



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

Summary of Scientific Committee activities during the biennium

May 2022 - May 2024



Contents

03	Introduction from the Chair & Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee
04	Population Assessments
06	Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling
09	Commercial Whaling
10	Human Impacts
14	Habitats and Ecosystems
16	Conservation Management
18	Sanctuaries
18	Extinction Alert
18	Whale Watching

Introduction from the Chair & Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee

The IWC Scientific Committee (SC) was established to provide advice to the Commission on scientific matters related to the regulation of whaling. Since its inception, anthropogenic threats such as pollution, entanglement in fishing gear, and collisions between vessels and whales have emerged. Today, the SC addresses broad scientific management and conservation issues in response to the International Convention for Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), and as directed by the Commission.



The SC is recognised as the preeminent global body on cetacean science. It delivers an enormous and diverse volume of work to support the Commission. In recent years, the SC has also been guided by the Commission's efforts to increase collaboration and accessibility. As well as a strengthened relationship with the IWC's own Conservation Committee (CC), SC partnerships have been developed or broadened with many other Conventions, organisations and disciplines. Direct support has also been provided to IWC member governments on local or regional issues important to cetacean conservation

and welfare. SC accessibility and outreach projects include the *Communications Initiative* to convey the diversity and depth of SC work more effectively. The *Status of Whales* webpages have also been developed to provide a non-technical and highly visual overview of several cetacean populations. The SC also recently released the first IWC *Extinction Alert*, bringing media and public attention to the imminent extinction of the vaquita, a species for which the SC has expressed grave concern over decades.

The SC acknowledges the budgetary pressure the Commission has experienced in recent years and understands that economies have been made across the IWC and its subsidiary bodies. The SC is actively pursuing cost-savings and making best use of voluntary funds, however, the ability of the SC to provide advice to the Commission will be compromised as both the research budget and the frequency of SC meetings are reduced. As these constraints on the SC come into effect, it is essential that the Commission clearly prioritises the advice it requires from its SC and understands that it will take longer to assess and deliver advice under the new biennial meeting schedule.

This booklet is central to the SC *Communications Initiative* and provides a high-level summary of our activities during the last biennium. We hope you enjoy this first glance at the enormous number of issues we tackle, and that it will inspire you to explore topics of interest in more detail through the pages of the full SC Reports. We look forward to discussing our work with you in more detail at the Commission meeting in Peru.

Thank you,



Alex Zerbini
SC Chair



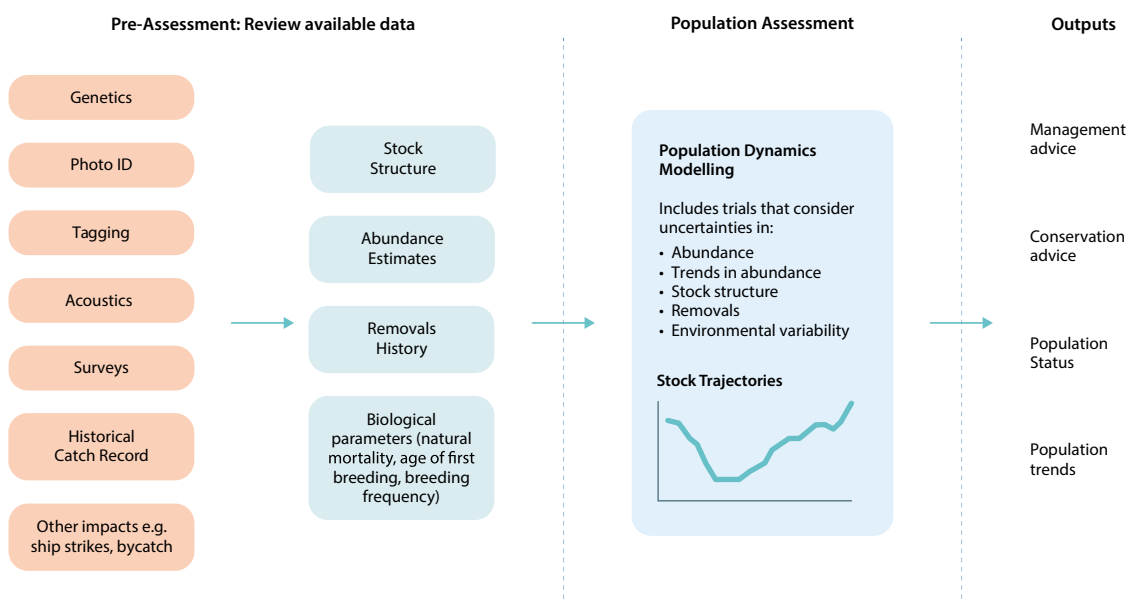
Lindsay Porter
SC Vice-Chair

Population Assessments

Much of the IWC's management and conservation work relies on an understanding of a population's status. To achieve this the SC conducts assessments, using information generated by many of the [SC's sub-groups](#).

Population assessments use information including estimates of how many whales there are now and how many there were in the past, as well as estimates of current rates of mortality such as from

fisheries bycatch and ship strikes, and records of past and current catch. Biological and environmental information is also used to determine the population's current status relative to its historical health. The modelling frameworks used by the SC can also be used to predict how a population's status may change in the presence of various future human impacts and environmental conditions, such as climate change.



In this biennium, the SC has worked on population assessments for [western North Pacific common minke whales](#), [North Pacific sei](#) and [humpback whales](#) and [Antarctic blue whales](#). Work has also been undertaken on [eastern North Pacific gray whales](#), [North Atlantic common minke whales](#), and the [vaquita porpoise](#) as part of the [Status of Whales programme](#) to increase public access to SC population assessments (see below).

Abundance Estimates

In many ways, the starting point for each population assessment is a reliable understanding of population size - or 'abundance'. The SC has developed a new process to provide consistent, rigorous review of abundance, and each endorsed estimate is added to the [IWC Table of Accepted Abundance Estimates](#).

To date, 785 abundance estimates have been reviewed for large and small cetaceans from every region of the world. With this new process, the SC evaluates and provides advice on abundance survey design and data analysis and informing best practice across the scientific community, including outreach to regions with little expertise or infrastructure in cetacean studies.

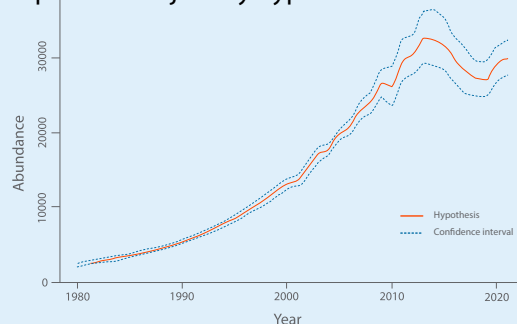
Case study 1

Status Assessment for North Pacific humpback whales

This assessment was completed in 2024 and revealed that humpback whales have a complex population structure that congregates across multiple feeding and breeding areas. Trends in population abundance were linked to climatic change as well as multiple human activities, including whaling and, more recently, fishing, ship strikes and negative impacts from marine debris. The assessment concluded that overall, the population is recovering from the commercial whaling that commenced post 1945, however, some recent localised

declines have occurred due to extreme marine heatwaves which is a cause for concern.

North Pacific Humpback whales Population trajectory hypothesis



Case study 2


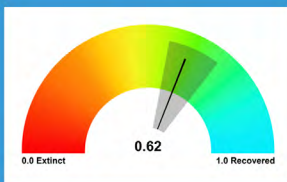
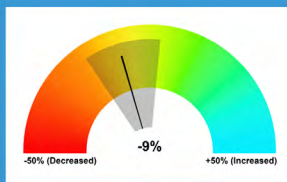
Pre-Assessment for Antarctic blue whales

Many of the SC sub-groups collaborated to prepare for the assessment of Antarctic blue whales. Information on historic whaling, individual whale identification catalogues, whale songs, whale movement across ocean basins and how whales are related to each other genetically has now been collated and will be used to estimate abundance, determine population structure, and map distribution and allocation of historical catches during the next phase of assessment.

Status of Whales

A valuable new resource for the Commission and the public

In 2024, the SC completed the first phase of a long-term programme to make the IWC's population assessment work more accessible. A new section of the IWC website will contain a simple 'thermometer' display that captures an array of complex information on population size, long term trends and health, as well as the uncertainty inherent with global biological and environmental assessments. The colour gradients of the display easily alert the viewer to species' status with links to the more complex assessment methods, results and conclusions.

Species	Population or Area	Relative Abundance	20-Year Change
Gray Whale <small>published: 2023</small>  Increased from historically depleted levels and recently experiencing some fluctuation due to changes in prey availability and sea ice. More information in the Status Summary	Eastern North Pacific	Relative Abundance GOOD 	20-Year Change STABLE 

Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW)

Strike Limit Algorithm (SLAs), Implementation Reviews (IRs) and 'parameter space'

Strike Limit Algorithms (SLAs) are used by the SC to calculate strike limits. Their performance against the [Commission's objectives for the management of ASW](#) is evaluated robustly using computer simulations of whale populations over 100 years. These simulations consider plausible levels of uncertainty regarding knowledge of stock structure, abundance and trends, historic and future catch levels, reproductive rates, survivorship, and environmental conditions – this is referred to as the tested 'parameter space'.

Although *SLAs* have been developed for long-term use, *Implementation Reviews (IRs)* are undertaken to assess if new information indicates additional simulation testing is required because the current situation may be outside tested 'parameter space'.

Key Points

- The [conservation advice](#) from the SC states that the rolled-over strike limits for 2026-2031 [will not harm any of the targeted whale stocks](#).
- Full consideration was given to the fact that [Unusual mortality events \(UMEs\)](#) in [gray whales](#) have occurred [more often](#) and potentially at a greater magnitude than originally tested (the last UME has now ceased).
- The 2024 gray whale abundance [estimate of 19,260](#) suggests the decline since a high of 27,450 has now ended.
- [Modelling results](#) in the last two years indicate that the Gray Whale *SLA* and Makah Management Plan are robust to recent and likely future UMEs. The next [Implementation Review for gray whales](#) will begin in 2025.

SC management advice on current Strike Limits

The SC has developed [six SLAs](#) to calculate safe strike limits for the current hunts that are robust to uncertainty. These *SLAs* remain the best way to provide management advice for these stocks. (See Table on p8 for strike limits).

North Pacific gray whales

A new abundance estimate of North Pacific gray whales of nearly 19,300 individuals was endorsed by the SC in 2024. This new estimate suggests a nascent recovery after a decline from a record high of 27,450 in 2016 to 14,530 in 2023.

Between 2019 and 2023, Eastern North Pacific gray whales experienced an Unusual Mortality Event (UME). The SC reviewed the UME data with updated information on stock structure, abundance estimates, calf counts, survival and reproductive rates, health, hunts and other human removals. The SC concluded that while UMEs are occurring more frequently and potentially at greater magnitude, than originally tested when developing the SLA, the new modelling and abundance results show that the

Gray Whale SLA and the Makah Management Plan are likely robust to recent and future UMEs. The next gray whale *Implementation Review* will begin in 2025.

Eastern North Pacific gray whale abundance 1967/68 - 2023/24

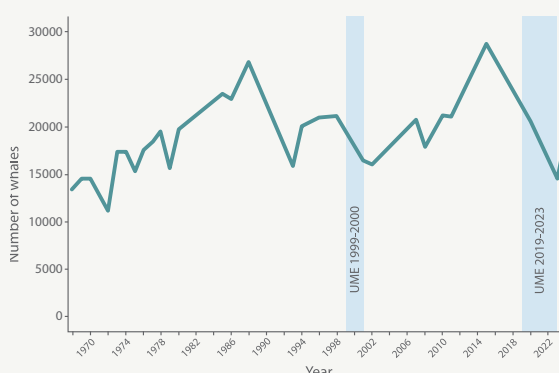


Table 1 Direct removals from stocks subject to Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling

Stocks subject to Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling	Year	Whales struck	Whales taken	ASW nation
Eastern Canada/West Greenland bowhead whales	2022	4 ¹	4	Greenland (Denmark), Canada (non-IWC member)
	2023	0 ^{2,3}	0	
Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Sea bowhead whales	2022	68	53	USA
	2023	55	45	
Eastern North Pacific gray whales	2022	124	119 ⁴	Russia
	2023	130	129 ⁵	
Common minke whales off East Greenland	2022	17	17	Greenland (Denmark)
	2023	18	18	
Common minke whales off West Greenland	2022	149	139	Greenland (Denmark)
	2023	165	160	
Fin whales off West Greenland	2022	4	4	Greenland (Denmark)
	2023	2	2	
Humpback whales off West Greenland	2022	1	1	Greenland (Denmark)
	2023	2	2	
Humpback whales off St. Vincent and The Grenadines	2022	1	0	St. Vincent and The Grenadines
	2023	1	1	

^[1] 1 struck by Greenland and 3 by Canada

^[2] Canadian strikes have not been reported yet (10-05-2024)

^[3] 2 of which were stinky whales

^[4] 5 of which were stinky whales

^[5] West Greenland feeding area.

Table 2 Proposed workplan and potential timings of *Implementation Reviews* for stocks subject to Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW) under the assumptions of (a) adequate interseasonal funding; and (b) lengths of time required (Annex L SC report).
The table also lists the latest SC-endorsed abundance estimates (with their 95% Confidence Intervals)

Stocks subject to ASW	Management advice tool	Last Implementation review (IR)	Next scheduled IR#	Status of IR	Latest abundance estimate	Conservation advice of SC (2024)
Eastern Canada/West Greenland bowhead whales	WG-Bowhead SLA	2022	Start 2028 (+6)	Early IR not required	2022: 888 ⁶ (300-2,200)	The annual strike limit of 2 whales will not harm the stock
Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Sea bowhead whales	Bowhead SLA	2018	Start 2027 (+9)	Early IR not required	2019: 15,229 ⁷ (11,045-20,998)	The annual strike limit of 67 whales will not harm the stock
Eastern North Pacific gray whales	Gray whale SLA Makah Management Plan	2020	Start 2025, complete ~2026 (+6)	Considered for new IR	2024: 19,260 (17,400-21,300)	The annual strike limit of 140 whales will not harm the stock
Common minke whale stocks off East Greenland	G-common minke SLA	2022	Start 2029 (+6)	Early IR not required	2015: 5368 ⁸ (2,762-10,433)	The annual strike limit of 20 whales will not harm the stock
Common minke whale stocks off West Greenland	G-common minke SLA	2022	Start 2029 (+6)	Early IR not required	2015: 5,095 (2,171-11,961)	The annual strike limit of 164 whales will not harm the stock
Fin whales off West Greenland	WG-fin SLA	2023	Start 2030 (+6)	Early IR not required	2015: 2,215	The annual strike limit of 19 whales will not harm the stock
Humpback whales off West Greenland	WG-Humpback SLA	2014	Start 2026 after in-depth assessment	Early IR not required	2015: 993 (434-2,272)	The annual strike limit of 10 whales will not harm the stock
Humpback whales off St. Vincent and The Grenadines	Ad-hoc	NA	Start 2026 after in-depth assessment	NA	Not available	The annual strike limit of 4 whales will not harm the stock

⁶ Inverse variance average of two endorsed estimates for 2019.

⁷ Summed from 2 strata and CIs calculated assuming log-normal distribution.



Commercial Whaling

The IWC does not set catch limits for commercial whaling conducted under reservation or objection of Paragraph 10(e) of the Schedule (also known as the moratorium on commercial whaling) or for whaling conducted by non-member nations. However, the catch data are used in population assessments conducted by the SC.

Stocks subject to Commercial Whaling	Year	Whales struck	Whales landed	Whaling nation
IWC Member Nations				
North Atlantic fin whales	2022	148	145	Iceland (IWC member, under reservation*)
	2023	24	23	
North Atlantic common minke whales	2022	581	576	Norway (IWC member, under objection*)
	2023	507	500	
Non-IWC Member Nations				
Northwest Pacific common minke whales	2022	58	58	Japan (non-IWC member)
	2023	83	83	
North Pacific sei whales	2022	25	25	
	2023	24	24	
Northwest Pacific Bryde’s whales	2022	187	187	
	2023	187	187	

* Limits are set nationally using a less conservative variant of the Revised Management Procedure than that agreed by the IWC

Human Impacts

Bycatch

The IWC response to entanglement in fishing gear includes the [Bycatch Mitigation Initiative \(BMI\)](#), the [Global Whale Entanglement Network](#), and reducing entanglement in ghost fishing gear ([Resolution 2018-2](#)).

Addressing bycatch requires multi-disciplinary collaboration and the IWC as a whole is working with [a range of nations and organisations](#) including the UN, the Food and Agriculture Organisation ([FAO](#)), the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources ([CCAMLR](#)) and regional fisheries management organisations.

Bycatch is the single most serious direct threat to cetaceans worldwide.



Image left: The BMI prioritises artisanal, coastal fisheries. Irrawaddy Dolphin, Sarawak Dolphin Project

Image top right: Franciscana and calf, fishing related mortality of this species is believed to be unsustainable. L Russo Lacerna, Fundacion Cethus


Image bottom right: Common bottlenose dolphin bycaught in gillnets, Adriatic Sea. Tilen Genov, Morigenos

The SC plays a leading role in IWC efforts to understand and mitigate bycatch. Key activities in this intersessional period included:

- Assessing new research on bycatch monitoring and mitigation, strengthening collaborations, and discussing bycatch mitigation for populations of particular concern; [Hector's and Maui dolphins in New Zealand](#), [common dolphins in the Bay of Biscay](#), [harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea](#) and the [Iberian Peninsula](#), and [franciscana dolphins](#) in the SW Atlantic.
- Reviewing studies in [Chile and Oman](#) that are using the bycatch risk assessment tool (ByRA), as well as other assessment and mitigation strategies in [Hong Kong SAR, China](#), [Ghana](#) and [Brazil](#).
- Supporting the [BMI's](#) development of pilot projects with priority given to small scale/artisanal fisheries in coastal areas of developing countries, particularly in Peru, where the [first pilot project](#) of this initiative has started to map bycatch and identify stakeholders.
- [Reviewing bycatch mitigation measures](#), such as the attachment of plastic bottles to nets that have resulted in a reduction of franciscana bycatch in Brazil, modifications to stow nets in Korea which completely eliminated bycatch of finless porpoise, 'on-demand' or 'ropeless' pot-fishing to reduce entanglement risk to North Atlantic right whales, and the use of sinking ground lines to reduce entanglement risk in fisheries in Scotland.
- [Welcoming fisheries closures to reduce bycatch](#) of common dolphins in the Bay of Biscay implemented by France and Spain in 2024. However, longer closure periods may be needed in order to achieve the [quantitative objectives agreed by OSPAR](#) and overall a long-term strategy is required to address dolphin bycatch in this region.

In the next biennium, the SC will work on [bycatch risk assessments](#) in the Indian Ocean, [with CCAMLR](#) on whale entrapment in the Southern Ocean krill fishery, and with the [CIBBRiNA project](#) to [implement best practice](#) for Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic, Baltic and Mediterranean Regions.

In addition to its long-standing role of providing advice on large whale disentanglement, the SC has now endorsed guidelines for [Best Practices for the Disentanglement of Free-Swimming Small Cetaceans](#).



The endangered Arabian Sea humpback whale population is subject to ship strikes and risks could be reduced by moving shipping a little further offshore

Ship Strikes

Most collisions with vessels of all types (ship strikes) are neither noticed nor reported. They are, however, a major concern for many whale populations and have welfare implications wherever they occur.

The IWC has a [Strategic Plan](#) to Mitigate the Impacts of Ship Strikes and the SC is developing a global database of such incidents to identify high risk areas and the [various factors that can contribute to this risk](#). The IWC works closely with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) on this issue.

In this biennium, the SC contributed to work on the endangered Arabian Sea humpback whale population, where ship strike risk could be reduced by [moving shipping further off the coast of Oman](#). In addition, the SC reviewed research on [sperm whales in the Canary Islands](#), where thermal cameras have been installed on inter-island fast ferries. This positive step forward may only be effective if accompanied

by appropriate vessel response when whales are detected by the cameras. The NW Mediterranean has been identified as a high risk area for both fin and sperm whales and was designated as a [Particularly Sensitive Sea Area](#) by the IMO in 2023. The SC concluded that the [measures associated](#) with this designation will only be successful if whale detection and reporting systems are able to provide information on where vessels should reduce speed.

The SC also considered studies of [manoeuvres to avoid collisions](#), which assessed effectiveness of different vessel types, sizes and speeds, and will help to develop advice for mariners on how to respond when whales are seen in front of ships.

The SC identified the need to update IWC guidance on [offshore sailing races](#) in response to increasing reports of collisions.

North Atlantic Right Whales

Analysis shows that [eliminating entanglements or ship strikes](#) would dramatically reduce extinction risk.

Approximately [360](#) North Atlantic right whales remain. They are experiencing an [Unusual Mortality Event](#) which [began in 2017](#).

The SC [reviewed new information](#) on population status, management measures to reduce ship strikes and entanglement, and modelling to assess extinction risk. [At least 50% of the deaths documented since 2017](#) were caused by entanglement or vessel strikes. Statistical analyses indicated that these documented deaths may account for only around 30% of the total deaths.

An assessment of photos of scars and injuries revealed that entanglement increased between 2010 and 2019 with roughly 30% of the population being entangled at least once every year. There is a nearly 90% chance that a healthy female will become entangled between calving cycles, potentially contributing to less frequent calving and lower calf survival.

A population viability analysis indicated a [93% chance of extinction](#). Eliminating entanglements or vessel strikes entirely would [reduce extinction probability to 5% or 34% respectively](#), highlighting the severe impact of these threats to North Atlantic right whales.

Habitats and Ecosystems

Plastic Pollution

In 2022, the Commission endorsed a [Resolution](#) focused on the impact of plastics on cetaceans. This had several aims including an assessment of current knowledge and development of a global risk assessment to identify hotspots of cetacean exposure to plastic debris. Previous work, including workshops focusing on [marine debris](#) and the [Pollution 2020](#) initiative, established some of the groundwork to meet these aims.

In partnership, the SC and the CC have analysed the [different types of threats](#), assessed practical, management actions and reviewed the latest evidence of ingestion, entanglement, microdebris and toxicology.

Plastic is the most commonly ingested material and microplastics may also [transfer from prey species and accumulate to pose a health threat](#). A workshop specifically focused on the impacts of marine plastic is planned for the next biennium.

The SC is also seeking to integrate IWC's work on debris with other global and regional initiatives, including the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) [Resolution to End Plastic Pollution](#), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

[programme to identify Important Marine Mammal Areas](#) and recently launched work on marine debris at the Convention for Migratory Species (CMS), the Agreement on the Conservation of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) and the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans in the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS).

Strandings

The SC leads the IWC [Strandings Initiative](#) (SI) which had an [extremely productive intersessional period](#). Strandings response capacity building workshops were delivered throughout the Caribbean region, sponsored by the Caribbean Marine Megafauna and Anthropogenic Activities project. The SI has five key themes; emergency response, capacity building, knowledge compilation, exchange of samples and disease outbreaks.

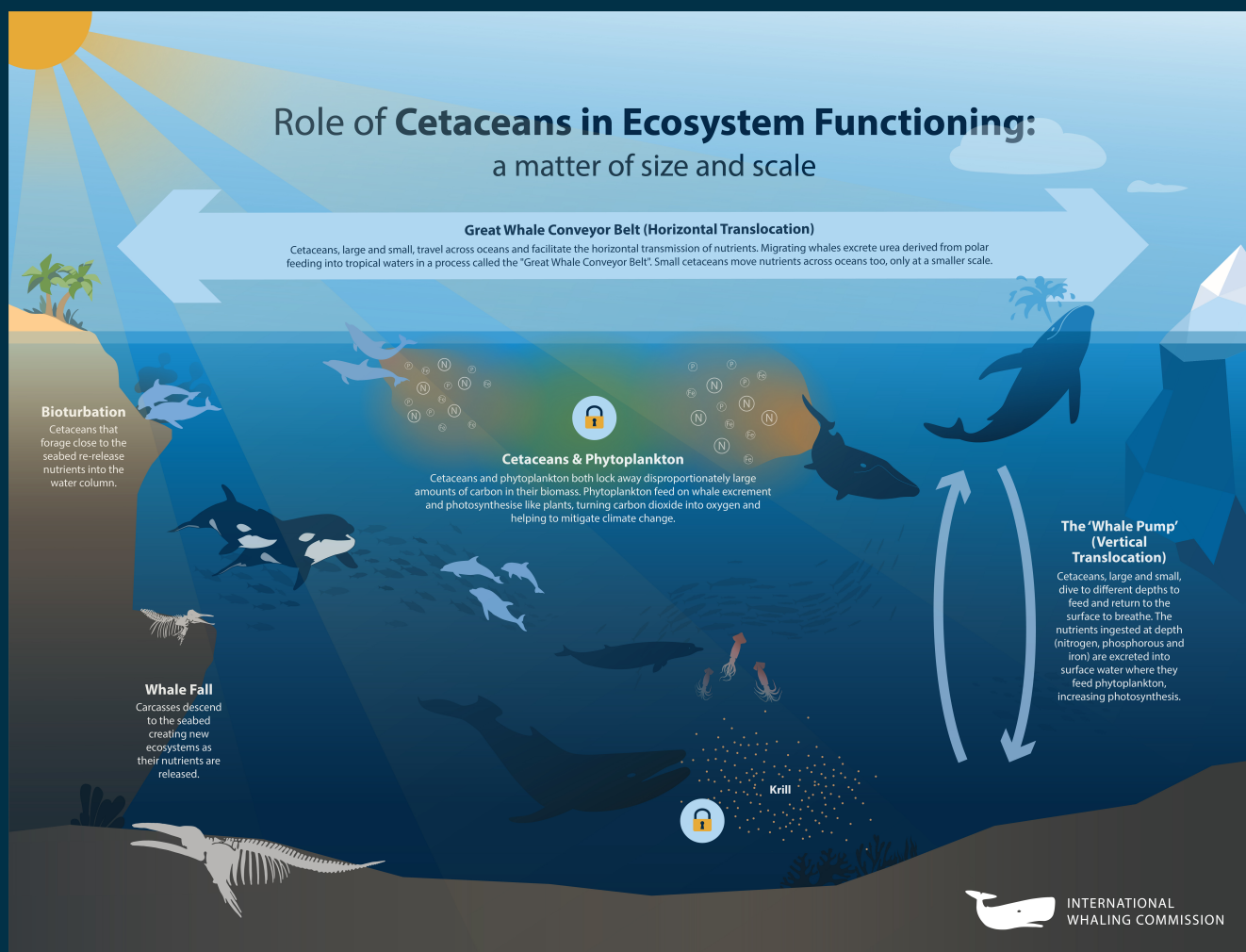
Emergency response to stranding events is provided by an [Expert Panel](#) that comprises 25 members from across the globe. In the last biennium, in response to requests from member governments in Asia, Europe and Oceania, the Panel made itself available 24/7 to provide advice on veterinarian treatment and safe handling practises for multiple live strandings.



Image: Researching microplastics in the Mediterranean Sea. IWC

Other work programmes

The SC also assessed studies on other environmental impacts on the world's cetaceans including those on [chemical pollution](#), [disease](#), [ocean noise](#) and [climate change](#).



Role of Cetaceans in Ecosystem Functioning

Whales play a broad range of roles in an ecosystem, including nutrient transport and cycling, carbon sequestration, biodiversity (associated with whale falls) and as predators.

The Commission has endorsed two Resolutions on this topic. In 2016, the SC was asked to identify knowledge gaps on the role of cetaceans in the ecosystem and develop a plan to fill these gaps. Two years later, Resolution [2018-2](#) encouraged IWC collaboration with CMS and other international organisations to progress this work.

In partnership with the CC, IWC-CMS [multi-disciplinary workshops](#) were held in 2020 and 2023. These events incorporated expertise from social scientists and economists as well as marine ecologists

and cetacean biologists, and they were able to complete the following tasks:

- [review of the complexity of factors](#) that contribute to the role cetaceans in ecosystem functioning;
- [analysis of current research needs](#) that can be progressed by the expertise in SC
- [establishment of collaborative mechanisms](#) with governmental, non-governmental, regional and international organisations.

In the next biennium, the [knowledge gaps identified](#) will be prioritised and, where possible, progressed, in collaboration with our identified partners.

Conservation Management

Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) provide a framework for countries within the range of cetacean populations to work together, and in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders, to protect and rebuild those populations. CMPs are flexible management tools that help range states address threats including fishing bycatch, entanglement, ship strikes, habitat loss, pollution, climate change and acoustic disturbance.

The CMP initiative is led by the Conservation Committee. The SC provides technical information to inform each CMP. CMPs are in place for five cetacean populations and four new CMP proposals have been endorsed by the SC during this intersessional period.



Existing CMPs

CMP: Western North Pacific gray whale	CMP range states: Japan, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, USA
Status IUCN: Endangered	SC Recommendations: 2024
Key threats: Entanglement	
SC-led progress and key recommendations: SC reviewed results of continued long-term monitoring of gray whales from Mexico, U.S., Russian Federation and Japan. Direct progress on the CMP has been delayed due to geopolitical tensions in a key portion of the range.	
CMP: Western South Atlantic southern right whale (SWARW)	CMP range states: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay
Status IUCN: Least concern (species-wide). This population’s recovery has been impacted by illegal hunting (1950s-70s) and widespread calf mortality	SC Recommendations: 2024
Key threats: Entanglement, high calf mortality, climate change	
SC-led progress and key recommendations: The SC updated research and monitoring actions for the SWARW CMP in 2024. The key recommendation is to continue long-term monitoring of the population to understand effects of climate change and to inform a global assessment of Southern Right Whales by the SC in the upcoming years.	

Existing CMPs continued

CMP: Eastern South Pacific southern right whale (SEPRW)	CMP range states: Chile, Peru
Status IUCN: Critically endangered population	SC Recommendations: 2024
Key threats: Entanglements, ship strike, harassment, noise, habitat modification, prey depletion	
SC-led progress and key recommendations: The SC completed a 6-yr review and updated SEPRW CMP actions and recommended continued monitoring to understand seasonal distribution, to determine preferred habitats, and to evaluate population structure and connectivity.	
CMP: Franciscana dolphin	CMP range states: Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay
Status IUCN: Vulnerable (species)	SC Recommendations: 2024
Key threats: Fisheries bycatch, pollution	
SC-led progress and key recommendations: The SC completed a review of the status of franciscana dolphins in 2023 and is working towards a Comprehensive Assessment of this species. A primary recommendation is to reduce bycatch in commercial and artisanal fisheries, which is the main threat to the franciscana throughout its range.	
CMP: Amazon River Dolphins (Amazon river dolphin and Tucuxi)	CMP range states: Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru
Status IUCN: Endangered (both species)	SC Recommendations: 2024
Key threats: Bycatch, direct killing, dams, pollution, climate change	
SC-led progress and key recommendations: Continue research to estimate population size and to better describe the taxonomy and population structure of the Amazon river dolphin species. Maintain the ban on the Piracatinga fisheries in Brazil to reduce intentional killing of dolphins for use as bait. Promote capacity building to improve population monitoring.	

Proposed CMPs

The SC has endorsed the scientific and technical aspects of four new CMP proposals:

CMP	Status	SC Recommendations
Central American humpback whale	IUCN: Least concern (species-wide). CMP recommended due to potentially severe impact of threats to this small population	2024
Guiana dolphin	IUCN: Near threatened. CMP recommended because some populations are small and possibly threatened.	2024
Lahille's bottlenose dolphin	IUCN: Vulnerable	2024
Irrawaddy dolphins (riverine populations)	IUCN: Endangered (species)	2024

Four priority populations have been identified by the SC for CMP development: the [Arabian Sea humpback whale](#), [Iberian killer whale](#), [Mediterranean sperm whale](#) and [Mediterranean fin whale](#).

Sanctuaries

The SC conducted the [3rd decadal review](#) of the Southern Ocean Sanctuary (SOS) and found that:

- the [SOS meets its objectives](#) and, in particular, it facilitates and serves as an incentive for cutting edge polar research on whales and their ecosystems.
- the SOS also provides a focus for collaboration and [knowledge sharing with other international treaty organisations](#), such as the Convention on the Conservation of Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).
- However, it was concluded that the [criteria for reviewing Sanctuaries need updating](#) and an intersessional group was set up to provide suggested revisions for the Commission. These suggestions will be provided at IWC70.

The last review of the Indian Ocean Sanctuary was conducted in 2002, thus the SC requests advice from the Commission on whether it should proceed with a new review.



Image: Interactions with Amazon River dolphins in the Mocajuba/PA municipality. IBAMA, Pará.

Extinction Alert

In 2022, the Commission endorsed a new mechanism for the IWC to express urgent concerns about cetacean population declines to communities outside the IWC.

The first alert was published for the vaquita in 2023. It generated broadcast, print, digital and social media coverage in a wide range of countries and was [considered a successful approach](#) for raising public awareness of species or populations at imminent risk of extinction.

[More specific criteria have now been developed](#) to guide the SC in identifying and prioritising candidate populations for possible future alerts.

Whale Watching

Two key objectives of the SC's work on whale watching are to assess the potential impacts of whale watching on cetaceans and to identify areas where whales may be at risk from unregulated activities.

In 2024, the negative impact of in-water, 'swim with' tourism was highlighted for the [endangered Amazon River dolphin](#). Public safety concerns were raised over another 'swim with' activity in the [Baja California Peninsula](#), that includes putting people in the water with killer whales.

[The Modelling and Assessment of Whale Watching Activities \(MAWI\)](#), a tool to better quantify impacts of whale watching activities, continues to be developed. The SC, in collaboration with CC, is also seeking to [integrate work with social scientists](#) to better understand the whale watching industry and tourist interests, and to pursue outreach opportunities more widely.

Produced by the IWC Secretariat

International Whaling Commission

Suite 2, First floor,
Victory House
Vision Park
Histon
Cambridge
CB24 9ZR

www.iwc.int

Cover credits

The Scientific Committee, Bled, Slovenia, 2024. IWC.
Aerial survey observer. Rikke Guldborg Hansen, Greenland Institute of Natural Resources
Research in the northern Adriatic. Tilen Genov, Morigenos
Photo ID work. Pacific Whale Foundation.
Population Assessment Sighting Survey. Sarawak Dolphin Project
Southern Cape Aerial Survey. University of Pretoria
Deploying Acoustic Sonobuoy, Southern Ocean. IWC-SORP
Deploying biopsy darts in the Southern Ocean. IWC



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

