

SC/69B/WW/06

Sub-committees/working group name: WW

Review of the Whale Watching Strategic Plan Outputs

Standing Working Group On Whale Watching



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

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Review of the Whale Watching Strategic Plan Outputs

Standing Working Group on Whale Watching

This paper provides a response to Recommendation SC2297, “The Committee recommends that the comprehensive review of the outputs of the IWC Strategic Plan for Whale Watching, be undertaken intersessionally by the SWG, which will now include the WW co-convenors (Suydam and Urbán), the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Committee (Zerbini or Porter) and another member of the Committee (Parsons).” But is also an action (1.5) within the WW Strategic Plan.

Background to Strategic Plan

The Whale Watching Strategic Plan (2018-2024) outlines two long-term actions:

- (1) Continued development of the digital Whale Watching Handbook, and
- (2) Development of an integrated research plan.

There are three objectives described in the Strategic Plan and each has a number of actions associated. The following tables review the actions and outputs for each to date and finally makes suggestions on potential areas for further work and inclusion in the new strategic plan 2025-2035.

Objective 1: Information sharing

Identify methods to facilitate cooperation and information/expertise-sharing between Contracting Parties and others to support the development of a responsible whale-watching sector, including the provision of benefits to local communities.

The Plan states that the digital Whale Watching Handbook (Handbook), the SC Subcommittee on Whale Watching, and the Standing Working Group on Whale Watching will be important mechanisms through which information sharing can be achieved. The Objective includes seven actions.

Table 1 Objective 1- Information Sharing		
Action	Outcome/Output	Next Step
Action 1.1 –improve industry and public access to data, information and research results.	1 industry representative was added to the SWG in 2023. As part of the Communications Plan, an introduction to the WW Handbook was sent to industry members including trade and tourism organisations in 15 countries.	Continue in new workplan
Action 1.2 – Continue to update, maintain and improve the Handbook.	An Editorial protocol has been endorsed and is in place for any new material that is received or sought.	Ongoing- any new material (papers, case studies, new legislation) can be sent to the Secretariat to be included. See also Annex 1 SC/69B/WW/04 for potential new content and the draft case study for Gibraltar
Action 1.3 - Identify and facilitate opportunities for the transfer (or development where a gap has been identified) of best possible practice approaches to meet identified capacity building needs including in the Handbook and elsewhere.		Carry over to new workplan

<p>Action 1.4 - In conjunction with relevant international bodies, facilitate access to guidance for Contracting Parties and others on creating enabling environments for whale watching operations to market and run their businesses responsibly.</p>	<p>The WW Handbook works as a resource where Contracting Parties can easily find updated information on best practices, regulations and case studies.</p> <p>Work with other organisations such as CMS on making CG aware of the Handbook and contents.</p>	<p>Ongoing, increase outreach with the Communications Plan</p>
<p>Action 1.5 - Continue to develop training and education tools for industry practitioners so that they can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand and improve cetacean and visitor safety; • Improve whale watching practices; and • Enhance visitor understanding and experiences. 	<p>Information is available in the WW Handbook</p> <p>Publication of new educational resources to enhance educational value of WW trips See website and Publication of General Principles See website</p>	<p>Ongoing- Site will be updated as needed.</p>
<p>Action 1.6: Implement a communications strategy to actively promote IWC whale watching resources (e.g., the Handbook, reports and training opportunities), with approaches tailored to target key audiences. These audiences include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the public • whale watching managers • researchers • operators • on-board naturalists. 	<p>Annually updated communication strategy with activities including social media campaign targeting school children/parents, personalised mailshots to stakeholder groups, interviews & outreach material focused on publication of General Principles document and work to increase the audience for the French and Spanish language versions of the website.</p> <p>See Annex A of the SWG for WW for the latest Comms Plan.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Action 1.7: Continue to improve the coordination between the SWG and the SC Sub-Committee on Whale Watching.</p>	<p>ICG established, SWG reports to WW sub-committee at each SC, SC members are part of the SWG</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

Objective 2: Research and Data Sharing

Continue to develop the necessary research principles and tools to assist the collection of data important to ensuring that whale watching (1) does not significantly and adversely affect the behaviours and fitness of individual cetaceans or populations or their habitats and (2) realizes its potential benefits, e.g., educating the public, positively affecting attitudes toward conservation, improving local economies.

These tasks and the actions below are for the SC Sub-Committee on Whale Watching, which should coordinate closely with the CC SWG on WW.

Table 2 Objective 2- Research and Data Collection		
Action	Update/Outcome/Output	Next Step
<p>Action 2.1 –Continue the Modelling and Assessment of Whale Watching Impacts (MAWI) initiative, to develop tools and methodologies to assist researchers and managers in their efforts to assess potential impacts of whale watching on cetaceans and to mitigate them. This initiative is ongoing and could focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigating modelling methods to link short- (e.g., behavioural reactions) and medium-term (e.g., changes in population distribution) responses with potential impacts from whale watching to long-term (i.e., >10 to 20 years) consequences (e.g., vital rates). • Establishing standard data collection methodologies, including from platforms of opportunity. • Identifying key locations for whale watching research projects and programmes, taking into consideration logistics, capacity and management urgency; 	<p>Last update from the SG 2020 at SC68B (SC/68B/WW/02). Third workshop cancelled due to pandemic, questionnaire was thought to be best way forward</p> <p>SC/67B/REP/03 Rev1 Report of workshop in Italy with key recommendations</p> <p>2021 (SC68C): postpone planning for a third workshop for the Modelling and Assessment of Whale Watching Impacts (MAWI) initiative and instead prepare and distribute a questionnaire intersessionally (as discussed at SC/68B; IWC, 2021, p. 96), targeting modelling and statistical experts. Responses to the questionnaire will be collated, assessed, and presented at SC68D. Results will help determine whether a third workshop is necessary (see New, 2020).</p> <p>2022 (SC68D): Discussion of this item has been postponed to the next meeting</p> <p>2023 (SC69A): The plan to distribute a questionnaire to outside modellers and report results to the sub-</p>	<p>This should be included in the next workplan/strategic plan if SC believe still necessary.</p>

	committee was not implemented during this period. The sub-committee needs to consider whether and how the project should be revived. The intersessional steering group (see Annex V ICGs) will consider ways forward and report to SC/69B.	
<p>Action 2.2 – Develop a long-term integrated research programme to better understand the potential impacts of whale watching on the demographic parameters of cetacean populations. Seek to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate whether there is a causal relationship between whale watching exposure and the survival and vital rates of exposed cetacean individuals and populations; • Understand the mechanisms involved in causal effects, if they exist, in order to define a framework for improved management; 	Papers summarising recent whale watching research are presented to the sub-committee at each SC. These are ‘deemed to be a useful review of recently published articles’. Recent advances in whale-watching research Series	Carry over to new workplan
Action 2.3 - Develop processes and mechanisms for whale watching activities to collect and provide scientifically robust and useful data to researchers and research programmes	Seafari app, E-WHALE Citizen-science and mobile web app Argentina, collection of faecal samples for microplastics, survey participants (swim-with). Use of citizen science and social media (Natoli et al 2022; Anderson et al 2022)	Carry over to new workplan
Action 2.4 - Develop an approach (e.g., hold an intersessional workshop; establish a joint intersessional working group) to integrate social and ecological scientific research within the IWC to inform whale watching management and promote potential benefits. This is a coordinated action between the SWG and the SC Sub-Committee on Whale Watching		Carry over to new workplan

Objective 3: Capacity Building and International Collaboration

Support the development of a responsible whale watching sector and the provision of benefits to local communities.

Table 3 Objective 3 - Capacity Building and International Collaboration		
Action	Outcome/Output	Next Step
<p>Action 3.1 – Identify, on a regional basis, specific capacity building, research and development needs. In particular, those (or including those) providing long-term benefits for the livelihood of local communities.</p>	<p>Rec SC2298: At SC68D established an intersessional correspondence to discuss the future of the sub-committee on whale watching, including, inter alia, who to invite as invited participants, how and where to solicit primary papers and how and when to collaborate with other sub-committees using data from whale watching platforms of opportunity and citizen science (see Item 17.4.3). This intersessional correspondence group will also identify a methodology for identifying regions and/or target species to view with regard to whale watching (see Item 17.3).</p> <p>2023 (SC69A) papers received from Latin America (Argentina, Ecuador), Timor Leste. The sub-committee encouraged the submission of papers relevant to whale watching in the SOS at next year’s meeting, as the SOS will undergo its 10-year review in 2024.</p>	<p>Ongoing, current focus areas include Latin America, Timor Leste, SOS, Australia and others. Report back to SC69B.</p> <p>Carry over to new workplan</p>
<p>Action 3.2 –Identify and list in the Handbook, funding and development organisations able to offer assistance relevant to the establishment and maintenance of whale watching operations at varying scales.</p>		<p>Carry over to new workplan</p>

Action 3.3 - Work with relevant international bodies, industry associations and outside expertise, to develop guidance and training tools in the Handbook that address occupational health and safety aspects of whale watching operations.	The WW Handbook was elaborated in collaboration with CMS, and the WW-SWG is working with IORA, IAATO to further promote the SWG programme.	Ongoing. Carry over to new workplan
Action 3.4 - Investigate and promote best practices on cost-effective monitoring and compliance regimes and alternative strategies to promote environmentally responsible whale watching.	The WW-SWG is working with ORCA, CMS/ASCOBANS to further promote the Handbook and the IWC Principles for WW.	Ongoing. Carry over to new workplan
Action 3.5 -Identify and work with key partners and priority organizations who might contribute to the vision and objectives/goals.	The WW-SWG is working with CMS (ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS), IORA, IAATO to further promote objectives of the WW Strategic Plan.	Ongoing. Carry over to new workplan

Table 4 Papers presented at SC meetings of the Sub-committee on Whale Watching

SC meeting	Number papers	Topics	Contributing to
2018 (SC67B) Slovenia	9	MAWI update, WW research 2017-2020, WW Handbook development, IORA and the WW network, Solitary Sociable Dolphins, CMS-in-water interactions, Update swim-with-whales ICG, WW Strategic Plan	Objective 1: Action 1.1, 1.2 Objective 2: Action 2.1 Objective 3: Action 3.1, 3.3
2019 (SC68A) Kenya	4	Impacts of swim-with-whale tourism, Seafari app, WW Handbook, WW research 2018-2019	Objective 1: Action 1.1, 1.2 Objective 2: Action 2.2, 2.3
2020 (SC68B) Virtual	4	Predicting the effects of whalewatching activity on the vital rates of Eastern North Pacific blue whales, MAWI update, WW Handbook, growth of whale watching Ecuador	Objective 1: Action 1.1, 1.2 Objective 2: Action 2.1, 2.2
2021 (SC68C) Virtual	2	Summary of swim-with-whales tourism around the globe, WW Colombia	Objective 2: Action 2.2
2022 (SC68D) Virtual	3	new whale watching site Argentina, Citizen-science and mobile web app Argentina, WW-SWG update	Objective 2: Action 2.2, 2.3

2023 (SC69A) Slovenia	9	Timor-Leste whale watching ICG, Timor-Leste whale watching and swim-with-whale tourism, communications strategy, swim-with-whale tours-Aus, Swim-with-cetaceans in Mexico, impacts of commercial whale watch and swim-with-whale tours-Japan, Impacts- assessment of the exposure threshold, WW-SWG update, Argentina sei whales and new WW site, Natoli et al. (2022) highlighted the potential of citizen science to gather data on cetacean occurrence and distribution in under-surveyed areas. Anderson et al. (2022) described a bimodal pattern of occurrence of humpback whales in the central Indian Ocean using information collated from various sources, including social media and a citizen science project. CMS Sec presented the outline of the <i>Guidelines for Recreational In-water Interactions with Marine Wildlife</i>	Objective 1: Action 1.6 Objective 2: Action 2.2 Objective 3
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Table 5 Recommendations made by SC WW Sub-committee

Year	Number	Closed at SC69A (See Table 7 for details)	Other status
2018	18134-18164 (8 blue boxes)	Not reviewed	20 proposed for closure at SC69B
2019	1954, 19145-19157 (14 recs)	6	2 proposed for closure at SC69B
2020	2043-2054 (12 recs)	10	2 proposed for closure at SC69B
2021	2109-2116 (8 recs)	4	1 proposed for closure at SC69B
2022	2293-2298 (6 recs)	3	3 proposed for closure at SC69B
2023	2394-23108 (15 recs)	NA	4 proposed for closure at SC69B

Table 6 Recommendations made by CC WW SWG **NOTE these will be reviewed before CC meeting September 2024.**

Year	Number	To close at IWC69	Other status
2018	6		
2019	No meeting		
2020	0 (virtual CC to cover urgent matters, Oct)		

2021	No meeting		
2022	2		
2023	No meeting		

Table 7: Progress against previous recommendations. The following were closed at SC69A.

Number	Text	Outcome	Reason for closure	Further Action
SC19146	The Committee has long recognised that human-induced behavioural changes of cetaceans related to whale watching is of concern and it agrees to retain the intersessional correspondence group under Simmonds on this topic (Annex T).	ICG in place.	Action complete	Continue to monitor the relevant literature; produce a new review of information for the Committee across the whole range of interactions; review the appropriate terminology; continue to consider the relevance of this topic to the work of the subcommittee.
SC19148	Given the developing whale watching industry in the Indian Ocean region and the previous engagement between the IWC and the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the Committee recommends that the dialogue between the IWC (both the Conservation Committee and this Committee) and IORA continue, and agrees to retain the intersessional correspondence group (Annex Y) to assist in this dialogue.	ICG in place. Superseded by SC2294	Superseded	Secretariat will be in communication with IORA after SC69A an update will be given at 69B. See also SC2294

SC19151	The Committee recommends that the promotion of the IWC's Whale Watching Handbook continue and that Contracting Governments and Scientific Committee members promote its use and continue to provide relevant and up-to-date information. The Committee agrees: (1) that an appropriate balance between positive and negative case studies is needed for future updates to the Handbook and to have further discussion intersessionally with the Secretariat and the Conservation Committee on how to strike this balance; and (b) to retain the Whale Watching Handbook intersessional correspondence group (Annex Y) to pursue these discussions.	Initial content all approved and included in all three official languages.	Action complete	Promotion is ongoing and new content being sought, but recommendation can be closed
SC19152	The Committee noted (a) that the Whale Watching Handbook will be updated annually in accordance with guidelines on the IWC website for updating content and (b) that the Conservation Committee and the Secretariat will be establishing protocols for managing content of the Handbook, which will be presented to the Committee at the 2020 Annual Meeting. The Handbook is a Commission tool to promote responsible whale watching and requires Commissioner approval for country profiles and case studies, coordinating with their own relevant agencies and experts. Therefore, the Committee agrees: (1) to provide the Secretariat with suggestions for updates to the Handbook in response to SC/68A/WW04 at the 2020 Annual Meeting; (2) that Minton will contact Committee members intersessionally and request individual (and immediate) input to specific needs for the 2019 update; and (3) to retain the Whale Watching Handbook as an item on the Agenda to allow the Committee to continue to contribute to the process of updating the Handbook on an ongoing basis.	Editorial Protocol for Handbook approved by the SC at its 2020 meeting and is now pending Commission endorsement. SC suggested and input to 2020 updates of the WW Handbook. Endorsed at IWC68 2022.	Action Complete	Suggestions from the Committee for updates to Handbook will be ongoing
SC19154	The Committee draws the attention of the Commission, the Conservation Committee and the Secretariat to the need to update the IWC General Principles for Whale Watching, as they have not been updated since 1996. The Committee recommends the approval and adoption of the revised general principles, as given in Annex N, Appendix 2, at the earliest opportunity.	Conservation Committee discussed in 2020. back to SC for further discussion. Amendments all agreed at CC and SC in 2022 and endorsed at IWC68. Now online.	Action complete	
SC19155	Given the need to improve communication and collaboration about whale watching between the Committee and the Conservation Committee, the Committee agrees that: (1) the whale watching sub-committee should serve as an early adopter of the recommendations database, to assess and determine its maximum utility with regard to facilitating communication between and among various IWC committees; (2) the ongoing effort by the Secretariat to archive committee reports and documents on the website is consistent with its suggestion to circulate or otherwise make Conservation		Actions complete	

	Committee reports and documents relevant to Committee work plans available as soon as they are ready for distribution; and (3) a standing agenda item will be added to review such reports and documents from (in particular) the standing Working Group on whale watching as they are produced.			
SC2044	The Committee encourages further development and testing of the welfare assessment tool for wild cetaceans Nicol et al. (2020), noting that whale watching might provide further examples to be considered.	Welfare assessment Tool endorsed at IWC68 see recommendation CO2202 also WKM2202	There was an update in HIM SC69A (ship strikes) using the tool (Rae et al. 2023)	WW welcomes further contributions in sub-committee
SC2045	As last year, the Committee draws the attention of the Commission, the Conservation Committee and the Secretariat to the need to update the IWC General Principles for Whale Watching, as they have not been updated since 1996. It reiterates its recommendation for the approval and adoption of the revised general principles (IWC, 2020i, pp.258-59) at IWC/68 in 2021 or earlier by intersessional correspondence, if possible.	Conservation Committee discussed in 2020. Referred to the WW SWG and back to the SC for further discussion. Guidelines endorsed by CC and SC 2022 and endorsed at IWC68. Now online.	Action complete	See also SC2293
SC2046	The Committee supports the Government of Timor-Leste in their pursuit of sustainable marine tourism and encourages continued communication with them regarding whale watching guidelines. It draws attention to reports of rapidly increasing numbers of foreign operators who are violating best principles for whale watching as developed by the IWC and anticipates further updates on this issue at SC68C.	Update received at SC69A.	Superseded by SC69A rec SC23100	Close Recommendation. See SC23100
SC2048	The Committee commends the Government of Peru for its Ministerial Resolution No 451-2019-PRODUCE, which defines the countrys whale watching guidelines, for its alignment with many other nations; whale watching regulations and recommendations of the IWC, as well as for its mitigation efforts to protect the most vulnerable individuals in the population (mothers with calves).	link to the Ministerial Resolution has been included in the Peru profile page of the WW Handbook	Complete	Add to the Conservation Db
SC2049	The Committee supports the whale watching regulations implemented by the Government of Ecuador but expresses concern regarding the increase in illegal whale watching and current lack of enforcement for said recommendations.	No action		Superseded by New rec at SC69A. See SC2399

SC2050	The Committee recommends that the promotion of the IWCs Whale Watching Handbook continue and that Contracting Governments and Scientific Committee members continue to provide relevant and up-to-date information.	New promotion plan endorsed at IWC68. SC provided some funding for this.	Action complete	
SC2051	The Committee endorses the Editorial Protocol for updating the Whale Watching Handbook presented in SC/68B/WW/03. It highlights the need for discussion and compromise between the Commissioners, Scientific Committee, and regional experts when drafting and approving content for the Handbook, in order for the Handbook to remain neutral and unbiased and recommends that this continue to be taken into account in the application of the Protocol.	Editorial Protocol endorsed IWC68 now in effect	Action complete	
SC2052	There is an ongoing need to effectively interact with the Conservation Committee and its Standing Working Group on Whale Watching generally, but with particular regard to the Whale Watching Handbook. The Committee therefore agrees: (1) to add a standing item on the agenda regarding updates on intersessional communications with the Conservation Committee and its Standing Working Group on Whale Watching.	On the agenda	Action complete	
SC2053	There is an ongoing need to effectively interact with the Conservation Committee and its Standing Working Group on Whale Watching generally, but with particular regard to the Whale Watching Handbook. The Committee therefore agrees: (2) that updates on the Whale Watching Handbook be included under this agenda item at future meetings.	Included on agenda	Action complete	
SC2054	The Committee endorses the proposal and funding request for the participation for regional and international whale watching experts in a joint workshop between Chile and Peru on experience exchange on whale watching regulation and research permit systems, to be held under the umbrella of the Conservation Management Plan for the Eastern South Pacific southern right whale in the region.	Delayed from 2020 due to pandemic. Held October3-4 2022 in Lima, Peru. Summary included in CC/68/REP/RWCMP/01.		Final report presented to SC69A. Included in SC/69A/CMP/22. Hope for further update at SC69B

SC2110	The Committee agrees that posting updated General Principles for Whale Watching to the IWC website has become a matter of urgency. Given the unavoidable delays in the Commission approving and finalising the proposed revisions to the General Principles approved by the Committee at SC/68A, the Committee recommends that those provisions of the proposed update that are not considered controversial, based on the discussion by the Conservation Committee in late 2020 and during the next Conservation Committee meeting in 2021, should be 'fast-tracked' if at all possible and posted on the website at the earliest opportunity. The remaining provisions will be posted when the Scientific Committee, the Conservation Committee, and the Commission approve a final draft.	Superseded See SC2111, SC2293	Superseded	
SC2111	The Committee recommends that, until the revised General Principles for Whale Watching are approved by the Commission for posting to the IWC website, the Secretariat take down the current General Principles and replace them with a disclaimer, drafted intersessionally with assistance from the Convenor for the Sub-Committee on Whale Watching and the Chair of the Standing Working Group, noting that an update will be forthcoming.	General Principles removed and disclaimer in place	Action complete	Remove disclaimer and include link once endorsed at IWC68. Complete See SC2293
SC2115	Noting that, in Mexico, monitoring and enforcement of whale watching regulations are significantly higher within Marine Protected Areas (MPA), versus outside of them (Urban et al., 2021), the Committee draws attention to MPAs as a strong tool for management and endorses this proposal for additional MPAs in Mexico. Where supportive data exist, the Committee generally encourages the designation of well designed, resourced and properly enforced MPAs to improve whale watching management and to assist with managing other human activities in marine habitat.	Draw attention and encourage.	Close	Look forward to additional info from Mexico
SC2116	The Committee agrees to reconstitute a standing intersessional correspondence group on communication between the Conservation Committee's Standing Working Group on Whale Watching and the Scientific Committee's Sub-Committee on Whale Watching, with a Chair who is a member of both. Iñiguez was nominated to serve as Chair. Membership and Terms of Reference for this group can be found in Annex O.	Superseded by SC2296	Superseded	

SC2293	The Committee agrees that posting the revised General Principles for Whale Watching to the IWC website is a matter of urgency. The Committee endorses the revised General Principles communicated by the Conservation Committee's Standing Working Group on Whale Watching at SC68D and recommends that the Conservation Committee present this version to the Commission at IWC68 for approval and endorsement, after which the General Principles should be posted to the IWC website by the Secretariat with due dispatch (including a link in the Whale Watching Handbook).	General Principles posted on the website and linked in the WW Handbook as well as being shared with partners and the focus of comms plan.	Action complete	
SC2295	The Committee agrees that its whale watching-related work needs wider promotion, beyond the IWC. It is of note that many researchers, managers, whale watching participants (tourists) and whale watching operators remain unaware of the whale watching outputs of the Committee. Therefore, it recommends the preparation of a comprehensive communications plan, with a budget, in an effort to ensure dissemination of the whale watching outputs of the Committee and the Conservation Committee to as wide an audience as possible, using social media, podcasts, webinars and other available platforms. The Committee agrees to form a steering group (see Annex M), which will prepare this plan and present it at the next meeting, coordinating with the Secretariat, which is already developing a promotional plan for the Whale Watching Handbook (see Item 17.4.1).	Communication plan provided as SC/69A/WW/05	Action complete	Form Steering Group and present plan to SC69B
SC2298	The Committee agrees to establish an intersessional correspondence to discuss the future of the sub-committee on whale watching, including, inter alia, who to invite as invited participants, how and where to solicit primary papers and how and when to collaborate with other sub-committees using data from whale watching platforms of opportunity and citizen science (see Item 17.4.3). This intersessional correspondence group will also identify a methodology for identifying regions and/or target species to view with regard to whale watching (see Item 17.3). The group will provide a summary of its discussions to the Committee at the next meeting.	ICG established 2022. 2023 the Identified priority regions for next meeting (SC69B): Latin America, Timor Leste, SOS, Australia and Other.	Action complete	ICG disbanded at SC69A