

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

Submitted by the Secretariat

*The Commission is requested to:*

- *note the intersessional progress made on the Conservation Database prototype.*

This paper (CCPG-MAY2024-05) was originally prepared for the Conservation Committee Planning Group meeting, held virtually May 2024. This document summarises key recommendations made by the United Kingdom and New Zealand regarding the prototype of the Conservation Database. By revisiting this paper, we aim to build on the insights gained, update member countries on the progress made since IWC68 and gather further feedback to refine our strategies moving forward.

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### **1. Introduction**

At IWC67 in October 2018 the Commission endorsed a proposal from New Zealand to revise the existing template for voluntary conservation reports (VCRs) and develop an integrated Conservation Database (Cons DB). The detailed proposal, which includes the rationale for changing the reporting template, is in [IWC/67/CC/10](#) (also as CC/68A/INFO/05). This will replace static written reports with an online database searchable by country or conservation theme on the IWC website. Countries would populate and update the database, and the submission template would be revised to match the Conservation Committee's Strategic Plan and Workplan. This should be compatible with other IWC databases, especially SC-submitted National Progress Reports. This would simplify Contracting Government reporting and improve VCRs accessibility, effectiveness, and reach. At IWC68, the Secretariat presented an update on the database ([CC/68/4.2.2/01](#)) and asked contracting parties and others to test the prototype and report back to the Secretariat with feedback (Item 3).

### **2. Overview of database prototype**

Using the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software on which the IWC's InforMEA database is hosted, the Secretariat has developed a basic prototype website using information in previous VCRs. Without logging in users can view the details of countries that have submitted reports. Country profiles will include details such as how long the country has been an IWC member, which Committees/sub-committees the country participates in, as well as more general cetacean information for that country and a link to the country page of the WW Handbook, relevant CMPs and/or Task Teams. Users can search by country, theme, section, status, and CMP to explore report information.

The themes used are the priority topics dealt with by the Conservation Committee as identified in the Strategic Plan (e.g. anthropogenic underwater noise, bycatch, climate change). A profile page for each theme is included. These pages define and explain the main concepts and sources under each theme, as well as links to other useful information. While reviewing past reports several additional themes were identified that could be beneficial to include in the database, these were strandings, cooperation, research and other. Section topics are from question categories asked in the VCRs. The section topics are legal developments, information on whale watching operations, current Government programs related to cetacean conservation, current threats to cetacean conservation and management measures taken/proposed, reporting systems for cetacean injuries/mortality/strandings, international cooperation activities and other.

Countries can send data in a template csv file to the Secretariat or upload it to the prototype after designating a user. All updates are quarantined for the nominated lead person to be approved before release.

### **3. Feedback from Contracting parties**

Based on the comprehensive feedback from both New Zealand and United Kingdom, several key areas have been identified for improvement in the Cons DB prototype.

*Ease of usability:* It was suggested that a front-end navigation interface would significantly improve usability by directing users to the appropriate sections and explaining the database's capabilities as new users found the database confusing to navigate. The current "add content" function lists various types of information, mixing different data types such as Secretariat administrative duties, official databases, and country-submitted data. This mix is confusing and requires restriction and better categorisation, along with a user-friendly front-end interface to guide users through the process of adding or updating information.

*Aesthetic aspects:* The readability of text, particularly red highlighted text against a blue background and grey text against blue, is difficult to read. These colour schemes should be revised to ensure all text is easily readable. Functionality issues include non-working edit links and an overly accessible delete function, which poses a risk of accidental data loss. It's important to restrict editing and deleting rights to the appropriate representatives, for example implementing levels of access that differ between Secretariat and Contracting party's representatives.

*Content:* Regarding the current content on the Cons DB, the Secretariat received feedback on various pages. The usability of the "view your content" page is unclear, and the navigation on the "add content" page needs improvement. The scientific literature page would be easier to use if organised by publication date or alphabetically. Lastly, country profile pages are currently too busy, with a lot of scrolling required to access information. Implementing navigation buttons to each section would streamline this process, making it more user-friendly.

The Secretariat thanks New Zealand and the United Kingdom for their feedback and will work on progressing the Database intersessionally. Progress will be presented to CCPG at the next two annual meetings and countries will be asked to assist with further testing. The aim is to present a final version at IWC70.

#### **4. Question for CCPG**

Should there be a call for VCRs for IWC69, given that the Conservation Database will not be ready by then? If a call is made, it may help to further develop the Cons DB by providing more data for testing input/upload.