW Handbook. IWC was also added to the cross-mapping table.

When engaging in this process, the Secretariat will continue to highlight issues most directly relevant to healthy cetacean populations. These include key threats to cetaceans and any opportunities for these to be addressed or strengthened in the framework and promoting opportunities to address these threats including through increased cooperation, capacity building, engagement of key sectors (e.g., shipping and fisheries) and data management and reporting. These efforts will highlight opportunities for IWC

scientific information to support monitoring of progress in achieving the new framework of targets. IWC69 would bring an opportunity for the Commission to welcome the KM-GBF and to make any observations on the role of the IWC in delivering relevant objectives in the framework.

CITES

The Secretariat continues to engage with CITES on several issues. The Secretariat participates in the development of a procedure for transboundary transport of diagnostic specimens for cetacean disease investigations in emergency situations. IWC are members of the CITES working group on rapid movement of wildlife diagnostic samples and of musical instruments. The Secretariat reviewed the simplified permitting procedures outlined in [Resolution Conf. 12.3 \(Rev. CoP19\)](#), and the so-called ‘scientific exchange’ process outlined in [Resolution 11.15 \(Rev. CoP18\)](#) on *Non-commercial loan, donation or exchange of museum, herbarium, diagnostic and forensic research specimens*. The Secretariat is also part of the Standing Committee Working Group on Species at Risk of Extinction affected by International Trade. The Secretariat attended a meeting in July 2023

As requested by recommendation SC2276, the Secretariat wrote to CITES conveying the Scientific Committee’s concern about the illegal trade in totoaba and its effect on the critically endangered vaquita. The letter offered to help with any issues concerning the species’ conservation. Although no reply has been received to date the Secretariat continues to monitor discussions within CITES related to this matter.

UN and Ocean Decade

As in previous years, IWC submitted an update to be included to the report of the Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea, pursuant to United Nations General Assembly resolution 77/248 of 30 December 2022, entitled “Oceans and the law of the sea”.

Additionally, in response to Recommendation SC2299, the Secretariat organised an introductory call with UNESCO/IOC in October 2023 to discuss the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) and possible areas of collaboration. Following the meeting, Secretariat attended the Ocean Decade Vision 2030 - White Papers Review Webinars on February 12-15, 2024. The Secretariat will also attend the Ocean Decade Conference in Barcelona, Spain on April 10-12. The aim is to gain recognition of several established IWC programmes under the UN Decade in order to foster engagement and help progress their workplans.

COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO

ATLAFCO and the IWC have recently appointed new Executive Secretaries who have recognised the importance of collaboration under the MoU.

SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME (SPREP)

Since July 2023, the IWC Secretariat has held several informal meetings with SPREP, as well as stakeholders from Taiwan, the United States, and New Zealand, to discuss potential collaborations related to cetacean interactions with tuna fisheries. During these meetings, the IWC briefly presented its capsule project and discussed how to move it forward. In preparation for WCPFC-SC19, IWC and SPREP held additional virtual meetings to discuss the content of papers related to cetacean bycatch that each organisation would present at the meeting.

CMS AND ITS DAUGHTER AGREEMENTS

The Secretariat has continued ongoing co-operation with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and its daughter agreements ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS on a wide range of common challenges,

including bycatch, strandings, CMPs, ship strikes, ecosystem functioning and whale watching. The IWC has a MoU with the CMS.

In 2022 and 2023, the Secretariat, CC and SC WW groups contributed to the CMS Recreational In-Water interactions with Aquatic Mammals Guidelines. The final version of the Guidelines was presented in February 2024 at the CMS COP14 meeting and was adopted. This is now part of the suggested new content for the IWC/CMS WW Handbook. The Secretariat (Rojas Urrego and Webster) attended the COP14 in Uzbekistan. They shared statements in support of several species-specific activities such as concerted action plans for Arabian humpback whales, listing of endangered species (Lahille's dolphin, harbour porpoise) as well as participated in side events led by IUCN, IFAW and OceanCare.

There is a strong, long-standing collaboration between the IWC and **ACCOBAMS** on many issues including matters related to population assessment, ship strikes, bycatch, whale watching, noise, chemical pollution and CMPs. The need to continue and improve co-operation has continually been underscored and opportunities for further collaboration were recently discussed in a virtual meeting between the IWC and ACCOBAMS Secretariats. The Secretariat attended the webinar 'Regional training on genetic data collection and analysis' on November 8th. The IWC is also working with ACCOBAMS in the development of the Mediterranean fin whale CMP.

Regarding **ASCOBANS**, the Secretariat reviewed the Draft Guidelines for Cetacean-Friendly Marine Spatial Planning. The Secretariat also participated in the Technical Workshop on this topic, which was held virtually on June 27-28, 2023. On September 26-28, 2023, the Secretariat virtually attended the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee (AC28) meeting. The Ship Strikes and Strandings Data Manager has also been collaborating closely with ASCOBANS and ICES on a proposal for a regional database that can be expanded to include global strandings data.

PELAGOS SANCTUARY

The Secretariat virtually participated in the 15th Scientific and Technical Committee of the Pelagos Agreement on 11-12 September 2023. In January 2024, the Secretariat (O Loughlin) virtually participated in the COP 9 meeting. The Secretariat had a meeting with Pelagos in late February 2024 to discuss potentially formalising collaboration between both organisations. Update on the formalisation will be presented at IWC69.

ICES

The Working Group on Bycatch (WGBYC) has been working with the Bycatch Coordinator and is now expanding to focus on "reviewing selected aspects of marine mammal-fishery interactions and assembling data and qualitative information available from other sources not fully covered by WGBYC (notably strandings) on marine mammals." This was based on the potential value of a strandings database, which would prevent countries from sending strandings and diagnosed bycatches to multiple organisations separately. The IWC Secretariat will continue to discuss options with various organisations interested in creating this shared data platform and has also been collaborating closely with ASCOBANS and ICES on a proposal for a regional database that can be expanded to include global strandings data.

GLOBAL GHOST GEAR INITIATIVE (GGGI)

At IWC68 the Commission endorsed the signing of a Statement of Support for collaboration with GGGI. This is a long-standing recommendation from the Commission and SC (CO1857, SC19215). It would be useful for IWC to continue to engage in this, to input scientific and technical advice relevant to marine debris and cetaceans and to facilitate networking with other organisations and stakeholders on this issue. However, there is an annual membership fee that IWC would have to pay. The Secretariat has looked for ways to waive the fee and had a meeting with them to discuss in-kind activities that could be considered. It is unlikely that IWC can join without paying the fee.

OCEAN GOVERNANCE PROJECT

The IWC Secretariat has had ongoing communication and collaboration with Ocean Governance about IWC programs and the work of the Marine Mammal Twinning Project. The Secretariat attended the Final Workshop of the Ocean Governance project, on 16-18 October at NOAA HQ in Scituate, Massachusetts. The aim of the workshop was to review the achievements and accomplishments of the Marine Mammal Twinning from 2023 while discussing the potential legacy of the project. Recording of the workshop is available [online](#).

The Executive Secretary also made an opening statement in their side event at CMS COP14.

IORA

There have been several recommendations (e.g. SC19148, SC2294, CC1622, CC1625) from both the Scientific and Conservation Committees concerning engagement with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Given the overlap in topics of interest, possible collaboration could include further developing the Indian Ocean region's whale watching industry, monitoring and data recovery of cetacean strandings, sustainable fisheries, and bycatch mitigation. In early September 2023 the Secretariat organised a call with the IORA Secretariat to make introductions and re-initiate discussions. There was a special emphasis on whale watching because of the recent relaunch of the Sustainable Whale and Dolphin Watching Network, which IWC helped establish following the 2016 whale watching workshop. As part of the network's reboot, they relaunched their [newsletter](#), and IWC contributed an excerpt. This was circulated in early 2024. The Secretariat had a second meeting in February 2024 to discuss other potential avenues of collaboration, such as with the BMI, with IORA's Blue Economy team.

OCEAN PROJECT

The Secretariat (O Loughlin) has remained updated on the OCEAN Project's work and progress by participating in the OCEAN Project Stakeholders Forum with regular updates on the status of the project. This project aims to create a prediction and detection system for European waters that alerts mariners on the bridge of potential marine hazards such as cetaceans.

Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR)

The Strandings coordinator attended the meeting of the SCAR's Expert Group on birds and marine mammals (EGBAMM) on July 29, 2023. The Strandings coordinator gave a short presentation on the Strandings Initiative followed by discussions around improving marine strandings response capacity to groups working in and around the Southern Ocean/ Antarctica. The highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) was also discussed and the key request for IWC was for guidelines or protocols on dealing with HPAI in cetaceans. This is being discussed with the Strandings Expert Panel.

CABES MSc lectures

The Secretariat prepared and presented a four-hour lecture to 23 students on July 25, 2023. Students represented 23 African countries and were enrolled in the MSc. Programme on "Science-Policy-Practice Interfaces on Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services and Climate Change – SPIBES" is part of CABES – Capacity Development for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Experts project. CABES aims to develop and strengthen the capacity of professionals in biodiversity-related fields in West, Central, and East Africa to engage in the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, www.ipbes.net). CABES is supported by [the International Climate Initiative \(IKI\)](#) of the [German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection \(BMUV\)](#).

The IWC lecture was a component of the Aquatic Ecology and Management module. The lecture covered the IWC's structure and process, history and current work, general marine mammal biology and ecology, threats, management options, and IWC case studies. Students learned about the importance of science-based policy and discussed possible projects they could implement related to marine mammal conservation in their local areas.

MINAMATA

The Secretariat and Holm prepared a report ([UNEP/MC/COP.5/INF/31](#)) for the COP to the Minamata Convention on Mercury 5th meeting in Geneva, 30 October–3 November 2023. The report detailed the IWC's work on pollution, including Resolutions and recommendations, workshop reports and the IWC Contaminant Explorer tool. The Secretariat also submitted a paper on the links between the IWC and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Further discussion on how IWC and Minamata Convention could enhance collaboration was had during the Bern III workshop and continues.

NOAA

The Secretariat (O Loughlin) attended the NOAA North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Risk Reduction Technology Workshop in Washington, D.C., USA 5-6 March 2024 as well as the pre-workshop webinars in February 2024. The purpose of the workshop was to investigate options to foster the research, development, testing, and operationalization of innovative tools and management practices to offer mariners additional options for reducing lethal collisions with North Atlantic Right Whales. The final workshop report will be disseminated to the IWC Ship Strikes Expert Panel.

NAMMCO

The Secretariat has continued to engage with NAMMCO in areas of common interest including ensuring consistency in published abundance estimates and welfare issues. The IWC Executive Secretary gave an opening statement at the 31st Council meeting of NAMMCO in March 2024 which the secretariat attended online because of budget restrictions. An online meeting is planned between both Secretariats because of important personnel changes in both.

Observer Reports

Agenda Item 4.12 Report on IUCN activities 2023-2024 By Randall Reeves, Gianna Minton, Gill Braulik, Justin Cooke, Barbara Taylor, Grant Abel, Frank Cipriano, and Simone Panigada

IUCN has continued to be directly involved in cetacean research and conservation in several main work streams relevant to the IWC: (i) activities undertaken under the aegis of the Species Survival Commission's Cetacean Specialist Group [CSG], which notably includes overseeing Red List assessments, (ii) activities of the Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, convened jointly under the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas and the Species Survival Commission, and (iii) the Integrated Conservation Planning for Cetaceans (ICPC) group within the CSG, which has been active in initiating projects for some of the most threatened small cetaceans.

A fourth work stream involving independent scientific review panels to advise on western gray whale conservation ended in March 2022, and the CSG has been working with the IWC Secretariat and other stakeholders to try and restore public access to reports and other documents that were previously available through the IUCN website related to this work stream.

Progress on the three ongoing work streams since SC/69A is summarised briefly below. More information can be found on the Cetacean Specialist Group website (iucn-csg.org) and the Important Marine Mammal Areas website (<https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/immas/>).

4.12.1 Red List Assessments

Following a concerted effort over the last few years to update large numbers of cetacean assessments, the majority are now relatively current, and in 2023 a limited number of new or updated assessments were published. These include the following:

- The Indian Ocean humpback dolphin (*Sousa plumbea*) species assessment was updated and the species remained as EN ([Braulik et al. 2023](#)).
- The assessment for Māui dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus hectori maui*) was updated and the subspecies continues to be listed as Critically Endangered ([Constantine et al. 2023](#)).
- The Baltic Sea subpopulation of harbour porpoises was reassessed and its status remained Critically Endangered ([Carlström et al. 2023](#)).

Guidelines for the selection of subpopulations that should be assessed for the Red List were finalised and published as supplementary information in the Red List status of cetaceans paper by Braulik et al. (2023) discussed below.

The framework for prioritising cetacean subpopulations for Red List assessment was finalised and published on the CSG website, along with a template to nominate subpopulations for consideration. These can be seen on the CSG website here: <https://iucn-csg.org/red-listing-process/>

A new paper titled 'Red-list status and extinction risk of the world's whales, dolphins, and porpoises' was published in *Conservation Biology* in 2023. It has been submitted as a For Information document and is available online: <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cobi.14090>. A graphical abstract, which can be broken down into separate infographics, is available here: <https://iucn-csg.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Infographic-IUCN-CSG-Sept2023.pdf>

4.12.2. Integrated Conservation Planning for Cetacean

Barbara Taylor and Grant Abel co-chair the conservation planning component of the Cetacean Specialist Group and a section of the CSG web site is devoted to planning efforts, which focus on threatened species and populations of small cetaceans (<https://iucn-csg.org/integrated-conservation-planning-for-cetaceans-icpc/>).

Fundraising and collaboration with a number of range-country partners have resulted in projects on the ground focusing on conservation action for some of the most threatened small cetacean species including Atlantic humpback dolphins (see Sousateuszii.org), Indus river dolphins, Yangtze finless porpoises, and franciscana dolphins.

4.12.3 IUCN Task Force on Marine Mammal Protected Areas (formerly ICMMPA)

Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara and Erich Hoyt continue to co-chair ongoing efforts of the Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force (MMPATF) to identify Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) (see marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-eatlas for map).

Progress on identification of IMMAs through dedicated regional workshops

In the period between May 2023 and March 2024, Important Marine Mammal Areas from two new regions were identified and published on the eAtlas, taking the total number of IMMAs identified to date to 280. The workshop reports from the Southwest Atlantic and the Northeast Atlantic have been submitted as For Information documents and can also be accessed online here:

<https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/download/preliminary-report-of-the-regional-workshop-for-the-south-west-atlantic-ocean-important-marine-mammal-areas/>

and <https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/download/final-report-of-the-regional-workshop-for-the-north-east-atlantic-ocean-important-marine-mammal-areas/>

The next area to be covered by a Regional IMMA workshop will be the Northwest Atlantic Ocean and the Wider Caribbean, scheduled for May 2024 in Mexico.

As of February 2024, the Task Force has worked with more than 300 scientists to examine close to 75% of the global ocean, identifying 280 IMMAs. To date the shape files for these IMMAs have been requested by over 725 individuals and organisations around the world for use in research, conservation planning, and threat mitigation.

Progress on the use of IMMAs to identify high-risk areas where human threats, such as ship strikes, should be mitigated

IMMAs are being used by Vanguard Technologies as part of their digital ship security and planning services, and the locations of IMMAs and details on the key species that occur in them are transmitted to ship captains worldwide.

In June 2023 the Maritime Environment Protection Committee of the International Maritime Organization adopted a proposal of the Governments of France, Italy, Monaco and Spain for designation of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) in the North-Western Mediterranean Sea to protect cetaceans. The PSSA includes the Pelagos Sanctuary and the Spanish whale migration corridor, two Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance dedicated to cetaceans, and it partially overlaps with the North-West Mediterranean Sea, Slope and Canyon IMMA (Tetley et al., 2022), to take into account whale population movements and distribution. The

final goal of the PSSA is ‘to protect cetaceans from collision risk, ship-generated pollution and to increase awareness on a critically important area for the fin whale and the sperm whale’ (Fortuna et al., 2022; Sèbe et al., 2023).

4.12.4 Coordination between IUCN and the IWC SC

The IWC-IUCN Coordination ICG was established to enhance coordination between the IUCN and IWC SC, other relevant parties involved in conservation actions for cetaceans, with a particular focus on the IUCN Red List assessments process and the IWC Status of Stocks Initiative (SOSI). This group has fulfilled its remit on developing appropriate language, terminology and content for SOSI, prioritising cases for SOSI inclusion and has aligned text across IUCN and IWC platforms with the intention of minimising public confusion about whale statuses.

With regards to engaging with other relevant parties involved in cetacean science and conservation, the IWC Executive Secretary has participated in the UNEP supported “Bern Process”, which aims to bring together Secretariats and partners from across biological conventions to find ways to enhance cooperation and collaboration. The Executive Secretary is also a member of the Biodiversity Liaison Group, comprising representatives from the eight biodiversity-conventions, which aims to identify cross-convention collaboration opportunities. Further, the Chairs of the Scientific Advisory Bodies of the Biodiversity-related Conventions (CSABS) has been identified as a further opportunity for IWC SC to engage with other scientific bodies established under other conventions.

Given the progress in all tasks and the work of other groups and processes underway, this ICG is no longer required.

References

- Braulik, G.T., Natoli, A., Sutaria, D. & Vermeulen, E. 2023. *Sousa plumbea*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2023: e.T82031633A230253271. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2023-1.RLTS.T82031633A230253271.en>. Accessed on 05 March 2024.
- Braulik, G.T., Taylor, B.L., Minton, G., Notarbartolo di Sciara, G., Collins, T., Rojas-Bracho, L., Crespo, E.A., Ponnampalam, L.S., Double, M C., & Reeves, R.R. (2023). Red-list status and extinction risk of the world's whales, dolphins, and porpoises. *Conservation Biology*, 37, e14090. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.14090>
- Carlström, J., Carlén, I., Dähne, M., Hammond, P.S., Koschinski, S., Owen, K., Sveegaard, S. & Tiedemann, R. 2023. *Phocoena phocoena* (Baltic Sea subpopulation). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2023: e.T17031A50370773. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2023-1.RLTS.T17031A50370773.en>. Accessed on 05 March 2024.
- Constantine, R. 2023. *Cephalorhynchus hectori* ssp. *maui*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2023: e.T39427A50380174. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2023-1.RLTS.T39427A50380174.en>. Accessed on 05 March 2024.
- Fortuna, C., Sánchez-Espinosa, A., Rodríguez-Rodríguez, D., Abdul Malak, D, Podestà, M., Panigada, S. 2022. Pathways to coexistence between marine mammals and maritime transport in the north-western Mediterranean region: Collision risk between ships and large whales within the proposed north-western Mediterranean Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), including the Pelagos Sanctuary. Interreg Med Biodiversity Protection project, 2022. Available from: <https://panaceaweb.adabyron.uma.es/wp-content/uploads/Pathways-to-coexistence-between-large-cetaceans-and-maritime-transport-in-the-north-western-Mediterranean-region.pdf>

Sèbe, M., David, L., Dhermain, F., Gourguet, S., Madon, B., Ody, D., Panigada, S., Peltier, H., Pendleton, L. 2023. Estimating the impact of ship strikes on the Mediterranean fin whale subpopulation. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 237, 106485.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2023.106485>.

Tetley M.J., Braulik G.T., Lanfredi C., Minton G., Panigada S., Politi E., Zanardelli M., Notarbartolo di Sciara G., Hoyt E. 2022. The Important Marine Mammal Area network: a tool for systematic spatial planning in response to the marine mammal habitat conservation crisis. *Frontiers in Marine Science* 9:841789. doi: 10.3389/fmars.2022.841789

Cooperation with IMO 2023-2024 By Russell Leaper

The Secretariat and members of the Committee have continued to work with IMO particularly on underwater noise and ship strikes.

Ship strikes

Campbell (Secretariat) and Leaper (Scientific Committee) attended a meeting of the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) in July 2023. Following a number of recommendations from the Scientific Committee, IWC had co-sponsored a paper to the meeting (MEPC 80/16/3) proposing the establishment of a new traffic separation scheme south of Sri Lanka to reduce ship strike risks to blue whales and improve maritime safety. Despite strong support from the industry and several Member States, the proposal was not accepted and MEPC decided that further discussion and cooperation between the co-sponsors and the coastal state involved was needed.

Also at MEPC 80, following a proposal from Spain, France, Italy and Monaco, the IMO agreed to designate the North-Western Mediterranean region as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) with the aim of reducing ship strikes of sperm whales and fin whales. The agreed Associated Protective Measures involve a voluntary speed reduction. The IMO calls on mariners to 'navigate with particular caution within the NW Med PSSA, in areas where large and medium cetaceans are detected or reported, and reduce their speed to between 10 and 13 knots as voluntary speed reduction'.

Underwater noise

The IMO adopted its Revised Guidelines for the Reduction of Underwater Radiated Noise from Shipping to Address Adverse Impacts on Marine Life at MEPC 80 and issued these as a circular in August 2023 (MEPC.1/Circ.906).

Members of the Secretariat attended a workshop at IMO in September 2023 workshop which examined opportunities to tackle Greenhouse Gas emissions and harmful underwater radiated noise in tandem noise. A key outcome of the workshop was that reduced speed is a well-documented approach for fixed propeller ship types to achieve lower GHG emissions and URN, but further reductions can be realized when carefully integrated with technical measures.

Leaper attended a meeting of the IMO Ship Design and Construction (SDC) sub-committee in January 2024. At the meeting the SDC agreed on an Action Plan to further prevent and reduce underwater radiated noise (URN) from ships. The aim is to minimize the adverse effects of underwater noise on the marine environment. The Action Plan includes establishing an experience-building phase (EBP) during which Member States and international organizations are invited to share lessons learned and best practices, developing targets and policies for underwater noise reduction, and encouraging more research on underwater noise and its impacts on the marine environment.

The IMO has also progressed a Global Partnership for Mitigation of Underwater Noise from Shipping (GloNoise). The overall objective of GloNoise is to establish a global stakeholders' partnership, with a strong developing countries focus, in order to deal with the major environmental issue of underwater noise from shipping. Lead pilot countries are Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, India, South Africa and Trinidad and Tobago, five of which are IWC members. IWC is a Strategic Partner in the project. The Secretariat (Campbell and Webster) and Leaper attended the inception workshop in March 2024.

Scientific Committee of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (2023) by Nat Kelly (Australia)

Australian Antarctic Division, Kingston, 7050, lutruwita (Tasmania), Australia
nat.kelly@aad.gov.au

CCAMLR/SC-CAMLR

CCAMLR meets every year, and its next meeting will be 14-25 October 2024, and is always in Hobart, Tasmania. Detailed information about CCAMLR can be found [here](#). The SC-CAMLR meets every year, also in Hobart, Tasmania, immediately preceding the annual CCAMLR meeting. Detailed information about SC-CAMLR can be found [here](#). The reports of the annual meetings of CCAMLR and SC-CAMLR can be found on CCAMLR's [website](#).

SC-CAMLR Structure

SC-CAMLR is comprised of several work groups (WGs), which are roughly equivalent in relationship to SC-CAMLR as the IWC-SC subcommittees are to IWC-SC; recently updated Terms of Reference for each of the WGs can be found in [SC-CAMLR 2022](#), Annex 11, but see table below for a summary of their purpose.

Working Group	Summary, provides advice on:
WG- Acoustic Survey and Analysis Methods (ASAM)	hydro-acoustic methods and protocols, including survey design and methods for estimating biomass. Convened annually, hosted by Member.
WG- Statistics, Assessments and Modelling (SAM)	quantitative methods, including stock assessment methods, modelling, research plans and survey design. Convened annually, hosted by Member.
WG- Ecosystem Monitoring and Management (EMM)	understanding ecological relationships within krill-centric ecosystems in the context of managing fisheries. Coordinates implementation of the CCAMLR Ecosystem Monitoring Programme (CEMP). Convened annually, hosted by Member.
WG- Fish Stock Assessment (FSA)	status and management of fish stocks. Convened annually in Hobart, Tasmania.
WG-Incidental Mortality Associated with Fishing (IMAF)	the level and significance of direct impacts of interactions and incidental mortality of marine mammals and seabirds associated with fishing, including mitigation, reporting. Convened when needed.

News items from 2023

Revised krill fishery management approach

The process of developing the revised krill fishery management strategy has been a major focus of SC-CAMLR over the past few years, since the 'three component' approach was endorsed by CCAMLR ([CCAMLR-38 \(2019\)](#), paragraph 5.17). More details on the revised krill fishery management approach can be found in [SC-CAMLR \(2022, paragraphs 3.2-3.69\)](#) and [CCAMLR \(2022, paragraphs 4.8-4.21\)](#), and summarised for IWC-SC in [SC/69A/EM03](#).

Krill catch limits in [CCAMLR Subarea 48.1](#) representing waters around and to the west of the Antarctic Peninsula), as outlined in Conservation Measure [51-07](#), remained a topic for discussion in 2023, with a proposal for catch limits based on the revised krill management approach being considered ([SC-](#)

[CAML-41](#), paragraph 3.46). CCAMLR ultimately decided to roll over CM 51-07 pending further discussions in 2024 ([CCAMLR-42](#), paragraph 4.31).

Krill catch limits in [CCAMLR Statistical](#) Divisions 58.4.1 and 58.4.2 (East Antarctica), as outlined in Conservation Measures [51-02](#) and [51-03](#), respectively, was also a topic for discussion in 2023, with a proposal for revising catch limits being considered (SC-CAML-42, paragraphs 2.91-2.101). No consensus was reached regarding revision of catch limits in Divisions 58.4.1 and 58.4.2 ([CCAMLR-42](#), paragraph 4.43).

Harmonisation Workshop

CCAMLR intends that a workshop be held in mid-2024 to 'harmonise' various conservation and krill fishery management initiatives being applied at developed for Subarea 48.1 (including the [Domain 1 MPA proposal](#), the revised krill fishery management approach and the [ARK voluntary restricted zones](#); [SC-CAML-42](#), paragraphs 2.85-2.90). It is hoped that details of the workshop will be finalised in the near future (but see [SC-CAML-42](#), Annex 14, for agreed terms of reference, etc).

Discussions on whale incidental mortalities in the krill fishery

[WG-IMAF](#) continued to discuss the issue whale mortalities associated with krill trawl operations (four humpback whale deaths in Subareas 48.1 and 48.2 in 2021 and 2022), including reviewing a cetacean exclusion device used in continuous trawls ([WG-IMAF-23](#), paragraphs 3.26-3.28) and a data collection form for observers to complete in the event of a cetacean mortality, which was developed in collaboration with IWC-SC, via the Intersessional Correspondence Group on cetacean incidental mortality in the krill fishery ([WG-IMAF-23](#), paragraphs 2.16-2.19, 3.17-3.19). WG-IMAF thanked the IWC-SC, specifically, the subcommittee on Non-deliberate Human Induced Mortality of Cetaceans (HIM), for their work in developing the form, and noted the benefit of this collaboration with the IWC ([WG-IMAF-2023](#), paragraph 2.16). [SC-CAML](#) (paragraph 8.4) noted the effective collaboration between WG-IMAF and IWC and the importance of marine mammal by-catch mitigation approaches given the recent increase in baleen whale abundance.

CCAMLR adopted a revision to [CM 21-03](#), regarding reporting of cetacean exclusion devices.

CEMP review

The CCAMLR Ecosystem Monitoring Programme (CEMP) was established in 1985 with the aim to: a) detect and record significant changes in critical components of the ecosystem, to serve as a basis for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources; and b) to distinguish between changes due to the harvesting of commercial species and changes due to environmental variability, both physical and biological ([SC-CAML 1985](#)). Discussions around CEMP, including the krill predators considered, and the various parameters measured, is on-going ([SC-CAML 2002](#), paragraphs 4.31-4.39). A review of CEMP commenced in 2023, exploring how the programme can inform the revised krill management approach, and included discussion of cetacean science ([SC-CAML-42](#), paragraphs 2.69-2.84). Intersessional discussions on the CEMP review will be presented to [WG-EMM-2024](#), to be held in early July 2024.

Workshop on Climate Change

CCAMLR held a Workshop on Climate Change 4-8 September 2023 ([WS-CC-2023](#); [SC-CAML-42](#), paragraphs 5.1-5.29), and CCAMLR noted the importance of considering climate change in its

management decisions ([CCAMLR-42](#), paragraphs 6.1-6.24). In 2025, there will be a joint SC-CAMLR/[CEP](#) workshop on climate change (see [SC-CAMLR-42](#), Annex 17 for further details).

Krill stock hypothesis workshop

The SCAR Krill Expert Group (SKEG) held a [virtual workshop](#) 20-24 March 2023 with the aim of developing a krill stock hypothesis for CCAMLR's Area 48 to augment the revised krill fishery management approach ([SC-CAMLR 2022](#), paragraphs 3.26-3.29); the report of this workshop can be found [here](#). A second SKEG [workshop](#) to progress work on krill stock hypotheses in Area 48 is planned for 8-12 April 2024 (online).

Report from the 2023 activities In ICES by Guðjón Már Sigurðsson

Marine and Freshwater Research Institute, Hafnarfjörður, Iceland

This report reviews the 2023 activities in ICES which had some relevance to the work in IWC SC. This included work in the ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME), the Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC), and the newly formed Working group on the Joint Cetacean Database Programme (WGJCDP). The ICES Annual Science Conference (ASC) generally include sessions with marine mammals included as an integral part, occasionally also sessions entirely devoted to marine mammals. Last year the ASC had a large session on bycatch.

ICES WGMME

The ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME) had a hybrid meeting in Stockholm during 30 January - 2 February 2023 to address five terms of references. Under the first of these, ToR A, new information on cetacean and seal population abundance, distribution, population/stock structure, was reviewed, including information on vagrant marine mammal species. For cetaceans, coverage from the latest SCANS-IV survey was presented along with results of recent regional/national surveys, particularly in the Bay of Biscay and the Iberian Peninsula. For seals, latest monitoring results were given for harbour, grey and Baltic and Saimaa ringed seals. In addition, where possible, local long-term trends were illustrated for those species, based on earlier WGMME efforts to assemble these data into the WGMME seal database. For both species' groups, a first account of vagrant species was provided.

Under ToR B, cetacean and seal management frameworks in the North Atlantic were discussed, with an overview of the EU Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, and examples from the United Kingdom, Spain, and the Faroe Islands of national management frameworks regarding marine mammals.

ToR C provides an overview of new published information with regards to anthropogenic threats to marine mammal populations following on from the review by WGMME in 2015 and subsequent updates. These are considered under the following headings: cumulative effects, fishery interactions, chemical pollution, marine debris, underwater noise, ship strikes and other physical trauma, tourism, climate change, and new pathogens (including avian flu).

ToR D focused upon bycatch. In support of WGBYC, this ToR aimed to contribute to the Roadmap for ICES PETS bycatch advice.

ToR E involved liaison with other WGs. The Chairs of the newly-formed WGJCDP introduced to WGMME members, the Joint Cetacean Database Programme, which is to be hosted by the ICES Data Centre. The scope to collect information on other marine species besides cetaceans was discussed. A meeting with another newly formed ICES working group, on Marine Protected Areas, was planned but was deferred at the request of that group above.

ICES WGBYC

The Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) had a hybrid meeting (Sukkarieta, Spain and by correspondence) on 18-22 September 2023.

The Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) was established in 2007 and collates and analyses information from across the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent sea areas (Baltic,

Mediterranean and Black Seas) related to the bycatch in commercial fishing operations of protected and sensitive species including marine mammals, seabirds, turtles and sensitive fish species. WGBYC seeks to describe and improve understanding of the likely impacts of fishing activities on affected populations, to inform on the suitability of existing at-sea monitoring programmes for assessing sensitive species bycatch, and to collate information on bycatch mitigation efforts. In 2023, the WGBYC hybrid meeting addressed eight Terms of Reference (ToR).

The group report provides an overview of data collection activities during 2022 including details of reported monitoring and fishing effort data, and bycatch records that were submitted to the WGBYC database in 2023 following a formal data call. Data were requested from 17 of the 20 ICES countries, six EU Mediterranean countries and two EU Black Sea countries. 23 of the 25 contacted countries submitted data.

WGBYC further expanded the BEAM approach which was first developed in 2022 and is designed for evaluating and quantitatively assessing population impacts of bycatch across the full range of relevant taxa by considering various criteria, including data availability, quality and representativity, within group expertise and the existence of management/conservation thresholds or reference points. The BEAM approach underpins the requirement of the agreement between ICES and DGMARE for the provision of annual advice on bycatch. Estimated bycatch mortality ranges, by ecoregion and gear type, were produced for several mammal, seabird, turtle and fish species listed on the EU priority species list and the ICES Roadmap for Bycatch Advice ecoregion species list.

In 2023 WGBYC developed a new semi-quantitative and repeatable methodology for evaluating bycatch risk for high priority data limited species for which reliable quantitative assessments cannot currently be carried out using the BEAM approach. WGBYC proposed a process where taxa specific experts contribute biological, demographic and distribution data to metadata tables which are combined with bycatch and fishing effort data to inform risk matrices to evaluate bycatch risk by species, gear type, area and potential population impact.

A risk-based approach to highlight potential monitoring gaps and inform coordinated sampling designs was further developed and expanded and provides useful insights into which métiers may currently be under-sampled by existing at-sea data collection programmes with respect to PET species bycatch.

ICES WGJCDP

The new working group on the joint cetacean data programme was formed last year. The Joint Cetacean Data Programme (JCDP) vision is to promote and facilitate cetacean data standardization and maximize value through collation and enabling universal access.

The Working Group for the Joint Cetacean Data Programme (WGJCDP) is responsible for the JCDP database - which contains collated cetacean data from the northeast Atlantic - and works in line with the JCDP vision.

The database comprises data that meets the agreed data standard from multiple data providers collected through ship-based and aerial methodologies. WGJCDP drives continued input of standardized data into the database and develops analyses and data products in line with identified priorities across the cetacean research and policy community.

WGJCDP will work in collaboration with the Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) and the Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME) to provide robust and relevant outputs in support of ongoing priorities and needs such as e.g. abundance and distribution trends and areas of persistent densities.

ICES ASC

The 2023 ICES Annual Science Conference (ASC) was held as a hybrid conference 11-15 September 2023 in Bilbao, Spain. The conference included a theme session devoted to bycatch, which included many marine mammal related talks and posters. Of note there were presentations on the developing methodology to assess bycatch begin developed in WGBYC, on modified gillnets with the aim to reduce cetacean bycatch, and developments of seal deterrents. The ASC conference in 2024 will also be held in Gateshead, United Kingdom 9-12 September 2024. The call for abstracts is now open and while there is not a session entirely dedicated to whale research, there are sessions on marine food webs, electronic monitoring of bycatch, and welfare conscious fishing that can be relevant to whale research.

More information is available at the ICES web site:
<https://www.ices.dk/events/asc/2024/Pages/default.aspx>

Report from ASCOBANS to IWC SC69A by Jenny Renell and Mark Simmonds

Available [here](#) (SC/69B/O/02)

Report from CMS to IWC SC69A by Jenny Renell and Mark Simmonds

Available [here](#) (SC/69B/O/05)

Observer Report of the 2023 PICES Annual Meeting by Tsutomu Tamura (Japan)

The North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES) is an inter-governmental organization in which Canada, China, Japan, Korea, Russia and the United States participate. PICES has four committees: the Biological Oceanography Committee (BIO), the Fisheries Science Committee (FIS), the Marine Environmental Quality Committee (MEQ), and the Physical Oceanography and Climate Committee (POC). In addition, it has one technical committee for data exchange (TCODE). PICES has been conducting a research project titled FUTURE (Forecasting and Understanding Trends, Uncertainty and Responses of the North Pacific Ecosystems) since 2008.

PICES meets once a year for its regular meeting and its associated symposia with over 500 participants. Since 1997, PICES has addressed marine birds and marine mammals as relevant ecosystem components in the North Pacific, and has established a special working group to assess the impact of feeding by marine birds and marine mammals upon ecosystems (WG11). There was also a marine birds and marine mammals advisory panel (AP-MBM) under the BIO to examine the relationship between climate change and ecosystem fluctuation in the North Pacific Ocean, and compare the situation with those in other oceanic basins. Since 2016, the AP-MBM is under Section-MBM (S-MBM) under the BIO.

The PICES-2023 meeting was held online between 23 and 27 October 2023. The two S-MBM business meetings were held on 19 September and 21 October, focused on the ongoing activities such as the S-MBM next five-years project. Four S-MBM members representing Canada, Japan, Korea and USA were present, while those from China and Russia did not attend PICES-2023.

The S-MBM meeting in 2023 reviewed the five-years (2022-2026) project titled “Interaction between MBMs and other ecosystem components and stressors”, and concluded that it will be held some workshops and sessions related to this project between 2023 and 2026.

Below is a brief outline of the most relevant events at the 2023 S-MBM business meeting:

1. S-MBM leadership

The business meeting of S-MBM was convened by Dr. P. O’Hara (Canadian Wildlife Service, Canada) and Dr. M. Kim (Hanyang University, Korea).

2. Reports from IWC SC

At the two business meetings held on 19 September and 21 October 2023, Tamura (Institute of Cetacean Research, Japan), as the representative of the IWC-SC, presented the observer report of the 2023 IWC/SC meeting on topics related to the North Pacific (*e.g.* Research Plan for the IWC-POWER cruise).

3. Activity in 2023

There was one workshop and one session regarding marine birds and marine mammals in 2023 PICES.

Workshop

*W5 “ Bio-indicators of meso to global scale marine pollution: techniques for integration and standardization” on 20 October at PICES-2023.

The workshop reviewed and compared approaches used for detecting and measuring pollutants in different tissues in various species of marine birds and marine mammals. It discussed the approach for standardization and integration of the concentration of pollutants in the tissue of MBMs and other possible sentinel organisms for the North Pacific. In total, there were 8 presentations: 3 presentations based on western North Pacific dealing with marine birds and marine mammals, and 5 presentations based on eastern North Pacific dealing with marine birds and marine mammals in the PICES regions.

Sessions

“S11” anticipated and realized effects of climate change on predatory fish, birds, and mammals of the North Pacific on 26 October at PICES-2023.

The session was focused on how climate change is affecting the North Pacific’s top marine consumers directly or indirectly through trophic interactions (for example, how metabolic changes in predatory fish may be making them more or less susceptible to changes in food resource availability). In total, there were 16 presentations: 8 presentations based on western North Pacific dealing with marine birds and marine mammals and 8 presentations based on eastern North Pacific dealing with several fishes, marine birds and marine mammals in the PICES regions. The workshop and session were held as a hybrid meeting. The summary of this workshop and session were presented to the PICES BIO committee.

4. Plan of activities in 2024

The five-year project (2022-2026) titled “Interaction between MBMs and other ecosystem components and stressors” will continue its implementation through important sub-themes such as:

- Forecasting changes in forage species and response of top predators.
- Marine birds and marine mammals as ecological indicators and predictors of changing marine ecosystems.
- Changing roles of recovering marine mammals and declining marine birds in ecosystems.

One session and one workshop were proposed for 2024 PICES as following:

*Session (1 day); “Social, economic and ecological implications of recoveries, range expansions and shifting distributions of marine birds, mammals and fish”.

*Workshop (1/2 day); “Puffin diet samples as indicators of forage nekton availability and community structure in the Aleutian marine ecosystem”.

5. Other matters

The 2024 annual meeting of the PICES will be held in Hawaii, USA. The meeting will be held between 26 October and 1 November 2024.

NAMMCO SC 2024 – Issues of Relevance to IWC by Guðjón Már Sigurðsson

Marine and Freshwater Research Institute, Hafnarfjörður, Iceland.

The 30th meeting (SC30) of the NAMMCO Scientific Committee (SC) was held at the Marine and Freshwater Research Institute in Hafnarfjörður, Iceland.

By-catch

The NAMMCO By-catch Working Group (BYCWG) met online October 6th, 2023, to discuss the best ways to answer ToR related to risk of bycatch in fishing activities. The WG aims to identify areas where marine mammals are likely to be highly exposed to the risk of by-catch, based on the overlap of species distribution and fishing effort. This will determine where by-catch monitoring efforts should be concentrated. To collect the necessary fishery data for this analysis, the BYCWG is formulating a data call to the Parties. Some preliminary information was requested from the Fisheries Departments of each country, and that information is now available. The next steps are to establish a formal data call to the Fisheries Departments, and the working group will meet in 2024 to finalize the data call.

Ecosystem issues

Multi-species Approaches to Modelling:

The SC agreed to update the list of different multi-species ecosystem modelling projects that members are involved in, as well as provide information on the reliability of such models, for the next SC meeting.

Other Environmental Issues:

The SC recommended that the Joint NAMMCO-JCNB Working Group on disturbance provide further monitoring updates of the Mary River Project iron open pit mine and associated disturbances to marine mammals at its next meeting.

Cetacean stocks

Narwhal:

The Ad hoc Working Group on Narwhal in East Greenland (NEGWG) met in December 2023. Fine-scale genetic structure analysis revealed that the spring and summer hunts in Scoresby Sound are supplied by different aggregations. All recent aerial surveys in Southeast Greenland, including one designed and conducted with the direct participation of local hunters, indicate a continued decline of narwhals in all three Management Areas. Assessment models for each area point to an immediate risk of stock extirpation at current quota levels. The SC endorsed the recommendations of the WG and highlighted one: "For all three Management Areas, the SC strongly reiterates the recommendation for zero removals and immediate closure of the hunt." The NAMMCO Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC) agreed to forward the following recommendations for Conservation and Management to Greenland: Acknowledging the serious status of narwhal and beluga in East Greenland, as pointed out in the letter of concern by the Scientific Committee, while recognizing the importance of issues related to food security in the remote areas in all management areas in East Greenland, and adhering to the 8 precautionary principles adopted by NAMMCO 30, the MCC agreed to urge Greenland to implement a management approach on narwhal and beluga stocks in East Greenland aiming at zero quotas to ensure the long-term sustainability of these stocks.

Beluga:

The NEGWG reviewed the latest information on genetics and catches of belugas in East Greenland. While still irregular, increased catches since 2017 indicate more frequent occurrence of belugas in the region in recent years. Genetic analyses revealed that these animals originate from at least three different circumpolar stocks, including the Beaufort Sea (USA and Canada), Kara Sea (Russia), and Svalbard (Norway). The SC endorsed the recommendations of the WG and prioritised two: "Collect incidental observations and biological samples when available, to monitor the occurrence of belugas in East Greenland" and "Zero removals should be allowed, in order to allow for the potential establishment of a new population of belugas in East Greenland, and to avoid removing animals that have potentially originated from the small and protected Svalbard stock". The MCC agreed as seen above to urge Greenland to implement a management approach on beluga stocks in East Greenland aiming at zero quotas to ensure the long-term sustainability of these stocks.

Dolphins:

The Working Group on Dolphins met for the first time in October–November 2023 to assess the status of white-beaked and white-sided dolphins in the NAMMCO area. Based on genetic and telemetry data, white-sided dolphins were assessed as a single unit. A conservative assessment model including abundance, life history, and catch data indicated that removals of up to 750 white-sided dolphins per year across the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland maintained a 70% likelihood of sustainable catches. For white-beaked dolphins, although there is genetic evidence of at least three distinct stocks, there were considerable uncertainties regarding misreporting and struck and lost animals in catch data. Not being possible to conduct a full assessment, a preliminary assessment using the Potential Biological Removal approach was done, which indicated that catches of this species in Greenland may be unsustainable. The SC endorsed the recommendations of the WG and prioritised these four: "To validate the Greenlandic removals with a special focus on minimising underreporting and estimating struck and lost rates, thus facilitating a full assessment of white-beaked dolphins as soon as possible (high priority)", "To validate the completeness of the Faroese white-sided dolphin catches, focusing on the apparent lack of juveniles in the catch", "To maintain total removals below 750 white-sided dolphins per year across Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands", "To determine the stock identity of white-beaked dolphins in West Greenland, using increased genetic sampling and tagging efforts in Greenland". These recommendations were accepted by the MCC.

Harbour Porpoise:

The SC considers the assessment of harbour porpoises in Iceland to be of high priority and recommended that suitable data on biological parameters be collected. No abundance estimate will be available for this stock until 2026 at the earliest, therefore the SC concluded that an assessment for all countries could potentially be undertaken that year.

Pilot Whale:

In advance of the planned assessment in 2025, progress is being made on the analysis of biological samples for age and reproductive data, as well as in tracking studies of pilot whales in the Faroe Islands. The SC recommended that the Working Group on Genetics provide guidance on the most appropriate analysis and interpretation of genetic data.

Northern Bottlenose Whale:

The SC noted that reports of this species in Greenlandic catch data should be validated.

Research updates were also presented on Beaked Whales, Blue Whale, Bowhead Whale, Common Minke Whale, Fin Whale, Humpback Whale, Killer Whale, Sei Whale, and Sperm Whale.

NASS Survey 2024

The upcoming survey in the summer of 2024 will make use of both dedicated and opportunistic (Norwegian, Faroese, and Icelandic mackerel survey, Icelandic redfish survey) platforms to cover all important areas for the target species of each country. Stratification for the entire NASS area has been designed and transects have been laid out. The Scientific Planning Committee (SpC) will finalise survey and observer training protocols will be finalised in May 2024.

MINTAG project

The MINTAG project is a collaboration between SC members from all NAMMCO countries and scientists from Japan. The objective of the MINTAG project, originally called Super-Tag project, is to develop smaller and lighter telemetric tags to be used on cetaceans than the ones existing on the market today, i.e., miniature tags – or MINTAG. Extensive testing of different tag designs for minke and fin whales was conducted in Japan, Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Iceland. Tags were also deployed in the field, in Japan, Greenland, and Norway, with tag retention being the primary issue observed. Two modified designs, with the aim of improving retention rates, of the minke whale tag will be field tested during 2024. The SC approved the Steering Group's (StG) plans for continued experimental deployments, highlighting that optimal tagging platforms must be put in place.