INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

80 years of science and stewardship

1946 - 2026

Report of the Scientific Committee (SC70)

27 April - 8 May 2026

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Report of the Scientific Committee (SC70)

Bled, Slovenia, April 27 – May 8 2026

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the IWC concerning the legal status of any territories or geographical areas.

1. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

The 2026 meeting of the Scientific Committee (henceforth Committee or SC) was held between 27 April and 8 May 2026 in Bled, Slovenia. This was the first meeting in the new biennial cycle, with no meeting held in 2025. The Chair (Porter), Vice-Chair (Lang) and Vice-Chair Elect (Nelson) worked with the Convenors and the Secretariat to organise SC70 and two pre-meetings.

1.1 Opening remarks

Porter, as Chair, welcomed participants to SC70 and thanked the Secretariat for its work in preparing for the meeting. She also thanked the Vice-Chair, Vice-Chair Elect and the Convenors for their pro bono assistance. Via video, the Executive Secretary expressed her disappointment that, due to imminent surgery, she was unable to attend the meeting in person. She thanked the Committee's leadership for their excellent preparation and gave special thanks to its members for generously providing their time and expertise to support the Commission's work. She also noted that 2026 marks the 80th anniversary of the IWC and recognised the Committee's role throughout this time, providing rigorous advice that enables the Commission to take decisions and provide guidance for Contracting Governments.

The SC Chair welcomed Türkiye as a new member participating in an SC meeting for the first time; Dr. Bayram Öztürk introduced current scientific studies and future conservation plans for the cetaceans in Turkiye's waters. Representatives from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a non-member Government, were also welcomed.

1.2 Remembrances

The Committee was saddened to learn about the deaths of 11 scientists connected to the IWC during the intersessional period:

(1) Mel (Andrea) Cosentino attended SC meetings from 2012 until 2022, during which she made many contributions, submitting papers across a diverse range of topics, including bycatch, whale watching, aquatic wild meat and noise pollution.

(2) Paul Ensor was Cruise Leader for the IDCR/SOWER cruises for over 20 years. He first joined an IWC Antarctic research cruise in 1979/80 and continued to sail almost annually until the cessation of the programme. In 1994/95, Ensor accepted the role of Cruise Leader, which he performed every season through to 2008/09. Ensor was a member of the Committee from 1994 to 2010, attending all its meetings and the IDCR/SOWER planning meetings.

(3) Jim Gilpatrick was an IWC researcher for four of the IWC-POWER surveys: 2015, 2016, 2019 and 2021. During the surveys, Jim was recognised for his dedication, field expertise and cheerful attitude.

(4) Joseph (Joe) Horwood was a marine scientist and a very long-standing participant in Committee meetings during the 1970s and 80s. He participated in the 1979/80 IDCR/SOWER cruise, which provided the first systematic survey data for Southern Ocean stocks.

(5) Armando Jaramillo-Legorreta was a pioneering scientist and dedicated conservationist. Armando was at the forefront of developing and applying passive acoustic monitoring to assess population trends of the vaquita and other endangered marine mammals.

(6) Finn Larsen was an active member of the Committee who designed the 'Larsen Gun', a specialised, modified shotgun for firing biopsy darts that became the international standard for cetacean sampling. This system has been used on over 40 IWC research cruises in the Antarctic and North Pacific to collect skin and blubber samples.

(7) Tore Schweder was a Norwegian statistician whose work improved how whale stocks are estimated and managed through advanced mathematical modelling. He was involved in some of the first large-scale pinger trials in commercial gillnet fisheries.

(8) Dmitry Tormosov was a prominent Russian whale biologist who played a key role in the preservation of invaluable data on illegal Soviet whaling catches. With these data, a true assessment has now been made which has significantly improved the understanding of many whale populations.

(9) Oswaldo E. Vasquez Ravelo was a prominent marine biologist deeply involved in whale conservation in the Dominican Republic. He served as a member of the Dominican Republic's delegation to the IWC, ensuring that the country's landmark work in protecting humpback whale breeding grounds was recognised.

(10) Timothy Werner was a prominent conservation biologist and fisheries scientist who served as a member of the Expert Panel for the IWC's Bycatch Mitigation Initiative.
(11) Tadasu Yamada attended three Committee meetings. Yamada was involved in the description of two new species from Japan: Omura's whale (*Balaenoptera omurai*) and Sato's beaked whale (*Berardius minimus*). His expertise on the morphology and taxonomy of baleen and beaked whales led him to contribute to the description of Rice's whale (*B. ricei)* and the resurrection of Deraniyagala's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon hotaula*).

The Committee paused in silence and respect for these scientists. Full obituaries can be found in Annex V.

1.3 Appointment of rapporteurs

Members of the Secretariat, led by Staniland, were appointed as rapporteurs for Plenary Items, with assistance from members of the Committee as appropriate. Convenors appointed rapporteurs for Sub-Committees and Working Groups (Item 1.5).

1.4 Meeting procedures and schedule

The meeting arrangements comprised seven sub-committee days, with the capacity to hold three simultaneous sessions across five fixed time slots per day. To maximise efficiency and save costs, the opening Plenary session was not held; instead, four days of dedicated Plenary sessions were held at the end of the meeting.

1.5 Establishment of Sub-Committees and Working Groups

Table 1 below lists the Committee's sub-groups, including the relevant convenor(s).

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The adopted Agenda is given as Annex B.

3. REVIEW OF AVAILABLE DATA, DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS

3.1 Documents submitted

A list of documents available to the Committee is provided as Annex C. The Committee received 256 primary papers and 123 For Information papers. These were made available via the SC70 SharePoint.

3.2 National Progress Reports on research

The Commission requires all member nations to provide Progress Reports to the Committee. The National Progress Reports (NPRs) originate in Article VIII paragraph 3 of the Convention and Scientific Committee Rule of Procedure E.1. As agreed in 2012, NPRs should be submitted electronically via the IWC Progress Reports data portal.

Countries were reminded on 12 March 2025 and 25 February 2026 (IWC.ALL.487 and IWC.ALL.501) of the critical importance of providing NPRs and any data relevant to the Commission's work. The Secretariat reported that 11 countries submitted NPRs in 2025 and 13 in 2026 (IWC portal accessed on 7 May 2026). Details on the number of countries reporting per NPR section can be found in Annex H.

Table 1

Sub-groups and Convenors for 2026.

Name	Convenor	Co-Convenor
Working Group on Photo-ID (PH)	Olson	-
Sub-Committee on Stock Abundance and Status (SAS)	Givens	New
Sub-Committee on Sanctuaries (SAN)	Parsons	Rojas
Sub-Committee on Databases and Related Issues (GDR)	Double	-
Sub-Committee on Implementation Simulation Trials (IST)	Donovan	Wilberg
Sub-Committee on Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW)	Walløe	Nelson
Sub-Committee on Stock Definition and DNA Testing (SD-DNA)	Lang	Tiedemann
Sub-Committee on In-depth Assessments (IA)	Palka	-
Sub-Committee on the Other Northern Hemisphere Whale Stocks (NH)	Cholewiak	Robbins
Sub-Committee on the Other Southern Hemisphere Whale Stocks (SH)	Bell	Herr
Sub-Committee on Conservation Management Plans (CMP)	Zerbini	Vermeulen
Sub-Committee on Non-Deliberate Human-Induced Mortality of Cetaceans (HIM)	Leaper	Minton
Sub-Committee on Environmental Concerns (E)	Genov	Noren
Sub-Committee on Ecosystem Modelling (EM)	Kitakado	-
Sub-Committee on Small Cetaceans (SM)	Trujillo	Porter
Sub-Committee on Whale Watching (WW)	Suydam	Urban-Rámirez
Working Group on franciscana bycatch rate evaluation	Sigurðsson	Kingston

3.3 Data collection, storage and manipulation

3.3.1 Catch data and other statistical material

Table 2 lists data received by the Secretariat since SC69B. Summaries of large whale catches from the 2024 and 2025 seasons are listed in SC/70/O/25 and SC/70/O/27. The Committee emphasises the importance of historical catch data as a foundational element of population assessments. It encourages all participants who are aware of any relevant historical data to bring any such data to the attention of the Secretariat.

3.3.2 Progress of data coding projects and computing tasks

The Table of Assessed Abundance Estimates was updated based on the work of the SAS Sub-Committee (and SAS-Steering Group) during SC69B, the SAS-SG online meeting on 6 September 2025 (SC/70/REP/01Rev1), and the ASI-IA-IST workshop in November 2025 (SC/70/REP/02). After report approval, the abundance estimates discussed during SC70 will be added.

The IWC Summary Catch Dataset is undergoing structural updates to support publication as a data paper, with completed changes focused on improving clarity, consistency, and alignment with individual catch records. Key revisions include standardised geographic and administrative fields, enhanced data-quality coding, clearer identification of multiple and complex expedition records, and the introduction of new columns to improve interoperability with other datasets. Further work is ongoing to resolve remaining data gaps, refine expedition definitions, and develop additional linked datasets.

The IWC Individual Catch Database has been updated to include data from the 2024 and 2025 seasons. Historical records have also been expanded, with 2015-20 Greenland data reconciled to resolve discrepancies and now fully integrated, alongside additional 1940s Japanese expedition data from the D. Rice archive.

Work on population modelling and associated computing tasks is progressing for several priority species, albeit at different stages of development. In-depth Assessments of North Pacific and North Atlantic humpback whales are currently in development. The Implementation Review of Gray whales was finalised at SC70 and includes applying management strategy evaluation by incorporating code for the Makah Management Plan (Item 6.1). The In-depth Assessment of North Pacific humpback whales is nearing completion, with finalisation pending resolution of outstanding issues related to abundance estimates. Work on the In-depth Assessment of North Atlantic humpback whales has recently commenced, with data currently being evaluated and collated; the modelling framework will build on the approach developed by Liu (IWC, 2024a; Palka *et al*., 2024). Following the successful recruitment of population modellers under the *Securing Legacy in Computing and Modelling Project I*, overall capacity has increased, and plans are underway to validate the code underpinning the models on which these assessments are based. The In-depth Assessments of Western North Pacific minke whales and Antarctic blue whales were completed. Final steps will involve reviewing and refining the documentation, publishing the work, and developing an accessible guide to support the understanding and application of the methods and findings.

3.4 Guidance for the format of recommendations and discussions of the Recommendations Database

Within the Committee's report, recommendations are the principal method by which the SC conveys its work to the Commission and the wider world. The Database of Recommendations is a public-facing tool that is searchable and helps track the work and progress of all IWC bodies. It contains almost 3,000 recommendations, with nearly 1,700 made by the SC.

Following the successful process developed at SC69A, sub-committees were asked to review updates to their recommendations proposed by the Secretariat and confirm closure based on three scenarios:

(1) The recommendation has been superseded;
(2) The recommendation's action has been completed; or
(3) The recommendation is to 'draw attention', which means there is no required action beyond the Commission's endorsement of the report.

Convenors were given training on drafting recommendations, and help guides were available via the SC70 SharePoint. This process has now been successfully applied to the wider Commission, with other Committees reviewing and agreeing to close recommendations at IWC69. In total, almost 700 have now been closed.

3.5 Review of Commission Resolutions from 2024

At IWC69, the Commission adopted three Resolutions, two of which are relevant to the Committee's work. Resolution 2024-1 on Cooperation in Antarctica recognised the collaboration between the IWC and CCAMLR and identified ways to strengthen this. For the SC, this includes data sharing, the exchange of information on the effects of fisheries and global environmental change in the Antarctic region relevant to whale populations, and the IWC's provision of expert advice on cetaceans to inform management decisions (SC/70/O/28Rev5).

Given the increasing engagement with SC-CAMLR, a steering group was established to oversee the broader collaboration, support the IWC/CCAMLR observer, and ensure the related ICGs operate efficiently and effectively so that advice and topics covered are within the expectations of the Commission. The Terms of Reference (ToR), potential membership, and how it would report to the SC are proposed in SC/70/O/31 (see also Item 8.5).

Table 2

Data and programmes received by the Secretariat since SC69B (last update: 01/05/2026).

Date	From	IWC Ref	Description
CATCHES			
Large whales			
19/03/2025	Greenland: N. Holm	E190-Cat2024	Greenland Individual catch records for the season 2024
08/04/2025	Norway: G. Gjelsvik	E190-Cat2024	Norwegian individual minke whale catch data - 2024
24/04/2025	Japan: Y. Kawai	E190-Cat2024	Individual data for commercial catches by Japan in the N. Pacific in 2024
30/04/2025	Russia: D. Litovka	E190-Cat2024	Russia Individual catch records for season 2024
02/05/2025	SVG: J. Cruickshank-Howard	E190-Cat2024	Catch data for the 2023-2024 season
09/05/2025	Iceland: G.M. Sigurðsson	E190-Cat2024	No whaling in 2024
26/05/2025	Canada: R. Apro	E190-Cat2024	Canada catches seasons 2022/23-2024/25
30/06/2025	USA: J. Citta	E190-Cat2024	USA individual catch records for the season 2024
24/03/2026	C. Yamada	E190 Cat2024	Japan's Scientific Progress Report on Large Cetaceans
26/03/2026	Japan: Y. Kawai	E201-Cat2025	Individual data for commercial catches by Japan in the N. Pacific in 2025
27/03/2026	Greenland: N. Holm	E201-Cat2025	Greenland Fin and Humpback Individual catch records and summary of minke whale catch for season 2025
27/03/2026	USA: M. Harris	E201-Cat2025	USA individual catch records for season 2025 - included in their harvest report - SC/70/ASW/02
08/04/2026	Iceland: G.M. Sigurðsson	E201-Cat2025	Iceland catch report - No whaling in 2025
09/04/2026	Russia: D. Litovka	E201-Cat2025	Russia Individual catch records for season 2025
09/04/2026	Norway: G. Gjelsvik	E201-Cat2025	Norwegian individual minke whale catch data - 2025
16/04/2026	Greenland: N. Holm	E201-Cat2025	Greenland Individual minke whale catch records for season 2025
17/04/2026	SVG: J. Cruickshank-Howard	E201-Cat2025	Catch data for the 2024-2025 season
28/03/2025	Korea: T. Won	E191-INF-IWC70	Infractions Korea 2024
10/04/2025	Norway: P. Meier	E191-INF-IWC70	Infractions Norway 2024
16/04/2025	USA: M. Harris	E191-INF-IWC70	US Infractions 2024
27/03/2026	USA: M. Harris	E202-INF-IWC70	US Infractions 2025
Historical data			
15/05/2024	T. Branch	E181	Annual catch summary changes: blue and pygmy blue whales
17/12/2024	Greenland: N. Holm	E189	Amendments of Greenland catch data 2015-2020 discrepancies
Small cetaceans			
23/09/2024	J. Citta	E184	Alaska Beluga Whale Committee (ABWC) corrected harvest - 2007-2009
06/01/2026	USA: K. Frost	E190-Cat2024	Revised Summary of Beluga Catches in Alaska 2020-2024 from the Alaska beluga whale committee 06/01/26
28/04/2026	Canada: R. Apro	E201-Cat2025	Canada catches for season 2025/26
SIGHTINGS			
20/05/2025	K. Matsuoka	-	2024 POWER sightings cruise data
26/04/2026	K. Matsuoka	-	2025 POWER sightings cruise data
PROGRAMMES			
05/01/2024	G.M. Sigurðsson	E178	Catch at age, by totals and by sex – fin whales - Iceland
15/04/2025	Carryn de Moor		2025 version of the WNP minke assessment
03/05/2024	A. Punt	E164-NAfin	NA fin whale trials with updated catch at age data
29/04/2024	Andre Punt	E176	Makah Management Plan
30/04/2024	Andre Punt	E177	NP Humpbacks IA
03/05/2024	A. Punt	E179	BCB bowhead trials update
03/05/2024	M. Wilberg	E180	Trajectory plot script for SoW
31/10/2024	A. Punt	E187	NP Humpbacks IA - update
13/04/2025	A. E. Punt	E194-NPMi-assessment	COPYNP.DAT file generator
13/04/2025	A. E. Punt	E194-NPMi-assessment	Survey extract
15/04/2025	A. E. Punt & M. Wilberg	E194-NPMi-assessment	Dispersal Rate - Demographics
18/11/2025	P. Mahoney	E197	PCFG Gray Whale Model - VarCov Matrix
OTHER			
11/04/2024	Peru: C. Palomino	E173	Peru's Scientific Progress Report 2022-2023
22/10/2024	M. Garagouni	E186	Strata for NASS and NILS surveys
11/07/2024	J. Taylor	E182	Acoustic sonobuoy recording logs
20/12/2024	D. Leonard	E188	Shape-files - areas ES2014, ES2019, EW1-3 - Solvang *et al*., 2021
08/04/2025	J. Barahona	E193	Whale bycatch - Chile
09/05/2025	M. Garagouni	E195-Abund. Est.	Abundance Estimate tables - NAMMCO
25/07/2025	D. Palacios		Outputs of project Contract # 2022-4206. NP Humpbacks: satellite tag data for stock assessments
27/10/2025	A. Lang	E196	Revised maps and Shape files - gray whales
09/12/2025	M.P. Heide Jørgensen	E199	Greenland 2024 survey shapefiles.
15/02/2026	R. Baird	E200	A copy of a reference database and ~50,000 PDFs that David Janiger has put together
09/04/2026	Peru: C.R.P. Palomino	E204	Peru: Encounters between cetaceans and marine debris – Peruvian coast

Resolution 2024-2 encourages synergies between the IWC and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Agreement on Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). The progress of this Resolution is detailed in SC/70/O/28Rev5. Discussion noted two ongoing CBD-related processes where the Committee could meaningfully contribute to global biodiversity efforts under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). The upcoming GBF Global Review will assess progress based mainly on national reporting, and there may be opportunities for SC input alongside Secretariat contributions. The suggestion is for the SC to contribute existing outputs to increase the visibility of marine biodiversity and cetacean science, rather than creating new work. The Commission also considered the response of the SC to Resolution 2022-1 (IWC/69/10.1/09), drawing on £15,000 from the SC Research Fund to facilitate a literature review on the impact of marine plastic pollution on cetaceans. This is discussed under Item 14.10.

3.6 Report on advice requested by the Government of Mexico, related to threats to cetaceans in the Gulf of California

An Expert Panel was convened at the request of the Government of Mexico to assess the ecological risks associated with a proposed LNG terminal in the Gulf of California. Drawing on expertise in cetacean ecology, marine protected areas, vessel strikes, and underwater noise, the Panel emphasised the exceptional ecological importance of the region. The Gulf supports a highly diverse range of cetacean species and functions as a critical migratory corridor, seasonal habitat, and refuge for endangered, vulnerable, and endemic populations.

The Panel endorsed recommendations from regional cetacean experts, including the need for improved acoustic modelling, robust vessel strike risk assessments, and significant revisions to the Environmental Impact Assessment to meet regulatory standards (SC/70/O/22). Although various mitigation measures were proposed, the Panel concluded that the development would result in irreversible ecosystem degradation and severe impacts on cetacean populations. It determined that no mitigation would sufficiently reduce these risks and therefore strongly recommended that LNG development should not proceed in the Gulf of California.

3.7 Progress on satellite imagery to inform the work of the Committee

The Using Satellites to Study Whales ICG made progress on recommendations from SC69A, particularly those aimed at establishing best-practice guidance (SC/70/O29). A hybrid workshop at the 2024 Society of Marine Mammalogy Conference in Perth, funded by WWF and NERC, advanced efforts toward standardising methods to enable greater international collaboration, locally led research, and the development of large, high-quality datasets for automated detection. Work is now underway to produce a peer-reviewed best-practice publication. The ICG also explored options for centralising cetacean satellite datasets, recommending that data holders register datasets with established platforms such as MEDIN or OBIS as a more sustainable long-term solution.

The group also continued work to identify and prioritise candidate areas for satellite monitoring of cetaceans, aiming to support speculative tasking and expand archival imagery. A priority list is being refined for completion in the next phase. Looking ahead, the ICG plans to finalise guidance on best practice, including AI applications, improve access to satellite imagery, and reassess its priorities through member consultation. The group will continue its work over the next biennium, potentially including further workshops to advance outstanding recommendations.

4. COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Over the years, the Commission, the SC and the Conservation Committee (CC) have adopted numerous recommendations to improve engagement with other organisations. In collaboration with members of the SC, CC and its Standing Working Groups (SWGs), the Secretariat has been working to fulfil this mandate whilst also seeking new engagement opportunities. Staff time and travel funds continue to be limited, emphasising the need to establish engagement priorities and arrange representation through alternative means, such as virtual participation and engaging members of the IWC community, particularly those who already have delegations at relevant meetings. SC/70/O/28Rev5 summarises the IWC's cooperation and engagement with external organisations from October 2024 to April 2026. For activities between SC69B and IWC69, see IWC (2024b).

4.1 Summary of Secretariat cooperation with other organisations

At SC70, the Committee received eight observer reports (SC/70/O/28Rev5). Between the Secretariat, the IWC Chair and the SC Chair, the IWC has collaborated with 28 organisations and attended 40 meetings since IWC69, in addition to webinars and lectures. The Committee **thanks** the observers for representing the Committee in other fora and reporting back to the group.

4.2 African States bordering the Atlantic Ocean (ATLAFCO)

The IWC has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO, signed at IWC68. Regular meetings between the two Secretariats have been held to develop a work plan and update the MoU for consideration at IWC70 (SC/70/O/28Rev5). ATLAFCO facilitated its observer to attend SC70 and for the submission of cruise plans off the west coast of Africa (See SC/70/O/01; SC/70/O/02; Item 22.2).

4.3 Arctic Council
No update to provide.

4.4 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

4.5 Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)
Cooperation and provision of advice between the IWC and CCAMLR continue to evolve. The Committee recognises the value of abundance estimates derived from CCAMLR surveys for the work of the Committee. In turn, CCAMLR appreciates the Committee's expertise and assistance advising on and evaluating surveys and abundance estimates (SC/70/O/28Rev5; Item 3.5; further details are also given in Annexes G, O and Q).

4.6 Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS)
4.6.1 Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS)
See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

4.6.2 Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS)
No update was provided.

4.6.3 Coordination between the IWC and CMS
The Chair of the CC commended the long-standing collaboration between the IWC and CMS, formalised in 2000 and strengthened through joint initiatives such as the Whale Watching Handbook, collaborative workshops, and coordinated efforts to address key threats, including bycatch, climate change and marine pollution. This growing partnership is underpinned by aligned resolutions and shared commitments to data sharing and joint action. At CMS COP15 (March 2026), Parties requested exploration of a formal joint work programme, presenting an important opportunity to deepen collaboration.

The CC Chair emphasised that closer coordination could further enhance impact, including aligning conservation plans, improving data frameworks, strengthening capacity building, and coordinating engagement with external bodies, such as the IMO. Greater national-level coordination was also highlighted as a practical way to improve efficiency and reduce duplication. Overall, the IWC and CMS were recognised as highly complementary, with clear potential to deliver stronger, more cohesive conservation outcomes through continued collaboration. The CMS COP-appointed Councillor for Aquatic Mammals expressed support for this ongoing cooperation.

4.7 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES)
Noting the 50-year history of cooperation between the IWC and CITES on issues of mutual interest, and the series of mutually reinforcing resolutions adopted by both organisations, the Committee notes opportunities for the IWC to cooperate with CITES on new issues of common concern.

One emerging priority is addressing the impacts of the global fish maw trade, on which CMS has recently invited collaboration between the IWC, CMS and CITES. Subject to the availability of resources, this collaboration could include IWC representation at CITES meetings and participation in intersessional CITES workstreams on the maw trade to provide relevant expertise. See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

4.8 Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)
See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

4.9 Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs)
See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

4.10 International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES)
See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

4.11 International Maritime Organization (IMO)
See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

4.12 International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
In addition to the IUCN species Survival Commission (SSC)/World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA) Initiative that was featured in the evening side-event during SC70, the IUCN SSC Cetacean Specialist Group welcomes collaboration with the IWC SC on: (1) updates to cetacean Red List assessments at species, subspecies or sub-population level, which will need to draw on the most up-to-date science presented at IWC SC meetings; and (2) the drafting of a new Global Cetacean Action Plan (*https://iucn-csg.org/global-cetacean-action-plan-gcap/*), which is intended to provide all stakeholders engaged in cetacean research and conservation with guidance on the threats, species, and

geographical regions where action is most urgently needed, as well as highlighting established initiatives to address these issues. The IWC has been invited to participate in an in-person workshop in Singapore in December 2026, during which the IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group will facilitate the first stages of the plan development. See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

4.13 North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO)

NAMMCO Working Group on Abundance Estimation (WGAE) invited SAS to participate in its September 2025 online meeting to learn more about SAS's role in the IWC Scientific Committee, its review processes and endorsement categories, and the Committee's Status of Whales project. NAMMCO was particularly interested in the nuanced, operationalised categorisation system used by SAS. Members of both organisations expressed interest in continuing to strengthen connections.

See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

4.14 North Pacific Marine Science Organisation (PICES)

See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

4.15 Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) of the Cartagena Convention for the wider Caribbean

See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

4.16 Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP)

See SC/70/O/28Rev5 for the full report.

5. GENERAL ASSESSMENT AND MODELLING ISSUES

The Committee received two papers directly relevant to general modelling issues this year. Discussion of Bjerke & Walløe (2025) can be found in Annex K (item 2); discussion of Kanaji *et al.* (2024) can be found in Annex J (item 10). The Committee notes that the issues raised in these papers will be considered in future whale population dynamics models, particularly when relevant data are available.

6. AWMP AND RMP IMPLEMENTATION-RELATED MATTERS

6.1 Completion of the gray whale Implementation Review (Annex K, item 3)

The Committee agreed in 2024 to undertake an Implementation Review of North Pacific gray whales with a focus on further consideration of the frequency and intensity of 'catastrophic mortality' events (unusual mortality events [UMEs] in US legislation) documented along the western coast of North America. Catastrophic mortality events led to reduced survival and calf production independent of hunting. The goal was for this work to be completed at the present meeting. The process was built upon the series of gray whale range-wide workshops held between 2014 and 2018 (IWC, 2015; 2016a; 2017a; 2018a; 2019a), the last Implementation Review (2021a), and additional modelling presented in 2024 (IWC, 2024c).

6.1.1 Summary of the intersessional workshop and subsequent work

The Implementation Review was a key focus of an intersessional workshop held in Cambridge in November 2025 (SC/70/REP/14). The primary objective of the workshop was to review new information on *inter alia* stock structure, removals, the intensity and frequency of catastrophic mortality events, biological parameters, and the latest US Makah Management Plan[1], with a focus on the simulation modelling framework and trial structure, such that the Committee could finalise the Implementation Review at SC70. Without the Workshop and intersessional work, this would not have been possible.

6.1.2 Review of trial results

Table 3 summarises the factors considered in the model scenarios used to test the ability of the Gray Whale Strike Limit Algorithm (SLA) to meet the Commission's conservation and need objectives, particularly given new information on mortality events available since the last Implementation Review. The full trial specifications can be found in Annex K (Appendix 2). Especially with complex modelling and scenarios, it is essential to ensure that they are consistent with the available data – this is known as 'conditioning'. After considerable modelling effort, the Committee **agrees** that conditioning was successful. Therefore, it was able to review the results in detail, including projections, using the pre-agreed performance statistics and graphical output (SC/70/IST/05; Annex K, item 3.4[2]). The presence of future catastrophic mortality events meant that 'traditional' depletion metrics, such as the final population size relative to carrying capacity, are harder to interpret than for other assessments. Four ways to define final and lowest depletion were therefore developed for reporting conservation performance metrics from the projections (Annex K, Appendix 2, Section I).

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[1]The Committee has previously reviewed management plans developed and proposed by the USA for the Makah hunt. This plan is formally outside the IWC's AWMP process that uses the Gray Whale SLA to provide advice for the total strike limits for North Pacific gray whales included in the IWC Schedule. The latest US Makah Management Plan has been incorporated into the modelling framework to the extent possible given its complexity. It is not the Committee's responsibility or remit to suggest changes but rather to say if it is consistent with the Commission's objectives.

[2]The full set of results are available from the IWC Secretariat.

Table 3

Factors considered in the model scenarios. The bold values are the base cases. For details and final trials listing, see Annex K.

Factor	Levels
Basic population dynamics	
Stock structure	**3a/4a**, 3b, 3e, **5a/7a**, 6b
MSYR (%)	**4.5%,** 2% for PCFG, estimated
Immigration into PCFG	0, **2**, 4
Bycatches and vessel strikes	**Dead x 4**, dead x 10
Pulse migration into PCFG	**20**
Mixing proportion	100% PCFG during the migratory hunt
Projection related	
Northern need in final year	**140**, 340
Struck and lost rate for PCFG (migratory season)	10% in feeding season; 25%, **50%,** 75% in migratory season
Catastrophic mortality event (NFG/ PCFG)	**Baseline**, 2 x baseline, linear increase, higher PCFG, none, half frequency
False positive for PCFG	**0**
False negative for PCFG	**0.1,** 0.25
False positive for WGW	**0**
False negative rate WGW	**0.58,** 1
Probability of photo (S&L)	0.8 / 0.6
Probability of photo (Landed)	0.9
Probability of sex being known given a PCFG match	0.81
Survey frequency	As planned, every 10 years
Baseline natural mortality	0.0202, increases linearly from 0.0202 to 0.0404 over the projection period
Female PCFG whales available to the Makah hunt	Random from the population, 100%

The AWMP approach does not evaluate the performance of SLAs solely based on the performance for the worst-case trials. Only two of the 47 trials led to final depletion values less than 0.6 (in terms of the lower 5th percentile), and these two trials were considered borderline implausible. The Committee therefore **agrees** that the performance of the Gray Whale SLA is satisfactory both in terms of need satisfaction and achieving the Commission's conservation objectives. However, it also notes that the US Makah Management Plan, whilst satisfactory in terms of conservation, is poor in meeting need. In reaching these conclusions, suggestions were made for consideration at the next Implementation Review.

6.1.3 Conclusions with respect to the use of the existing SLA

The Committee **agrees** that the performance of the Gray Whale SLA is satisfactory and that the Implementation Review is complete. The Committee **thanks** the modelling team of Punt, Brandon, Donovan, Lang, Katara, Mahoney, Scordino, Stewart and Wilberg for the intersessional work, without which it would not have been possible to complete the Implementation Review.

Attention: C, ASW, CG

*The Committee **agrees** that the Implementation Review for North Pacific gray whales is now complete, subject to final coding validation, and **recommends** to the Commission that:*

(1) The Gray Whale SLA remains the appropriate way to provide management advice, while noting that the US Makah Management Plan has acceptable conservation performance, but that its need satisfaction is poor;

(2) Monitoring of abundance and strandings in the context of UMEs and other sources of mortality by range states should be maintained and reported to the Scientific Committee for consideration inter alia at the next Implementation Review; and

*(3) The successful completion of this Implementation Review **re-emphasises** the need for sufficient allocation of resources for computing and resources for Aboriginal Whaling Scheme (AWS)-related work, if robust management advice is to be provided in a timely manner.*

6.2 Review of advice using agreed SLAs

The Committee notes that Paragraph 13(a) of the Schedule states:

> *Commencing in 2026, and provided the appropriate Strike Limit Algorithm has been developed by then, strike/catch limits (including any carry forward provisions) for each stock identified in sub-paragraph 13(b) shall be extended every six years, provided:*
>
> *(a) the Scientific Committee advises in 2024, and every six years thereafter, that such limits will not harm that stock; (b) the Commission does not receive a request from an ASW country relying on the stock ('relevant ASW country'), for a change in the relevant catch limits based on need; and (c) the Commission determines that the relevant ASW country has complied with the approved timeline and that the information provided represents a status quo continuation of the hunt.*

The limits agreed at the last Commission meeting (2024) apply to the years 2026-31 and follow the Committee's recommendations. New advice is not required until the 2030 meeting to enable the Commission to set catch limits from 2032.

6.2.1 Greenland hunts

Information presented on apparent large changes in the distribution of baleen whales in Greenland waters and the wider North Atlantic (e.g., SC/70/IST/06), along with the newly agreed 2024 abundance estimates and their implications for providing advice in 2030 (Annex K, Appendix 3), led to a focus on the Greenland hunts and especially how to ensure that the Committee is in a position to provide robust management advice under the AWS in 2030. The conclusions are provided below.

Attention: C, ASW

At IWC69, the Commission adopted new strike limits for ASW hunts, including Greenland, for the years 2026-31. New advice is therefore not required until 2030 for limits in 2032 (ICRW Schedule s.13a).

*The Committee had already agreed (IWC, 2022) that a thorough Implementation Review of North Atlantic common minke whales should occur starting in 2029, with a focus on stock structure and movements. However, given information presented at SC70, the Committee **strongly recommends** an accelerated process be initiated now, with an immediate Special Implementation Review as allowed for under the adopted Aboriginal Whaling Scheme (IWC, 2019). Starting the process now is essential as it is the only way to enable the Committee to be in the position of providing robust management advice at its 2030 meeting. This depends on provision of the necessary resources.*

The information leading to the recommendation for a Special Implementation Review includes:

(1) Evidence that the distribution of whales around Greenland (and other parts of the North Atlantic) has changed, such that this warrants detailed consideration in terms of stock structure and movements before providing management advice to the Commission in time for the 2032 strike limits (SC/70/IST/06). This is particularly true with respect to assumptions that whales found off West and East Greenland comprise separate populations; and

(2) New agreed 2024 abundance estimates (lower in West Greenland and higher in East Greenland – see Annex K, Appendix 3) that, under the current stock structure and movement hypotheses, would lead to reduced SLA limits from 2032 for West Greenland common minke whales and humpback whales, even with the agreed AWS carryover provisions.

*The Committee **advises** the Commission that following the existing management advice until it is updated in 2030 will not harm the relevant stocks.*

6.2.2 Other ASW Stocks

The Committee **agrees** that additional Special Implementation Reviews are not required for other hunts. Progress on developing an SLA for the St. Vincent and The Grenadines hunt of humpback whales and consideration of the Greenland humpback SLA depends on the completion of the In-depth Assessment of North Atlantic humpback whales. See Item 6.5.2 for more details.

6.3 Biennial and long-term work plan

6.3.1 Planning for forthcoming Implementation Reviews

Table 4 provides an update on the Committee's schedule for Implementation Reviews. Table 5 in Annex K indicates the intersessional work proposed to maintain this schedule for the BCB bowhead whales and the Special Implementation Review for Greenland common minke whales.

Table 4

Proposed workplan and potential timings of Implementation Reviews (IRs) under the assumptions of: (a) adequate intersessional funding; and (b) lengths of time they might require. Note: results of IRs can be endorsed by the full Committee only during even years, unless a silence procedure is agreed. Green shading indicates common analytical frameworks. Completion dates are estimates based on the previous experience.

Species/stock	Implementation (and subsequent IRs) completed	Next planned IR subject to sufficient resources (expected completion)
West Greenland humpback whales (AWMP)	2014	Start 2030 and complete in 2030 after
St Vincent and The Grenadines humpbacks (SLA development)	NA	In-depth Assessment (Item 6.5.2)
Eastern North Pacific gray whales (AWMP)	2004 (2010, 2013, 2020,2026)	Start 2032; complete 2032
BCB bowhead whales (AWMP)	2000 (2007, 2012, 2018)	Start 2027; complete 2028
West Greenland bowhead whales (AWMP)	2015 (2022)	Start 2028; complete 2030
Common minke whales off Greenland (AWMP)	2019, 2022	Start now; complete 2030
North Atlantic common minke whales (RMP)	1993 (2003, 2008, 2017, 2022)	
North Atlantic fin whales (AWMP, RMP)	2009 (2016, 2023)	Start 2030; complete 2032

6.3.2 Consider progress on the North Atlantic humpback whale In-depth Assessment

The Committee notes the discussions for an In-depth Assessment of North Atlantic humpback whales (Annex L, item 2.4). The data will be compiled over the next two years, including the holding of an intersessional workshop, such that the In-depth Assessment is expected to begin at the 2028 biennial meeting. At least one intersessional workshop will be required after 2028 if the In-depth Assessment and SLA advice is to have a chance of being available in 2030. This work is needed to develop an SLA for the St. Vincent and The Grenadines hunt and to refine advice under the Greenland hunt. The Committee notes that work on SLAs can progress alongside the In-depth Assessment, and that IST members will participate in the progress.

6.3.3 Code validation

The Committee reiterates its long-standing view of the importance of validating and archiving the code used in assessment models and SLAs for providing advice both within IST (it is an essential and required component of the AWS) and IA. This year, code validation is a high priority for the North Pacific gray whales. This is also reflected in the work plan (Item 6.5.5) and budget requests (Item 23.4). The Committee notes the potential for Artificial Intelligence (AI) to assist in the coding/validation process and **agrees** that this should be kept under review. The Committee notes that, given potential modelling synergies, the code validation of the North Pacific humpback whale In-depth Assessment will also benefit the work on North Atlantic humpback whales.

6.3.4 Working processes

A joint session was held between the IST and ASW Sub-Committees to consider whether there was value in merging them (Annex K, Appendix 5). The essential factor is to ensure that the necessary data, analyses and expertise are available to enable the operation of the AWS, therefore allowing the Committee to provide robust management advice. On balance, the Committee **agrees** that the current sub-group structure works well. Relevant convenors will provide information and advice on the data and analyses needed in good time to assist scientists, especially those from ASW countries.

6.3.5 Work plan

The work plan and intersessional groups are provided in Annex K (item 5).

7. STOCKS SUBJECT TO ABORIGINAL SUBSISTENCE WHALING

7.1 New information and progress on recommendations

7.1.1 Eastern Canada/West Greenland bowhead whales

The Committee **thanks** the Canadian Government for providing information on the subsistence hunt of Eastern Canada-West Greenland (EC-WG) bowhead whales. In 2024, two EC-WG bowheads were landed, one female and one of unidentified sex; none was struck and lost. In 2025, one female was landed; none was struck and lost. No EC-WG bowhead whales were struck in Greenland in 2024 or 2025.

Attention: C, G Canada
*The Committee **thanks** the Canadian Government for submitting annual information on the aboriginal hunts of bowhead whales and **encourages** the submission of additional information on the hunt, health and status of bowhead whales in eastern Canada.*

7.1.2 Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas bowhead whales

In 2024, 64 bowhead whales were struck during the Alaskan aboriginal subsistence hunt, of which 49 were landed (SC/70/ASW/01). The efficiency (no. landed / no. struck) of the hunt (77%) was slightly lower than average for the past 10 years (2013-2022: mean of efficiency=79%; SD=0.054). Two calves were inadvertently taken in 2024, one during the spring hunt and one during the autumn hunt. Additional information was presented about the 2024 hunt, including hunt conditions, sex ratio, and number of mature females (Annex D, item 2.1.2).

In 2025, 73 bowhead whales were struck during the Alaskan aboriginal subsistence hunt, of which 53 were landed (SC/70/ASW/02). The efficiency (no. landed / no. struck) of the hunt (73%) was lower than average for the past 10 years (2015-2024: mean of efficiency=76%; SD=0.134). One calf was inadvertently taken during the autumn hunt in 2025. Additional information was presented about the 2025 hunt, including hunt conditions, sex ratio, and number of mature females (Annex D, item 2.1.2).

The Committee notes that 'equipment malfunction' when classifying reasons for struck and lost whales during the Alaskan aboriginal hunt incorporates many factors, and that separating various forms of equipment failure from other factors will be difficult, if not impossible. Hunters have a strong desire to minimise struck and loss rates and engage in active training programmes. The Committee notes that this issue is the responsibility of IWC's Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Welfare Issues (WKM&WI) and is being discussed extensively there.

The Russian Federation reported that no bowhead whales were struck in Chukotka in 2024 (SC/70/ASW/08Rev1) or 2025 (SC/70/ASW/07Rev1).

Two attempts to estimate the abundance of BCB bowheads were made in 2025. A large-scale aerial line-transect survey was conducted from 28 July to 24 August 2025 by the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC, NOAA Fisheries) and the North Slope Borough (NSB) (Goetz *et al*., 2026). The Committee **notes** that the survey included northern Amundsen Gulf in the vicinity of Banks Island, an area known to sometimes have a high density of bowhead whales. The NSB also conducted the ice-based bowhead whale abundance survey near Point Barrow, Alaska, during 13 April - 25 May 2025 (SC/70/ASW/04).

Attention: SC, CG USA, R
*The Committee **thanks** the North Slope Borough (NSB), Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC, NOAA Fisheries) and the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission for supporting multiple abundance surveys in 2025 and **encourages** them to provide results from both surveys at SC71.*

The sixth BCB bowhead health report provides health information about bowhead whales for 2024 and 2025 (SC/70/ASW/11). The Committee **thanks** the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, the NSB and the US Government for providing this information, which is critical for assessing the status and health of the BCB bowhead population and provides important ancillary information on the sustainability of the harvest.

7.1.3 Eastern North Pacific gray whales

During the aboriginal hunt of Eastern North Pacific (ENP) gray whales within the Chukotka Autonomous District, Russian Federation, 132 ENP gray whales were struck, and 131 were landed in 2024 (SC/70/ASW/08Rev1). In 2025, 126 gray whales were struck, of which 123 were landed (SC/70/ASW/07Rev1). One whale was struck and lost in 2024, and three in 2025. No stinky whales were struck in 2024 or 2025, and the Committee **notes** an absence of 'stinky' whales may be due to hunters learning how to avoid them.

The Committee **welcomes** updates on the 2024 and 2025 IWC Pacific Ocean Whale Ecosystem Research (POWER) cruises (SC/70/ASW/03). In 2024, photo-identification (photo-ID) images from five gray whales and biopsies from three whales were collected. In 2025, photo-ID images of 62 individuals and biopsy samples from 32 individuals were collected.

Attention: C, CG
Given numerous genetic samples, photographs and data collected, the Committee:

(1) ***Thanks*** *the Governments of Japan and the United States, and the many individuals involved, for supporting the recent IWC-POWER cruises and for the collection of numerous biopsy samples and photographs in areas where little sampling of gray whales had previously been undertaken; and*
(2) ***Requests*** *that the Commission continue to support IWC-POWER surveys.*

An alternative survey design for assessing the abundance of PCFG gray whales using photo-ID methods was presented (SC/70/ASW/05). Results from the traditional sampling method will be compared with the new sampling method when it becomes available.

A survey of gray whales feeding in Mechigmen Bay, Chukotka, Russia, in 2025 observed an average of 39 gray whales per watch (range = 2-100) with a total of 866 (SC/70/ASW/13). There are plans to use aerial drones to study whale distribution and Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) to study and sample the benthic community. An assessment of feeding and body condition of gray whales undertaken in this same area during 2019-2023 indicates that Mechigmen Bay is an important feeding area for gray whales (SC/70/ASW/10). The Committee suggests future studies should include indices of body condition based on measures of girth, as these may be more sensitive than measures based on blubber thickness.

Two reports on parasites found on harvested gray whales in Chukotka, Russia, were presented; one on cyamids (SC/70/ASW/09) and the second on cestodes (SC/70/ASW/06). The Committee **notes** that one whale with a substantial cestode infestation was in good body condition and that nothing else about the whale indicated poor health. The Committee **commends** scientists from the Russian delegation for using both morphological and molecular characterisations of parasites, important for precise parasite identification. Given the recent mortality events in gray whales, the Committee **notes** the importance of further parasitological studies.

An update on the contaminants sampling of gray whale tissues was provided (SC/70/ASW/12). The Committee **notes** variability in the heavy metals contaminant data and suggests the differences may be due to not controlling for sex or age in the analysis, or dietary shifts and **welcomes** plans for future analyses.

Attention: C, CG Russia, R
Given recent mortality events in Eastern North Pacific (ENP) gray whales, the Committee:

(1) ***Thanks*** *scientists from the Russian Federation for conducting studies of feeding ecology, health and distribution of Northern Feeding Group (NFG) gray whales; and*
(2) ***Requests*** *countries that border the range of ENP gray whales continue to monitor abundance, calving, strandings, health and environmental variables that affect gray whales (i.e., ice coverage and benthic prey abundance in the Arctic).*

7.1.4 Common minke whale stocks off East Greenland

In 2024, 13 minke whales were struck and landed (10 females, three males). In 2025, 16 minke whales were struck and landed (10 males, six females).

7.1.5 Common minke whale stocks off West Greenland

In 2024, 130 minke whales were struck (88 females, 36 males, and six of unknown sex). One hundred and twenty-two (122) were landed, and eight were struck and lost. In 2025, 127 minke whales were struck (91 females, 26 males, and 10 unknown sex). One hundred and eighteen (118) were landed, and 9 were struck and lost.

7.1.6 Fin whales off West Greenland

In 2024, three fin whales were struck (one male, one female, one unknown sex). Two were landed, and one was stuck and lost. In 2025, two fin whales were struck and landed (one female, one male).

7.1.7 Humpback whales off West Greenland

In 2024, two humpback whales were struck (one male, one female). One was landed, and one was struck and lost. In 2025, two humpback whales were struck and landed (two females).

7.1.8 Humpback whales off St. Vincent and The Grenadines

One humpback whale was struck and landed in 2024, and another in 2025. Both whales were females. None was struck and lost in either year.

Attention: C, CG
*Reiterating past recommendations, the Committee **recommends** collaborative sharing and integration of data from all ASW countries (e.g., photo-ID catalogues, genetic samples) to inform conservation and management actions.*

7.2 Biennial work plan

The work plan can be found in Annex D (item 3).

8. WHALE STOCKS NOT SUBJECT TO DIRECTED TAKES BY CONTRACTING GOVERNMENTS

An updated process for undertaking both Comprehensive (the first time an assessment is completed for a species/region) and In-depth Assessments (subsequent assessments for a species/region) was agreed in 2018 (Donovan, 2018; IWC, 2020a, p.15) and includes two phases.

(1) The pre-assessment phase (carried out by, for example, NH, SH or CMP in an unspecified timeframe) collates available data and analyses that can be used in an assessment (stock structure hypotheses, time series of abundance and removals, and relevant biological and ecological information).
(2) The assessment phase (carried out by IA or IST in >2 years) refines and parameterises initial conceptual stock-structure hypotheses in cooperation with SDDNA, incorporates abundance estimates approved by SAS, determines population models and scenarios, runs simulations, and presents the results.

Conclusions of the Assessment can then be added to the IWC Status of Stocks webpage.

8.1 Comprehensive and In-depth Assessments

8.1.1 Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific humpback whales

The Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific humpback whales started in 2016 and includes IWC-funded intersessional workshops held in 2017 (IWC, 2018b) and 2024 (Palka *et al*., 2024). Since 2016, significant progress has been made: input data were updated, further analyses conducted, and the population dynamics model refined.

At SC69B, the Committee expressed gratitude to all contributing organisations and researchers for their data collection and analysis efforts, enabling the completion of the Comprehensive Assessment, pending validation of the software and review of the abundance estimates.

During SC70, most abundance estimates were reviewed by SAS (Item 11), necessitating an update to the assessment results using these approved estimates. A comprehensive study of the Eastern North Pacific humpback whale genetic population structure by Eichenberger *et al*. (in review) confirms the current stock-structure hypotheses.

Finalisation of the Assessment is scheduled based on approved abundance estimates, developing comprehensive documentation and archiving the data, models and results during 2026 to 2028, with the results to be presented at SC71 (Annex J, item 11).

The Committee received an IWC contract report (SC/70/IA/07) that evaluates the feasibility of incorporating satellite telemetry data into the IWC Comprehensive Assessment process using North Pacific humpback whales as a case study (Item 6.3). The results were broadly consistent with existing lines of evidence from photo-ID and genetic studies. The Committee **agrees** this report satisfies the IWC contract and anticipates discussion of the application of these techniques in subsequent In-depth Assessments.

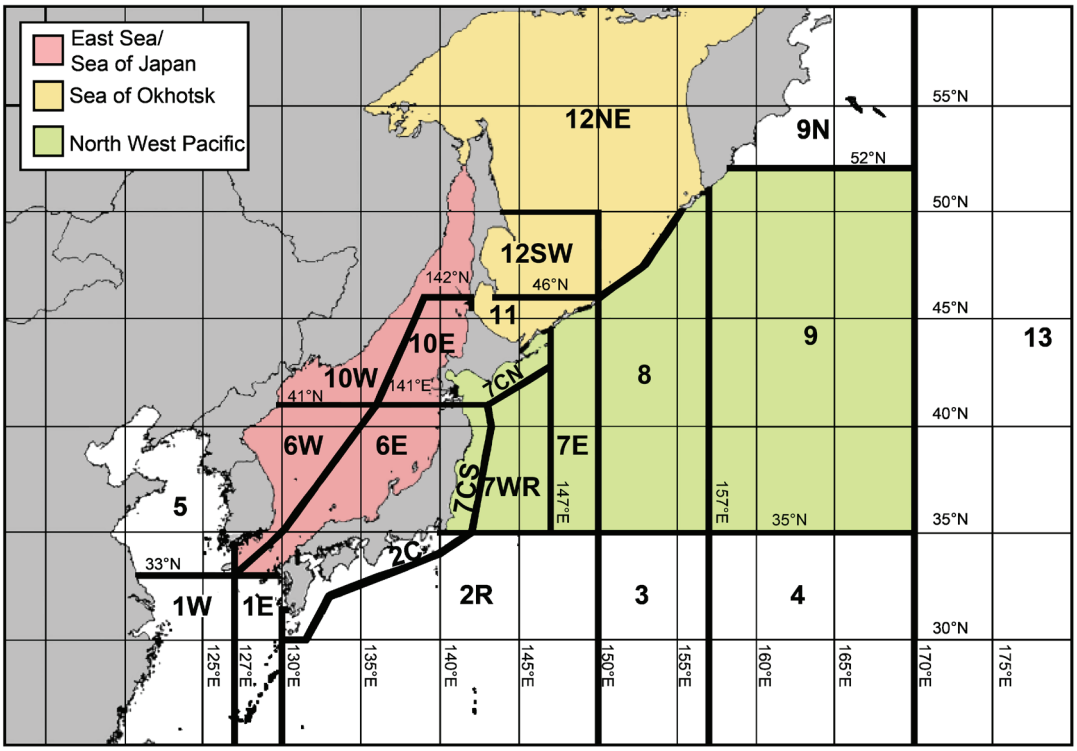

Fig. 1. The 22 sub-areas used in the In-depth Assessment of Western North Pacific minke whales.

8.1.2 In-depth Assessment of western North Pacific common minke whales

After Japan withdrew from the IWC in 2019, the Revised Management Procedure (RMP) Implementation Review for western North Pacific common minke whales was discontinued. However, due to high bycatch levels, especially near the Republic of Korea and Japan, and Japan's resumed commercial whaling in its EEZ, the Committee noted at SC68B that an In-depth Assessment was crucial. This Assessment was to focus on the conservation implications of regional removals and the status of the J-stock.

Three stock structure hypotheses (A, B and E) were developed and evaluated extensively by the Committee in 2019 (e.g., IWC, 2020b) and revisited again at this meeting. The hypotheses are (see Fig. 1 for a map of the sub-areas):

(1) Hypothesis A: there is a single J-stock that occurs to the west of Japan (sub-areas 1W, 1E, 5, 6W, 6E, 10W and 10E) and the Pacific coast of Japan (sub-areas 2C, 7CS, 7CN, 11 and 12SW), and a single O-stock in sub-areas to the east and north of Japan (2C, 2R, 3, 4, 7CS, 7CN, 7WR, 7E, 8, 9, 9N, 10E, 11, 12SW, 12NE and 13);
(2) Hypothesis B: as for hypothesis A, but there is a third stock (Y) that resides around the Korean peninsula (sub-areas 1W, 5 and 6W) and overlaps with the J-stock in the southern part of sub-area 6W; and
(3) Hypothesis E: there are four stocks, referred to as Y, J, P and O, two of which (Y and J) occur to the west of Japan, and three of which (J, P and O) are found to the east of Japan and in the Okhotsk Sea. Stock P is a coastal stock, with some dispersal between stocks J and P and between stocks P and O.[3]

After extensively reviewing previous and new information on genetics (Annex J, item 7.3.2.1), parent-offspring pairs (Annex J, item 7.3.2.2), and length and age data (Annex J, item 7.3.2.3), the Committee **agrees** that the assignment of plausibility to the three stock structure hypotheses has not changed and that all three should continue to be considered in the simulation trials.

After the IWC-funded November 2025 workshop (SC/70/REP/12) and several in-person and virtual Steering Group meetings since SC69B, the Committee **agrees** that almost all trials were conditioned satisfactorily for all three stock hypotheses and that this is sufficient to enable robust conclusions to be drawn from the trials (Annex J, item 7.3.1). Future projections on predicted abundance estimates were made for six scenarios involving continued future removals, ranging from no removals to various combinations of bycatch from the Republic of Korea and Japan, as well as Japanese commercial catches (Annex J, item 7.3.3).

[3]Although the stock names ("J", "O", "Y") are the same between hypotheses, they do not mean the same.

This is the most complex In-depth Assessment that the Committee has conducted thus far. The Committee **agrees** that it has completed the In-depth Assessment of the western North Pacific common minke whales with a focus on the effects of bycatch, particularly on the J-stock, taking into account Japan's whaling in its waters using domestically set catch limits. Finalisation of the In-depth Assessment of the Western North Pacific common minke whale is scheduled to include comprehensive documentation and archiving from 2026 to 2028, with the results to be presented at SC71 (Annex J, item 11).

Notwithstanding the lack of consensus on the relative plausibility of the three stock hypotheses (in particular stock hypothesis E) and some differences among the stock hypotheses in the definitions of what comprises J-stock by hypotheses, the consistency of the conclusions across hypotheses allows the Committee to draw the following conservation and management conclusions.

Attention: SC, C, CC, CG, G
The Sub-Committee has completed the in-depth assessment for the western North Pacific minke whales, which include projections under continued bycatch and commercial catches by Japan. The Sub-Committee:

(1) concluded that J-stock is heavily depleted at present, recently this is primarily due to bycatch in coastal waters (Yellow Sea, East Sea/Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean east of Japan);
(2) concluded that J-stock will not recover and may decline in future if bycatch rates remain equal to current levels;
(3) encouraged Japan, the Republic of Korea, and China, as a matter of urgency, to substantially reduce bycatch in their coastal waters, to allow J-stock to recover; and
(4) encouraged continuing monitoring of both bycatches and abundance of the western North Pacific minke whales, especially those in coastal waters and the collection of genetic and biological samples.

The Committee **thanks** de Moor, Allison, Punt, Wilberg, Tiedemann and Katara for the enormous amount of work they have put into developing and conditioning the trials over many years, without which it would not have been possible for the Committee to draw these conclusions regarding the current and future status of the western North Pacific minke whales.

With the completion of the assessment, the Committee began discussions on how to convey results through the SOSI project by stock/region, while highlighting the trends for J-stock, given that animals from this stock are taken as bycatch in the coastal waters of Japan, the Republic of Korea and perhaps China. An ICG involving members from SAS and IA was created to address this and present options at SC71 (Annex O).

8.1.3 In-depth Assessment of Antarctic blue whales

The In-depth Assessment of Antarctic blue whales began in 2024 (IWC, 2024). This year, the Committee reviewed Rand *et al*. (in review), which incorporates recommendations from SC69B to produce an improved theta-logistic population model fit to abundance estimates from IWC/IDCR/SOWER (Branch, 2007) and JARPA/JARPA II line-transect surveys (Hamabe *et al*., 2023), as well as photo-ID mark-recaptures.

The Committee notes the difficulties in defining the value of the maximum productivity (Annex J, item 10) and notes that, while age structure and environmental stochasticity are typically important, they were unnecessary for this single Antarctic blue whale stock. This is due to the severity of depletion, as the small population is currently experiencing exponential growth. The Committee **agrees** that the approach used in Rand *et al*. (in review) is the best available approach for an In-depth Assessment of Antarctic blue whales, given the current data.

The base model estimated a maximum intrinsic growth rate (r_{max}) for Antarctic blue whales of 0.045 (0.016-0.073). Their estimated pre-whaling abundance was 206,000 (168,000-276,000). The population size in 1973 (the year of the last recorded catch) was estimated to be 418 (147-1,100), which was 0.20% (0.008-0.42%) of their estimated pre-whaling abundance.

Attention: SC, C, R, S
*The Committee **agrees** that the In-depth Assessment of Antarctic blue whales is complete, pending final documentation that includes reviewing an abundance estimate and validating the assessment model by the Secretariat.*

*The Committee **draws attention** to the conclusion that this population is still severely depleted. The base model estimated the population to be 4,000 (1,870-8,400) in 2024, which is 1.9% (0.7-4.8%) of their estimated pre-whaling abundance. It further notes that, while Antarctic blue whales have continued to increase since the last recorded catches in 1973, they are still at levels far below their pre-whaling abundance. Continued monitoring of this population is essential.*

Finalisation of the In-depth Assessment of Antarctic blue whales is scheduled to include comprehensive documentation and archiving from 2026 to 2028, with the results to be presented at SC71.

8.1.4 Biennial work plan

The biennial work plans and ICGs required to finalise the Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific humpback whales and the In-depth Assessments of both western North Pacific common minke whales and Antarctic blue whales can be found in Annex J (item 11).

As noted in CMP (Item 9.1.2.6), data collection and analyses related to Franciscana dolphins are nearing the end of the pre-assessment stage. A Comprehensive Assessment is anticipated to start in 2026 or 2027. To expedite this timeline, members of the legacy project and IA will collaborate with CMP members, aiming to start the assessment phase and report on their advancements at SC71.

As noted under Item 8.2.7, data collection and analyses related to North Atlantic humpback whales are in the pre-assessment stage. An In-depth Assessment is anticipated to start at SC71. To expedite the assessment and subsequent Implementation Review, members of IA and IST will collaborate with NH members during the pre-assessment stage.

8.2 Potential new assessments: progress on previous recommendations and prioritised work plan

8.2.1 Non-Antarctic blue whales in the Southern Hemisphere (including NIO populations)

The Committee is preparing for a Comprehensive Assessment of non-Antarctic Southern Hemisphere blue whales. In the Southern Hemisphere and Indian Ocean, blue whales are primarily distinguished by song-type characteristically heard in their core range. Currently recognised populations occur in the south-east Pacific Ocean (SEPO) from Galapagos to Chile; north-west Indian Ocean (NWIO) from Oman to Madagascar; central Indian Ocean (CIO) from Sri Lanka to the southern Indian Ocean; south-west Indian Ocean (SWIO) from Madagascar to Kerguelen Islands; south-east Indian Ocean (SEIO) from Tasmania westward to Indonesia; and south-west Pacific Ocean (SWPO) from New Zealand to Tasmania.

The Committee received preliminary abundance estimates for the SEPO (Chile), SEIO (Australia), and SWPO (New Zealand) populations based on bilateral mark-recapture analyses of photo-ID data from the Southern Hemisphere Blue Whale Catalogue (SHBWC). After incorporation of feedback from the Committee, the abundance estimates will be submitted for review by SAS in the intersessional period and presented as final abundance estimates at SC71.

8.2.1.1 Southwest Pacific Ocean Pygmy Blue Whales

Results of the bilateral mark-recapture analyses from two feeding grounds of Chilean blue whales (SEPO) indicate a nonsignificant decline of 0.9% per annum from 2004-17 for the southern site (Isla Grande de Chiloé, 42°S) and a stable population from 2006-19 for the northern site (Isla Chañaral, 29°S). Summing the populations for the two sites suggests a non-significant decline of 0.6% per annum from 2006-17, and an overall decrease of 6.9% over the period 2006-2017 (SC/70/SH/19). Despite the non-significance, the Committee **expresses concern** about a potential decline, because this is the only population currently not showing an increase. The Committee concludes that further research on population trends is required. Noting that inclusion of additional data from the end of the capture period increased model robustness during the last iteration of the analysis, the Committee **recommends** the inclusion of photo-ID data from 2024-2026 to obtain a more precise estimate of the trend.

8.2.1.2 Southeast Indian Ocean Pygmy Blue Whales

The preliminary abundance estimate for the SEIO pygmy blue whales (Australia) indicates an increase in the population during 2000-2022. However, this increase is likely related to capture probabilities rather than true population growth, as only a subset of the population was sampled (SC/70/SH/16). To increase the precision of the estimate**,** the Committee **recommends** the inclusion of an additional 100 photo-IDs that have recently become available.

8.2.1.3 Southwest Pacific Ocean Pygmy Blue Whales

The preliminary mark-recapture abundance estimate for SWPO pygmy blue whales (New Zealand) suggests that the sampled population increased rapidly from 2008 to 2018. However, this is not interpretable as a demographic trend, but rather as an accumulation in the number of animals joining the observable near-shore population, as sampling effort accrued over time and space. The modelled trend curve was still increasing in 2018, suggesting that sampling coverage was still incomplete at that time (SC/70/SH/19). Therefore, more photo-ID data from New Zealand is required to improve the estimate, and the Committee **recommends** inclusion of data from satellite telemetry to better understand SWPO blue whale movement patterns and distribution around New Zealand.

The Committee will progress the refinement of the mark-recapture abundance analyses of non-Antarctic Southern Hemisphere blue whale populations. Revised abundance estimates for SEPO, SWPO and SEIO will be presented and reviewed at SC71.

Attention: SC, R, CG New Zealand

To increase the number of photo-IDs and matches of SWPO non-Antarctic Southern Hemisphere blue whales required for refinement of the mark-recapture abundance analysis and additional robustness of abundance estimates of the SWPO population, the Committee ***recommends:***

(1) Submission of additional blue whale photo-ID data from photo collection holders in New Zealand to the Southern Hemisphere Blue Whale Catalogue (SHBWC);
(2) Regular collection of photo-ID data of blue whales around New Zealand to increase recapture rates; and
(3) Satellite telemetry of blue whales around New Zealand to determine movement patterns and site fidelity.

Attention: SC, R
To facilitate the completion of the pre-assessments of Southern Hemisphere non-Antarctic blue whale populations, the Committee ***recommends:***

(1) Development of the Southern Hemisphere Blue Whale Catalogue (SHBWC) should continue with, in order of priority:
  (a) inclusion of additional Australian (SEIO) data;
  (b) inclusion of additional Chilean (SEPO) data sets, prioritising data from the latest capture period (2024-2026), followed by data from 2022-2023 and 2018-2021;
  (c) inclusion of Sri Lanka (CIO) data; and
  (d) inclusion of Kenyan and Madagascar (SWIO) datasets.
(2) Inclusion of additional datasets into the continued intersessional mark-recapture analyses of SEIO and SEPO blue whales for refinement of abundance estimates; and
(3) Provision of abundance estimates to the SAS Sub-Committee for review prior to SC71.

The Committee received two analyses of biological information from historical whaling data. SC/70/SH/06 uses catch-at-age data from extracted earplugs to estimate natural survival in pygmy blue whales. SC/70/SH/05 models relationships between age and ovarian corpora to estimate reproductive parameters for different populations of blue whales. These demographic parameters can be useful in future age-structured assessments of pygmy blue whales.

8.2.2 Southern Hemisphere right whales not the subject of CMPs

In 2016, the Committee agreed to commence gathering pre-assessment information to progress toward a regional Comprehensive Assessment of Southern Hemisphere right whales (IWC, 2017b). In 2026, the Committee was provided with updates on regional population structure, trends, movement, distribution, foraging ecology, health, and collaborative efforts, which will inform the In-depth Assessment of the species across its range in the Southern Hemisphere.

The Committee recognises the importance of collaborative efforts to coordinate, augment and expedite the delivery of scientific information to inform species and population assessments. It commends the highly collaborative efforts of researchers under the auspices of the Southern Right Whale Consortium (SRWC; SC/70/SH/03, SC/70/SH/14) and the IWC's Southern Ocean Research Partnership (IWC-SORP; SC/70/SH/08-SH/09, SC/70/SH/11). The Committee **recommends** the continuation of these consortia and encourages continued research on southern right whale demography, health, foraging ecology, connectivity and the impacts of environmental change, including climate change, as well as data sharing, collaborative analyses and syntheses of data, and development and standardisation of methods.

The Committee welcomes the new information provided for Southern Hemisphere right whale populations in the waters off Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and in offshore areas. The Committee recognises that long-term data series from repeated aerial and land-based surveys that collect demographic information using sightings and photo-ID are fundamental for population assessment and to detect change over time. The Committee **reiterates** the importance of continuing and maintaining these programmes and associated photo-ID catalogues (e.g., Australian Right Whale Photo-Identification Catalogue [ARWPIC]), noting that some have been running annually for 50 years.

8.2.2.1 Australia

Two populations of southern right whales are recognised in Australia: a population in the southwest, and a small, distinct population in the southeast, listed as Endangered under the Australian Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The Committee welcomes new information concerning the southwestern population stemming from long-term aerial surveys (1976-2025) and land-based surveys (1991-2026).

Analysis of photo-ID data from long-term aerial surveys of the southwest Australia southern right whale population shows no increase in cow–calf pair numbers since 2016 and an approximately 74% decline in unaccompanied adults since 2011 (SC/70/SH/17). Additional analyses (SC/70/SH/09) also indicate that population recovery has slowed and may now be plateauing, with declines in annual births since 2016 and an approximate 66% reduction in unaccompanied individuals.

Land-based surveys (n=41 in 2025) at the Head of Bight calving ground (SC/70/SH/18) sighted the third highest number of cow-calf pairs (n=72) but low numbers of unaccompanied adults, consistent with population trends observed in aerial surveys. Since 2015, mean apparent calving intervals have been longer relative to earlier decades, coinciding with changing environmental conditions on high and mid-latitude feeding grounds (e.g., declining sea ice concentration; Charlton *et al.,* 2026).

Despite earlier, post-exploitation exponential growth, the southwest Australia southern right whale population size remains well below pre-whaling levels, raising concerns about the impact of environmental change on southern right whale population demography and individual health.

The Committee welcomes new information from satellite tagging and biopsy sampling (SC/70/SH/10) that shows southwestern Australian southern right whales have diverse foraging ground associations, spanning mid and high latitudes, including shared foraging grounds with the South African population in the Kerguelen and Crozet Islands, and with the New Zealand population south of Australia (Riekkola *et al*., 2025).

8.2.2.2 New Zealand

The Committee welcomes new information about the New Zealand southern right whale (tohorā) population that winters around New Zealand's sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands. Data from drone-based photogrammetry, stable isotope analysis, and genetic sexing found that females with calves showed the highest body condition and adult males the lowest, likely reflecting the energetic costs associated with breeding behaviour. Body condition declined in 2022, coincident with a prolonged La Niña event and a decline in population growth rate, suggesting climate-driven changes in prey availability (Duran-Irigoyen *et al.,* in review).

Satellite telemetry provides important information on migratory routes, timing and cues, as well as feeding ground fidelity (Riekkola *et al*., in review a; b). New Zealand southern right whales exhibit substantial east to west movements from their wintering grounds to feeding grounds (mid and high latitude) that are shared across multiple breeding populations (Riekkola *et al.,* 2025; in review c; Germishuizen *et al*., in review). Environmental cues influence both departure timing (early or late) and route selection (a direct westward route or a longer, indirect high-latitude route), and the population exhibits some plasticity in foraging behaviour. The Committee **agrees** that further work is needed to understand behavioural plasticity in southern right whale foraging ecology and its implications for demographics and health under different climate scenarios. This work should also consider the influence of social learning and cultural connectivity (Garland *et al*., 2025).

8.2.2.3 South Africa Right Whales

Updates were provided on the long-term monitoring (since 1969, with photo-ID since 1979) of the South African southern right whale population, which indicates continued extended calving intervals, and a persistently low number of non-calving adults along the coast, indicative of altered migration patterns (SC/70/SH/01; Vermeulen *et al*., 2025). Similarly, data from these surveys suggest shifts in peak abundance timing and residency patterns in the South African calving ground, including earlier departure of known females. Updates were also provided on the mark-recapture modelling work for this population. Where technical aspects were referred to the Stock Abundance and Status Steering Group (SAS-SG), biological aspects of the model indicate increased interannual variability in abundance and calf production (SC/70/SH/02Rev1). Future research is encouraged to assess the energetic thresholds that influence migration patterns and timing, as well as reproductive success. Moreover, continued development of models that can be applied across Southern Hemisphere right whale populations and species is also encouraged.

Further work was presented on a decadal decline in maternal body condition (~23%) in South African southern right whales (Vermeulen *et al*., 2023). There is a strong link between declining body condition, reduced reproductive output (Vermeulen *et al*., 2025), shifts in foraging strategy (van den Berg *et al*., 2021) and environmental change (e.g., sea ice declines and impacts on Antarctic krill; Germishuizen *et al*., 2024). Therefore, the Committee **recommends** further multi-population research integrating long-term photo-ID data with photogrammetry, endocrine and visual health metrics to assess temporal trends in body condition and their links to environmental variability and population dynamics.

The Committee welcomes new information supporting unrecognised, extreme longevity of Balaenid whales (Breed *et al*., 2024) and reproductive physiology (Shuttleworth *et al.,* 2025). These findings have important implications for understanding reproductive timing, fecundity and population growth, particularly in the context of recent declines in reproductive success.

8.2.2.4 Offshore Areas

The Committee recognises the increasing importance of passive acoustic monitoring for studying cetaceans' acoustic behaviour and the provision of large amounts of continuous, long-term and seasonally unbiased data. It therefore encourages continued development of detectors and methods to augment analyses.

The Committee welcomes evidence suggesting that the islands at 60°30'-60°48'S, 44°25'-46°43'W - Scotia Sea system is an important multi-use habitat for southern right whales (and other cetacean species), including feeding, social interactions and offshore mating behaviour, supporting the hypothesis that conception may occur during the summer foraging period (SC/70/SH/15). This region overlaps with krill fishing activity and is sensitive to climate driven-changes in sea ice and productivity.

8.2.2.5 Population and Environmental Changes

The Committee **expresses concern** that multiple data streams provide consistent evidence that Southern Hemisphere right whales are negatively impacted by climate-driven variability in the Southern Ocean. Demographic indicators in several regions suggest slowing recovery, reduced calving rates, alterations in migratory behaviour and declining body condition.

Attention: C, CG, SC, R

*The Committee **expresses concern** at emerging signals of negative population-wide impacts across all southern right whale populations. These include:*

(1) Demographic change, including:

(a) Slowed or plateauing population growth rates, while abundances are estimated to be at levels well below historic abundances;
(b) Reduced birth rates as a result of elevated calving intervals; and
(c) Continued low coastal prevalence of unaccompanied adults.

(2) Changes in foraging ecology and migration strategies, reflecting broader ecosystem variation, for example, declines in sea-ice concentration likely resulting in decreased krill availability, and mid-latitude shifts in predominant prey species; and
(3) Ecosystem changes that drive declining health, including reduced body condition and signs of increased interactions with human activities.

*The Committee **expresses concern** that environmental change, including climate change, is likely the main driver of these shifts in southern right whale demography, foraging ecology and health. It **recommends** ongoing, targeted research to inform stock assessments for Southern Hemisphere right whale populations.*

Attention: SC, R, G

*The Committee **recognises** the importance of collaborative efforts to coordinate, augment and expedite the delivery of scientific information to inform species and population assessments. Therefore, the Committee:*

***(1)** **Recommends** the continuation of collaborative initiatives, such as the Southern Right Whale Consortium (SRWC) and the IWC's Southern Ocean Research Partnership (IWC-SORP), to inform an In-depth Assessment of southern right whales across the species range; and*
***(2)** **Encourages** continued research on southern right whale demography, health, foraging ecology, connectivity, and the impacts of environmental change.*

*The Committee **welcomes** updates at SC71 and **recommends** ongoing cross-consultation with other relevant sub-committees, such as CMP, E, PH and SDDNA.*

Attention: CG, SC, R, G

*The Committee **recommends:***

(1) Continuation of long-term demographic monitoring programmes, including photo-ID and genetic monitoring, photogrammetry, sampling for steroid hormone and stable isotope analyses, and the maintenance of associated catalogues, across all Southern Hemisphere right whale populations;
(2) Methodological advancements that support southern right whale monitoring continue, including the development of techniques, such as drone-based and autonomous systems;
(3) Development of standardised protocols for all southern right whale populations, including steroid hormone and visual health assessments to monitor the impacts of environmental change on health and physiology, including climate change, and relating these to downstream impacts on inter alia migration, feeding behaviour and demography;
(4) Continued advances in sample and data processing workflows to: (a) facilitate rapid analysis and downstream application of results at appropriate timescales; (b) remove existing bottlenecks in the delivery of results; and (c) inform further research, management and conservation decisions; and
(5) Ongoing development of models that can be applied across Southern Hemisphere right whale populations and species.

*The Committee also **recommends** the integration of multidisciplinary data streams to provide:*

(1) Multifaceted evidence to inform stock assessments of Southern Hemisphere populations;
(2) A holistic understanding of individual health and foraging, movement and connectivity, and population-level outcomes; and
(3) Inform management and conservation decisions for this species.

The Committee invites updates at SC71.

Attention: SC, R
*In order to progress regional population assessment for southern right whales, the Committee **encourages** further work on photo-ID data reconciliation, **recommends** that an improved analysis be developed intersessionally that could be referred to the SAS Steering Group for future review, and **agrees** on the following priorities for further model development:*

(1) Renewed evaluation of the South African photo-ID dataset to provide the ratio of the observed average proportion of grey blazed adults to the average proportion of grey blazed calves;
(2) Further interrogation of the south-eastern Australian dataset for comparison with, or integration into, the south-western Australian model and its outputs;
(3) Consolidation of Australian datasets prior to additional model runs, noting the current approximate 12-year backlog in south-western Australian data processing;
(4) Preparation of the South-West Atlantic datasets for integration into the common model;
(5) Capacity building within the south-west Atlantic region to support dataset integration and model application; and
(6) Obtaining comparative demographic estimates across the three key wintering grounds, South Africa, the South-west Atlantic and Australia, especially south-eastern Australia, given concerns about that population, given its slow rate of growth.

*The Committee **welcomes** updates at SC71 and **recommends** ongoing cross-consultation with other relevant sub-committees and Standing Working Groups, such as PH and SAS.*

8.2.3 Southern Hemisphere fin whales

The Committee commenced a pre-assessment of Southern Hemisphere fin whales in 2026. Fin whales are increasingly reported in many locations around the Southern Hemisphere, suggesting the onset of recovery of this species. A pre-assessment is therefore timely and important. Knowledge of population structure is essential for a Comprehensive Assessment, yet information on fine-scale structuring within the Southern Hemisphere is very limited. Currently, fin whale song, mitochondrial DNA and stable isotope evidence are used for developing hypotheses on population structure. Additionally, satellite telemetry and photo-ID will provide information on population connectivity and migratory connections.

Attention: SC, R
*To gain information on population structure required for the pre-assessment of Southern Hemisphere fin whales, the Committee **recommends**:*

(1) Analysis of Southern Hemisphere fin whale song structure in areas with current data gaps, such as the South Pacific and Pacific sector of the Southern Ocean;
(2) Applying whole-genome sequencing and mitochondrial and nuclear DNA analyses on existing Southern Hemisphere fin whale tissue samples and further biopsy sample collection across feeding and breeding areas; and
(3) Satellite telemetry to connect Southern Ocean feeding grounds with wintering areas.

The Committee invites updates at SC71.

8.2.3.1 Feasibility of a Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific Fin Whales

Given the announcement by the Government of Japan of commercial catches of North Pacific fin whales in its EEZ and territorial waters, the Commission, via the Science Liaison Group (SLG), requested the Committee to advise on the feasibility of conducting a Comprehensive Assessment (SC/70/O/21).

The Committee began summarising the data needed to conduct a Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific fin whales (Annex J, Appendix 5). Eastern and central Pacific data are available (e.g., IWC-POWER), although these data have yet to be fully analysed. However, information and data available to the Committee for the Western Pacific, where catches take place, are sparse and/or based on old analytical methods. Therefore, the Committee notes that collaboration with the Government of Japan and Japanese scientists is essential for it to carry out a full assessment of the potential effects of commercial whaling on North Pacific fin whales.

If instructed by the Commission to undertake a Comprehensive Assessment, the Committee's approach through its relevant sub-committees is summarised below:

- The Committee starts the pre-assessment phase, which includes gathering all available data and analyses and identifying an initial conceptual stock-structure hypothesis or hypotheses. This includes the formulation of a specific data request from the Committee to be provided to the Secretariat, which could then approach the Government of Japan on behalf of the Commission.
- If/when it is considered that sufficient data/analyses are available, the Committee starts the assessment phase. This entails refining and parameterising the initial conceptual stock-structure hypotheses, determining population models and scenarios, incorporating approved abundance estimates, running the simulations, and presenting the results.

- Once the pre-assessment phase is considered complete (there is no official time limit, but two years would be the minimum), the assessment phase requires a minimum of two years, including two intersessional workshops and a meeting of the Committee. This is based on the provision of sufficient resources in terms of funding and personnel. This ambitious timeline would require cooperation from the Government of Japan and Japanese scientists.

The Committee advises that, for it to undertake a formal Comprehensive Assessment as described above, it requires considerable data, time, resources and, desirably, collaborative work with Japanese and other range state scientists. This approach, following its usual assessment guidelines, would allow the Committee to provide robust advice on the effect of removals in the long-term.

However, if the Commission requires short-term advice, the Committee notes that a 'Report from the External Panel requested to review the proposal from Japanese scientists for catch limits of fin whales for Japanese commercial whaling' is publicly available on the Japanese Government's website.[4] If the Commission considers that an *ad hoc* short-term approach is appropriate, the Committee advises that, if instructed, it could form an ICG to review the External Panel report. The ICG could report to SC71 for consideration by the full Committee before presentation to the Commission. The report of the External Panel includes abstracts of the papers available to it (see Appendix). The Committee notes that, should an ICG be formed, its work would be greatly assisted if the full papers could be made available by the Government of Japan. Collaboration of Japanese scientists with the ICG would be valuable if it proves possible. The Committee draws the attention of the SLG to the above options.

8.2.4 North Pacific blue whales

In 2016, the Committee assessed the eastern North Pacific population of blue whales as 'almost recovered' (IWC, 2017b) and has been evaluating the data available to assess blue whales in the less studied central and western North Pacific. The Committee continues its multi-year data assembly towards an In-depth Assessment of Central and Western North Pacific blue whales.

The Committee received a comprehensive global compilation of blue whale strandings (Randrup *et al*., in review). The highest frequencies of strandings in the North Pacific were from the US West Coast. Reporting rates have increased over time, likely due to both rising whale abundance and improved stranding network infrastructure. For the Central and Western North Pacific, the database contains records primarily from California and Baja California, with a few records from Alaska, Japan and Taiwan. No records were available from Russia.

The Committee also received information on North Pacific blue whale sightings in the eastern North Pacific high seas and the western North Pacific from an IWC-POWER cruise (*SC*/70/REP/05) and Japanese dedicated cetacean sighting surveys (SC/70/O/11 and SC/70/O/12) (Annex L, item 2.1).

Attention: SC
*The Committee **reiterates** that an abundance estimate for CWNP blue whales using data from IWC-POWER and JARPN/JARPNII surveys is critical for the North Pacific blue whale assessment (e.g., SC2425). The Committee looks forward to receiving these estimates from IWC-POWER and **encourages** the Government of Japan to make available any abundance estimates from the JARPN/JARPNII surveys, with a view to reviewing these prior to SC71 in preparation for an In-depth Assessment.*

8.2.5 North Atlantic right whales

In response to the Committee's request, the US provided updates on North Atlantic right whales (SC/70/NH/01Rev1, SC/70/NH/04Rev1). Ongoing management measures by the US and Canada appear to have halted the steep decline observed between 2011 and 2019. The 2024 median abundance estimate is 384 individuals (95% CI: 375-394). Despite this positive trend, only 163 females were estimated to remain in the population as of 2024, and total mortalities continue to exceed long-term recovery thresholds. An updated Population Viability Analysis shows reduced extinction risk, but the quasi-extinction probability remains higher than targets for population recovery goals. Continuous monitoring in both countries is essential to track individual health and maintain accurate population estimates.

As of March 2026, the UME declared in 2017 is ongoing and has affected 170 individuals (43 deaths, 40 serious injuries, 87 morbidities), with entanglement as the primary cause of serious injury and morbidity. To reduce vessel strike risk, NOAA held a workshop in 2024 on avoidance technologies. Currently, mariners receive AIS safety alerts when transiting seasonal speed zones, supplemented by passive acoustic and visual monitoring in some areas. Research into satellite-based detection and advanced tracking tags is also underway. While speed regulations remain in effect, NOAA has requested public comment (closing 2 June 2026) on potential deregulatory speed zone modifications. NOAA also collaborates with the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team to refine mitigation on trap/pot and gillnet fisheries and continues investing in on-demand (ropeless) fishing gear (SC/70/HIM/04) (Annex L, item 2.2).

[4] https://www.jfa.maff.go.jp/e/whale/ (accessed 19 May 2026).

The Committee notes that an IWC Status of Stocks Initiative (SOSI) webpage is under development for North Atlantic right whales.

Attention: SC, CG, R

*The Committee **reiterates** its long-standing concern (SC2331, SC2426, SC2434) over the status of North Atlantic right whales, and the urgent need for the US and Canada to work towards eliminating human-caused North Atlantic right whale mortality, the primary sources of which are entanglements and vessel strikes.*

*The Committee **expresses concern** regarding recent and proposed changes to legal and regulatory protections for North Atlantic right whales in the United States, given the species' endangered status and ongoing UME. It **encourages** the Government of the United States not to weaken regulatory measures intended to reduce vessel strikes and entanglement risk.*

8.2.6 Rice's whales

The Rice's whale was only recently recognised as a species by the Society for Marine Mammalogy Taxonomy Committee and was classified as critically endangered by the IUCN (Rosel *et al*., 2022; Annex P, Appendix 6). It is the only year-round resident baleen whale in the Gulf of Mexico, with the best estimate of abundance of 51 (20-129) individuals based on 2017-2018 survey data (Garrison *et al.,* 2020). This estimate has been reviewed and endorsed by SAS (IWC, 2022, Annex E, item 11.1.10). The Committee continues to express serious concern about this stock (Recommendations SC2436, SC2339, SC22123).

The Committee welcomes the comprehensive update on Rice's whale research (Aichinger Dias *et al*., 2025). Suitable habitat for Rice's whale in the Gulf of Mexico is predicted between 100-400m, centred along the 220m isobath. Surveys and genetic sampling confirm the species' presence in the western Gulf. Passive acoustic monitoring has confirmed the species' presence in Mexican waters, confirming that Rice's whale is a transboundary species with México (Soldevilla *et al*., 2024). Long-term photo-ID identified 35 individuals (including new IDs not included in Aichinger Dias *et al*., 2026; Annex M, item 3.7), and new research has provided insights into dive behaviour, energetics and potential prey. A recent analysis of a chromosome-level genome assembly (Lin *et al*., 2025) shows that Rice's whale represents an older lineage than either of the currently recognised Bryde's whale subspecies, confirming its recognition as a distinct species.

The Committee **expresses deep concern** regarding recent exemptions from provisions of the US Endangered Species Act for oil and gas activities in the Gulf of Mexico, which reduce protections for Rice's whales. Further recommendations and discussion can be found under Item 14.8.2.

The Committee notes that an IWC Status of Stocks Initiative (SOSI) webpage is under development for Rice's whale (Annex L, item 2.3).

8.2.7 North Atlantic humpback whales

A Comprehensive Assessment of North Atlantic humpback whales was completed in 2002 (IWC, 2003. In 2018, the Committee agreed to consider a range-wide In-depth Assessment (IWC, 2019b, Item 8.8). Progress on collecting and evaluating available data was reviewed at an intersessional workshop held prior to SC70.

The Committee **endorses** the Report from the Workshop to Advance the In-depth Assessment of North Atlantic humpback whales (SC/70/REP/04). New information was received from ocean-scale and regional studies based on photo-ID, genetics, satellite telemetry and acoustics. This information was used to develop an initial, conceptual stock-structure hypothesis. New and existing abundance estimates were reviewed, highlighting the need for recent estimates of abundance for the Caribbean breeding population. Considerable data are available from long-term population studies to inform the demographic parameters in the assessment model.

An initial proposal for a multi-stock, multi-area population dynamics model to support the In-depth Assessment was discussed (SC/70/IA/02). The proposed model includes sex-specific survival rates and allows for differences in survival between breeder and non-breeder females (Robbins, 2007), resulting in a structure that partitions females into mature and immature groups. The population dynamics model of SC/70/IA/02 could be extended to form the basis for projections under SLAs for the hunts off West Greenland and St. Vincent and The Grenadines. The Committee discussed proposed modifications to the structure of population dynamics models (SC/70/IA/09), which explored alternative approaches to improve model fit to available data. There was support for continued exploration of alternative modelling approaches, including those that incorporate different forms of population regulation. The Committee emphasises the importance of improving estimates of mixing rates as a priority for advancing the assessment. Work that examines how the space-time fidelity of both individual whales and mark-resight survey effort can bias inferences about stock structure was also discussed (SC/70/IA/08). Genetic information was suggested as a complementary dataset that may help to distinguish true isolation from sampling artefact, and telemetry data were highlighted as informative for evaluating site fidelity and mixing between areas.

Several updates on studies from the Caribbean breeding areas were received. SC/70/IA/04 identifies the ongoing data need for this breeding population, including a better definition of the boundary between the Greater and Lesser Antilles

breeding areas. The Committee welcomes information from surveys studying the density of humpback whales off the Dominican Republic (SC/70/IA/03, SC/70/IA/06) and discussed the fact that the two surveyed areas are part of an extensive, interconnected breeding range. Geelhoed *et al*. (2026) review marine mammal research in the Dutch Caribbean and report passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) data from Saba Bank.

The Committee discussed the collection of additional data and agreed that new fieldwork in the Caribbean could best contribute to the forthcoming In-depth Assessment of humpback whales through photo-ID and genetic sampling. The Committee also recognises that, while satellite telemetry data can contribute valuable information, the costs are relatively high.

Following extensive discussion, the Committee agrees to continue the pre-assessment work for North Atlantic humpback whales, towards an In-depth Assessment that is anticipated to begin in 2028 (Annex L, item 2.4).

Attention: C, CG, SC, R
The Committee continues to collect and evaluate information relevant to an In-depth Assessment of North Atlantic humpback whales. It ***reiterates*** *its previous recommendations (e.g., SC22122, SC2335, SC2336, SC2337).*

To progress its work in a timely manner, the Committee ***recommends*** *that two hybrid workshops be conducted intersessionally to prepare available data for the assessment process.*

8.3 New information (if provided) for other northern stocks

8.3.1 North Atlantic sei whales

No new information was received.

8.3.2 North Atlantic minke whales

No new information was received.

8.3.3 North Atlantic Bryde's whales

In the western Atlantic, Bryde's whales are known to occur off the east coast of South America from Brazil north to Venezuela and in the Caribbean. New information on Bryde's whales in Venezuelan waters was received and noted as rare and valuable information (SC/70/NH/05). A synthesis of 193 records spanning 1970-2025 reveals that this species exhibits a persistent, spatially concentrated occurrence in northeastern Venezuela, contrasting sharply with consistently low detection rates across the wider Caribbean, despite extensive survey effort. This concentration of detections aligns with the Southern Caribbean Upwelling System (SCUS). The multi-decadal consistency and ecological coherence of this pattern may indicate that northeastern Venezuela represents a recurrent and regionally significant hotspot for this species in the North Atlantic. This provides strong support for the recent designation of the SCUS as an IUCN Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA), and the identification of this area as a priority habitat within an otherwise low-density and data-deficient portion of the Caribbean (Annex L, item 3.3).

Attention: SC
Recognising the value that the existing genetic samples could have for improving the understanding of stock structure for North Atlantic Bryde's whales, the Committee ***recommends*** *analysing existing samples from the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao) and the nearby areas in the wider Caribbean and Brazil.*

The Committee ***recommends*** *coordination with SDDNA to facilitate review of resulting analyses at SC71 or when appropriate.*

8.3.4 North Atlantic fin whales

Meister *et al.* (2024) report on climate change-driven habitat shifts in the Arctic Ocean, which may alter the spatial and temporal patterns of migrating baleen whales, such as North Atlantic fin whales. Recordings from eastern and central Fram Strait show that fin whale occurrence peaked from mid-summer to autumn, with moderate winter presence. Modelling indicated that occurrence was mainly driven by the day of the year. These results provide a baseline for a climate-sensitive ecosystem; regular winter presence suggests complex migration behaviour and potential seasonal shifts linked to ongoing Atlantification (Annex L, item 3.4).

8.3.5 East Greenland-Svalbard-Barents Sea (Spitsbergen) bowhead whales

The East Greenland-Svalbard-Barents Sea (Spitsbergen) population of bowhead whales is endangered and understudied, and new information is rarely available. The Committee received new passive acoustic information that suggests major habitat shifts of bowhead whales in the Arctic, primarily driven by sea-ice loss (Meister *et al*., 2025) (Annex L, item 3.5).

8.3.6 North Pacific right whales

North Pacific right whales occur as two genetically distinct stocks (Pastene *et al*., 2022). The abundance estimate for the eastern stock (Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea, Hawaii, west coast of North America) was ~30 individuals as of 2008 (Wade *et al*., 2011; LeDuc *et al*., 2012), while the western stock (China, Japan, Korea and Russia, including the Sea of Okhotsk) is understood to range between 400-1,100 animals (Matsuoka *et al*., 2021).

New passive acoustic data on spatio-temporal occurrence and distribution for the endangered eastern population indicate a possible northward expansion of their range, whereas certain areas, such as within Barnabas Trough, seem to serve as persistent foraging habitats. Detections near the Bering Strait in 2022 represent the northernmost record to date, potentially due to climate-driven changes in sea ice and resulting prey shifts. The Committee also received information from IWC-POWER surveys from 2010 to 2025. The majority of sightings were in the eastern North Pacific within the IWC-POWER area. A total of eight groups were observed in the research area, and seven biopsy samples were collected, including during the transit surveys (SC/70/REP/05).

Historical balaenid strandings records from the Commander Islands were examined, and four carcasses from a stranding event in 2000 were genetically confirmed to be bowhead whales rather than right whales (SC/70/NH/06). This discovery was unusual, given the southern location and the occurrence of four individuals in a single year. While bowheads show a declining southern presence, North Pacific right whales have been sighted more frequently in the region. Both species remain vulnerable to vessel strikes and fishing gear entanglements. A right whale entangled in crab trap rope in late 2025 underscores these ongoing risks (Annex L, item 3.6).

The Committee notes that an IWC Status of Stocks Initiative (SOSI) webpage is under development for North Pacific right whales.

Attention: SC, CG, R
*With an estimated abundance of ~30 animals, the eastern North Pacific right whale population is regarded as one of the most endangered populations of large whales in the world. The Committee therefore **reiterates** that the IWC-POWER cruises provide an important platform for obtaining visual and acoustic detections, photographs and biopsies of North Pacific right whales and **requests** that this work continue.*

8.3.7 North Pacific sperm whales

The Committee reviewed progress on data collected for a future In-depth Assessment of North Pacific sperm whales, now focusing on the eastern North Pacific and the California Current region. This approach addresses long-standing technical difficulties in assessing the species, including their complex social structure, global distribution and a catch history characterised by significant under- and misreporting.

The feasibility of a future assessment for sperm whales in the eastern North Pacific/California Current region was discussed (SC/70/NH/02Rev1), as this relatively well-studied region could serve as a potential case study. Key available information includes a recent survey of the California Current, an improved abundance and trends modelling approach, a population structure hypothesis, as well as new genetic samples, passive acoustic data, tagging data, and a recently completed photo-identification catalogue for the eastern North and tropical Pacific (SC/70/NH/03Rev1). A proposal for a pre-assessment workshop aimed at identifying assessment-relevant information, addressing technical hurdles and exploring status-trend models that use current removals rather than full catch histories was endorsed.

Attention: SC, CG, R
*Recognising the long-standing priority of the Committee to undertake an In-depth Assessment for North Pacific sperm whales (IWC, 2003, p.49; IWC, 2004, p.26), and that there has been significant progress on data compilation for the Eastern North Pacific/California Current area, the Committee **recommends** that a workshop be convened prior to SC71 to initiate the pre-assessment process.*

New information on sperm whale sightings in the North Pacific was also received from the IWC-POWER cruise (SC/70/REP/05) and Japanese dedicated cetacean sighting surveys conducted in 2024 and 2025 in the western North Pacific (SC/70/O/11, SC/70/O/12) (Annex L, item 3.7).

8.3.8 Unusual mortality events affecting northern stocks

Since 2016, there have been three concurrent UMEs in the North Atlantic Ocean along the coast of Canada and the US involving humpback whales (2016-present), North Atlantic right whales (2017-present), and minke whales (2017-present). As of the current reporting period, the cumulative total for these events has risen to over 642 individuals, including 263 humpback, 209 minke, and 170 North Atlantic right whales. While the humpback and minke whale numbers reflect confirmed mortalities, representing an increase of 43 individuals for each species since the previous session, the North Atlantic right whale total also includes serious injuries and morbidities. For North Atlantic right whales, the totals were 43 mortalities, 40 serious injuries and 87 morbidity cases. Necropsy (or at minimum internal examination) proved essential for diagnosing blunt force trauma consistent with vessel strike, as the animals rarely had obvious external injuries (with the exception of a few with lacerations from propellers). There has been strong public interest in large whale strandings, particularly in the US mid-Atlantic Bight region, related to concerns about offshore wind development. However, there is no evidence that offshore wind activities are linked to any recent large whale mortality. Further details can be found in Annex L (item 3.8).

Attention: SC, CG, R
*The Committee **reiterates** its concern about three concurrent UMEs along the east coast of North America. It further notes that the absence of a dedicated, consistent funding stream for stranding network operations poses a risk to efforts to understand the underlying causes of these events.*

*Given the critical role of necropsies in assessing the causes of mortality of North Atlantic right whales and other species under UMEs, the Committee **strongly recommends** the establishment of sustained long-term funding to ensure the continuity of essential biological data collection.*

8.3.9 Other new information

In 2022, information was received from the University of Barcelona indicating that historical records (1920-1980) from Spanish whaling operations had been mislabelled. Work to rectify these records within the IWC catch database has been ongoing. A recent review identified coding errors, including improbable sex and species entries (SC/70/NH/07). The Committee emphasises that, while careful validation of the data is required, this valuable dataset will lead to numerous additions and corrections to the IWC's databases. To address these inconsistencies, it was agreed that an additional expert review step be incorporated prior to SC71 (Annex L, item 3.9).

Attention: SC, S
*When submitting catch data to the SC, the Committee **strongly recommends**:*

(1) All digitised submissions of catch data should be accompanied by copies of the original source documentation to facilitate rigorous data auditing and cross-referencing;
(2) To mitigate the risk of systematic transcription errors, a dual-coder methodology should be employed to ensure accuracy and consistency prior to catch data integration;
(3) Expert review of the proposed database corrections should take place within six months; and
(4) That the Secretariat incorporates the revised data into the IWC catch databases once expert reviews are completed.

8.4 New information for other Southern Hemisphere baleen whale populations

8.4.1 Humpback whales

In 2017, the Committee agreed that obtaining a reliable estimate of absolute abundance for humpback whale Breeding Stock D (Western Australia) is a priority for any future In-depth assessment. In 2018, the Committee reiterated its recommendation that an evaluation of the abundance survey feasibility be carried out. The Committee provided funding to support this evaluation (SC/68A/RP/01).

The Committee welcomes plans for an aerial imagery survey of this population as the whales migrate north along the coast of Western Australia in May 2026. Updates are invited at SC71.

The Committee notes the regular occurrence of 'supergroups' (defined as tight feeding aggregations of 20-plus individuals) of non-breeding humpback whales, observed annually in the southern Benguela region, west of South Africa, from August through April, raising concerns about spatial overlap between these whales and one of the busiest shipping lanes in southern Africa (Seyboth *et al.*, 2025; see also Item 13.1 and Annex I).

8.5 Collaboration with CCAMLR

The Committee **agrees** that progressing work as directed by Resolution 24-1 on Cooperation in Antarctica to increase collaboration between IWC and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), particularly its Scientific Committee (SC-CAMLR), is a priority (Annex G).

The Committee **agrees** that it could provide subject matter expertise on a wide range of issues, such as cetacean abundance, distribution, population status, demography, foraging ecology and predator-prey interactions, connectivity, habitat use, health and the impacts of environmental change, including climate change, to support the development of spatial modelling tools. An ICG was formed to progress collaboration (Annex G). The Committee **strongly encourages** cross-Committee engagement and welcomes updates at SC71. The Committee thanks Kelly (Observer to SC-CAMLR and SC-CAMLR's Observer to the IWC-SC) for championing this work (Annex Q, item 6.3).

Attention: C, SC, R
*The Committee **agrees** that progressing work as directed by Resolution 24-1 on Cooperation in Antarctica and furthering collaboration with CCAMLR is a priority.*

*The Committee **agrees** that it can provide expertise on inter alia:*

(1) Cetacean abundance, distribution, population status, demography, foraging ecology and predator-prey interactions, health (e.g., body condition and reproductive status), connectivity, habitat use and the impacts of environmental change, including climate change;

(2) Methods and technologies to improve the monitoring of cetacean populations; and
(3) Cetacean data provision for, and advice on their use, in the development of spatial modelling tools.

*The Committee **strongly encourages** active involvement in both the cross-Committee ICGs and the Steering Group to progress collaboration with SC-CAMLR, according to the agreed Terms of Reference (Annex G) and **strongly encourages** updates at SC71.*

8.6 Progress on previous recommendations

Previous recommendations were reviewed and updated. Completed recommendations were closed. As the Assessments are either complete or almost complete, most recommendations relating to the Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific humpback whales and the In-depth Assessments of western North Pacific common minke whales and Antarctic blue whales were closed.

8.7 Biennial work plan

The work plan and intersessional groups can be found in Annex L (Table 1, Appendix 2) and Annex Q (item 6.3).

9. STOCKS THAT ARE OR HAVE BEEN SUGGESTED TO BE THE SUBJECT OF CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLANS

9.1 Stocks with existing CMPs: new information and progress with previous recommendations

9.1.1 Workshop on South American cetaceans CMPs

An intersessional workshop to discuss Conservation Management Plans for cetacean species in South America was held in Santos, Brazil, from 30 June to 5 July 2025, supported by funds provided by the IWC, the Government of Brazil and the Yaqu Pacha Foundation. The primary goal of the workshop was to review progress in all six South American CMPs and to establish a process to review these CMPs now that the SC has moved to biennial meetings. Detailed discussions of the workshop report (SC/70/REP/11) and outcomes are detailed in Annex E.

Attention: SC, CC, S, CG Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, Panama, Peru, Uruguay
*The Committee **welcomes** the report of the intersessional workshop on South American CMPs (SC/70/REP/11) and **endorses** all its recommendations detailed in Annex E.*

The Committee recognises that intersessional workshops are a cost-effective way to strengthen stakeholder engagement and collaboration, noting their success in enhancing partnerships across countries and organisations such as the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) to address existing and emerging research and conservation issues. The Committee **agrees** to continue using these workshops to advance the CMP work plan. The Committee welcomes Brazil's commitment to provide financial support for a 2027 workshop.

Attention: SC, CC, S, CG
*Recognising the value of intersessional workshops to advance the CMP work plan, increase stakeholder engagement and maximise cost-effectiveness of the Committee's resources, the Committee **strongly recommends** that workshops be held in the intersessional periods.*

9.1.2 Review of the South American cetacean CMPs workshop report

9.1.2.1 Southwest Atlantic Right Whales

The Southwest Atlantic southern right whale (SWA SRW) CMP, endorsed in 2012, aims to support population recovery by reducing threats, such as high calf mortality, vessel strikes, entanglements, habitat degradation and kelp gull harassment. Since its last review in 2024, research has advanced, including satellite tagging, acoustic monitoring, GIS mapping of human impacts, and improved understanding of feeding ecology and movement patterns. Monitoring and mitigation efforts have expanded, including better mortality assessment, improved capacity for post-mortem analysis, and entanglement response, though some actions have progressed more slowly due to governance and access constraints. Population trends show partial recovery, but major threats persist, particularly vessel strikes and entanglement, highlighting the need for stronger mitigation and improved effectiveness of protected areas. Given the concern of high mortality of Southwest Atlantic southern right whales in the primary calving ground in Península Valdés, a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Committee **reiterates** that studies on stranded southern right whales in this region are a key priority under the CMP.

9.1.2.2 Southeast Pacific Right Whales

The Committee welcomes progress under the conservation plan for the Southeast Pacific southern right whale (SEP SRW) population, last updated in 2022, highlighting that entanglement remains the primary threat to this population. Efforts to improve response capacity are underway, such as a 2025 disentanglement workshop in Peru. New data from visual

sightings and acoustic monitoring show increased activity around Chiloé Island, including a record aggregation in 2023, though gaps remain in other areas. Whale watching operations in Peru contribute valuable observations, and lower-cost monitoring methods are being explored. Advances have also been made in standardising research practices and collecting genetic samples, with unusual distribution patterns possibly linked to La Niña conditions. Regional cooperation is improving, alongside new research initiatives, such as satellite imaging and expanded acoustic monitoring, but key uncertainties about population structure and distribution persist, requiring continued collaboration and long-term conservation planning.

Attention: SC, R
Noting that permits to collect biopsy samples are now available in Chile, and that collaboration is being considered to analyse available samples from strandings, skeletal collections and slough skins, which have increased from one in 2017 to seven in 2026, the Committee ***recommends*** *that existing sequencing data from all available tissue samples be utilised, with whole genome sequencing proposed to maximise the value of the limited samples available for Southeast Pacific right whales. Updates are welcome at SC71.*

9.1.2.3 Lahille's Bottlenose Dolphins

The Lahille's bottlenose dolphin is one of the most threatened small cetaceans in the Southwest Atlantic. Bycatch is the primary threat, alongside habitat degradation, pollution and disease. Since the adoption of the CMP in 2024, new research has improved the understanding of population status, revealing stable overall numbers but showing population decline in some regions. Health and contaminant studies are advancing, while Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil have taken steps to strengthen conservation actions and reduce fisheries' impacts. Genetic findings highlight strong differentiation from *Tursiops truncatus*, underscoring the need for taxonomic reassessment of this subspecies. Policy progress includes uplisting to Endangered on the IUCN Red List and Critically Endangered in Brazil, new conservation measures, and international cooperation frameworks. Despite growing momentum, partnerships and scientific evidence, the subspecies remains at risk, with fewer than 600 individuals remaining.

Attention: SC, R
Considering new genomic information, the Committee ***agrees*** *to work with the Tursiops taxonomy group to review the taxonomic status of Lahille's bottlenose dolphins and communicate conclusions to the Society of Marine Mammalogy's Taxonomy Committee.*

The Committee ***recommends*** *that biopsy sampling be undertaken in Bahía Blanca and Bahía Anegada/Bahía San Blas, Argentina, and processed to allow comparative analyses with the ongoing genomic studies to reassess the population structure and Management Unit boundaries of the subspecies across its range. This will also help address an important data gap for the Argentine subpopulation and support the taxonomic revision.*

9.1.2.4 South American River Dolphins

Strong progress was reported on the South American river dolphin CMP adopted in 2021 to protect multiple dolphin species across major river basins spanning seven countries and over 9 million km². The plan includes 34 actions, with over US$4 million invested and advances made across all priority areas. Research expeditions have revealed significant population declines, while acoustic monitoring, mercury studies and bycatch mitigation efforts are expanding regionally. A 2023 heatwave caused over 300 dolphin deaths, prompting emergency responses and improved rescue capacity. Satellite tagging has identified key habitats, and health assessments revealed serious threats, including toxic contamination and dangerous pathogens. Illegal gold mining and mercury pollution remain critical concerns. At the policy level, international cooperation has strengthened, with new global and regional conservation commitments adopted. Despite this progress, bycatch remains a major unresolved threat, and efforts are underway to improve data collection and management, alongside upcoming workshops on health and tourism impacts.

Considering that oil and gas exploration and extraction are expanding in the Amazonian basin, and the potential risk to the health of river dolphin populations in the case of oil spills, as well as the increase in gold exploration across the Amazon, the Committee **encourages** range states to promote river dolphin health assessments to establish baselines. Continued health evaluation should be considered in the long term to understand health variations over time.

9.1.2.5 Guiana Dolphins

The Committee welcomes progress under the Guiana dolphin CMP, highlighting that the species faces widespread threats across its range, including bycatch, habitat degradation, pollution and increasing human pressures. Since the CMP's endorsement in 2024, regional engagement has improved, with Suriname joining the initiative, and France and Brazil advancing research and conservation actions, with Brazil listing the species as Endangered. Efforts are also underway to strengthen international cooperation through a proposed CMS Concerted Action. Key priorities include improving data sharing, integrating fisheries and stranding data, advancing health and contaminant research, and enhancing monitoring and mitigation measures. While progress has been made in planning and collaboration, challenges remain, particularly in developing effective health assessment methods, with concerns raised about the impacts of invasive techniques.

Attention: CG France
*The Committee welcomes the renewed research and conservation efforts for the Guiana dolphin in French Guiana and **encourages** the Government of France to continue supporting these initiatives. The Committee **encourages** the development of a French National Action Plan for the species, in close coordination with the Guiana Dolphin CMP and incorporating relevant CMP priority actions. This alignment would strengthen research, monitoring, stranding, genetic, bycatch mitigation and outreach activities in French Guiana, while contributing to regional collaboration and CMP implementation across the species' range.*

9.1.2.6 Franciscanas

The Committee received a progress report on the franciscana CMP adopted in 2016 - the first for a small cetacean species. Key priorities include improving estimates of bycatch and abundance across management areas and advancing the designation of protected habitats. A Comprehensive Assessment is expected to be conducted once bycatch estimates are reviewed. Despite progress, important knowledge gaps remain, requiring stronger mitigation and long-term management strategies. The Committee highlights the value of low-cost bycatch-reduction methods that could also benefit other species. It also notes awareness-raising efforts, such as the creation of a Municipal Franciscana Day in Brazil. Overall, continued research, monitoring and collaboration are essential to improve conservation outcomes.

9.1.2.7 General Discussion

The Committee acknowledges that several recommended actions made at the workshop in Santos in 2025 have already been completed, including the renewal of the CMS Concerted Action (CA) for franciscana at the CMS COP15 in March 2026, the proposal of a Concerted Action for Lahille's bottlenose dolphins at CMS, endorsed at COP15, and the establishment of the Albardão Marine National Park, the Albardão Environmental Protection Areas and the Foz do Rio Doce Environmental Protection Area in Brazil. The Committee **commends** the Governments of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay for these important actions.

The Committee reviewed new information on incidental mortality of cetaceans in gillnets in Brazil and **agrees** that gillnets represent an important threat to most small cetacean species in South America.

Attention: SC, CC, S, CG Brazil
*Recognising that gillnets pose the greatest threat to the franciscana, Guiana dolphin and Lahille's bottlenose dolphin, and are an important threat to the Amazon river dolphin, the Committee **recommends** expanding the use of Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) methods (e.g., cameras, GPS trackers) to the entire gillnet fishing fleet of Brazil. Such monitoring would improve estimates of bycatch and facilitate the evaluation of mitigation measures, such as low-cost plastic bottle acoustic reflectors (Item 12.5), which the Committee **recommends** should be implemented, where appropriate, alongside expanded REM.*

Attention: SC, R
*The Committee **recommends** the continued effort to assess stranded franciscanas, Guiana dolphins and Lahille's bottlenose dolphins throughout the species' range, with systematic recording of evidence of bycatch mortality, as well as data on sex, age and body size. It welcomes an update at SC71.*

9.1.3 Central American Humpback Whales

The Committee welcomes progress on the Central American humpback whale CMP, endorsed in 2024, highlighting that a key workshop on threats and mitigation is scheduled for June 2026 in Mexico with participation from all range states. The workshop will assess major threats, such as entanglement, vessel strikes, coastal development, liquified natural gas (LNG) projects and underwater noise, and will develop coordinated mitigation actions. Efforts in the United States to reduce entanglements in fisheries are also highlighted, including proposed regulations, stakeholder collaboration and improved monitoring methods. Overall, the focus remains on strengthening threat assessment and advancing practical conservation measures.

9.1.4 Western North Pacific Gray Whales

Japan reports continued voluntary monitoring of Western North Pacific (WNP) gray whales, including one opportunistic sighting in 2025, with no strandings or entanglements recorded. Long-term photo-ID off Sakhalin Island documented 384 individuals over 30 years, with declining new adult sightings but relatively high calf production in recent years. The Committee commends the continuation of this long-term time series under challenging circumstances, acknowledging the 30th anniversary of this study. The Committee emphasises the importance of cross-regional catalogue matching to better understand population connectivity and movements. Research from Mexico (Laguna San Ignacio and Bahía Magdalena) indicates an ongoing UME with extremely low calf numbers, worsening body condition and an elevated number of strandings.

Attention: CG R, SC, G, I, CC
*The Committee **welcomes** the new information provided by Japan, Mexico, the Russian Federation and the US, and **reiterates** the importance of long-term monitoring of gray whales. It **strongly encourages** range states support this work. Considering the inability to update the CMP as a result of current barriers to range-state engagement, the Committee **reiterates** the following recommendations made at SC69A (SC2356) and SC69B (SC2445) until it is possible to convene a meeting of the necessary range states:*

(1) That every effort be undertaken to enable continuation of the Russian Gray Whale Project to maintain the decades-long time-series upon which assessment of the population relies, and to monitor the concerning decline in whale numbers at the nearshore feeding area off Sakhalin;
(2) That NOAA/SWFSC continue their surveys of Eastern North Pacific gray whale abundance and calf production on a regular basis, recognising that the associated data are critical to ASW and SAS (then ASI); and
***(3) Recommends** that other research programmes focused on Western North Pacific gray whales (e.g., the industry-funded programme initiated in 2002 off Sakhalin) follow the example set by the Russia Gray Whale Project and make their photo-ID catalogue and related data available via the IWC.*

*The Committee **welcomes** updates from research related to the Western North Pacific gray whale CMP at SC71.*

9.2 Progress with identified priorities

9.2.1 Riverine populations of Irrawaddy dolphins

The Irrawaddy dolphin occurs in coastal and freshwater systems across Southeast Asia, with three critically endangered riverine populations in Cambodia, Indonesia and Myanmar, all declining mainly due to (often illegal) fishery interactions. Following a 2022 stakeholder meeting, range states and NGOs developed a draft CMP focused on reducing fishing-related threats, improving protected area management, engaging communities, and promoting sustainable livelihoods. The draft CMP was approved by the Committee and provisionally endorsed by the Commission in 2024, pending formal participation confirmation from range states. A regional workshop is planned for August 2026 in Cambodia to advance development, with support from the Committee's CMP leadership and input from the CC to ensure best practice alignment.

9.2.2 Humpback whales in the northern Indian Ocean, including the Arabian Sea

The Committee received a proposal to establish a CMP for the Arabian Sea humpback whale, first recommended by the Committee in 2011 and developed through sustained collaboration among range states, CMS and the IWC. As only Oman and India are members of the IWC among the species' many range states, CMS Concerted Actions were used to advance coordination from 2017 onwards. A workshop held in Muscat in 2025, supported by range states, IWC conservation funds, and international partners, and aligned with broader conservation initiatives in Oman, produced a fully developed CMP proposal and represented a major milestone towards its completion. The draft CMP underwent multiple rounds of review prior to endorsement by CMS in 2025-2026. The Committee **commends** the strong collaboration, progress and continued commitment from stakeholders and range states, despite regional challenges. A structured timeline is now in place for formal adoption, governance set-up, and implementation activities through 2027, should the CMP be adopted by the Commission.

Attention: C, SC, CC, S, CG India, Oman
*The Committee **endorses** the Arabian Sea humpback whale CMP proposal, highlighting the strong collaboration underpinning its development and the strength of the Arabian Sea Whale Network (ASWN) and its broad engagement across NGOs, scientists and stakeholders. The Committee **recommends** the proposal to move forward towards its approval by the Commission, including review by the Conservation Committee.*

9.2.3 Mediterranean species/populations

The Committee received a progress report on CMP development within the ACCOBAMS region, particularly for Mediterranean fin whales, which has been a long-standing joint priority with the IWC. Work has been delayed due to logistical and administrative constraints, especially the need for dedicated stakeholder workshops, but fundraising efforts are ongoing to enable the workshop implementation. ACCOBAMS is also developing CMP drafts for Mediterranean populations of bottlenose, common and Risso's dolphins, with potential for coordinated or joint workshops across species. Broader CMP consideration is being extended to additional priority species, including sperm whales, Cuvier's beaked whales, and three Black Sea cetaceans, as outlined in ACCOBAMS resolutions. The idea of a regional CMP framework for selected species within the ACCOBAMS area (e.g., black sea species) was also discussed. The Committee welcomes the update and **reiterates** the recommendations made at SC69B (SC2453, SC2454, SC2455). It welcomes an update at SC71. The Committee further notes that the development of a CMP for critically endangered Iberian killer whales should be considered by the relevant range states with support from the Committee, as discussed in Annex R (item 3.2).

9.3 CMP Standing Working Group

9.3.1 Update from the CMP Standing Working Group (SWG)

The Committee received an update from the CMP SWG, which reported on progress across all CMPs, and emphasised the need to strengthen outreach and communication through newsletters, websites and broader information sharing to support engagement and fundraising. The Committee **encourages** contributions to outreach materials and stresses their importance for raising awareness and supporting conservation efforts.

Attention: SC, CC, R
*Given the important role that communicating CMP activities plays in raising awareness and supporting fundraising efforts, the Committee **recommends** developing a concise summary document (also drawing on the CMP Handbook) to showcase the work undertaken through CMPs and facilitate engagement with governments, NGOs and other stakeholders.*
*The Committee **welcomes** updates on this work at SC71.*

9.3.2 Clarification on CC-SC-CMP roles

SC/70/CMP/01 clarifies the different roles of the CC-CMP and SC-CMP. Within the CMP process, the Committee focuses on the scientific integrity of CMPs, including identifying priority populations, assessing threats, and defining objectives and monitoring, while the CC assists range states and facilitates coordination, implementation, partnerships and governance. The Committee emphasises that both Committees must work closely together and supports making role separation more widely available through guidance materials.

9.3.3 CMP action timelines

The Committee reviewed a framework to improve coordination of CMP implementation and reporting, emphasising the importance of intersessional workshops for maintaining progress and regional engagement. This framework separates routine progress checks from full formal reviews to improve efficiency and reduce duplication while accommodating new CMPs. Concerns were raised about funding constraints and workshop costs, with the view that regional workshops may be more cost-effective than full Committee meetings. Alignment with external processes, such as CMS cycles, was also highlighted as necessary.

9.3.4 CMP standardised action table

A new standardised CMP Action Table was proposed to improve consistency and clarity in tracking and reporting CMP implementation across research, monitoring, mitigation and stakeholder engagement activities. It should apply across all CMPs and be maintained by CMP Coordinators to keep information current for both the SC and CC. The Committee **endorses** this approach, noting it would streamline reporting and improve identification of priority issues.

9.4 Progress on previous recommendations

As CMPs require substantial international coordination, progress takes time to fully assess, but significant advances have been made across several existing plans, and new plans have been endorsed or proposed. The Committee **recognises** strong commitment and collaboration from all involved and commends their contributions.

9.5 Biennial work plan

The work plan and intersessional groups can be found in Annex E (item 8). In discussion of the work plan, the Committee notes the increase in the number of CMPs proposed and highlights the need for regional intersessional work to advance the Committee's agenda.

10. STOCK DEFINITION AND DNA TESTING

10.1 Provide advice to other sub-groups on population structure for requested stocks

10.1.1 North Pacific gray whales

The ongoing Implementation Review of gray whales was scheduled for completion in 2026. In order to capture uncertainty surrounding stock structure of gray whales, the modelling framework used in the Implementation Review includes two high priority stock-structure hypotheses (4a and 7a; IWC, 2021b) that were identified as part of the Range-wide Workshops on the Population Structure and Status of Gray Whales in the North Pacific held between 2014-2018 (IWC, 2015; 2016a; 2017a; 2018a; 2019a), as well as subsequent discussion by the Committee (IWC, 2021a). Additional hypotheses are included as medium priority hypotheses and evaluated as sensitivity tests (Annex K, Appendix 2).

A key difference between the two high-priority hypotheses is the way in which whales feeding in the western North Pacific (WNP) are modelled. In hypothesis 4a, all whales feeding in the WNP migrate to wintering grounds in Mexican waters, while in hypothesis 7a, some whales that feed in the WNP use wintering grounds off Vietnam and the South China Sea, while others overwinter off Mexico. At SC70, the Committee reviewed the results of analysis of whole genome sequencing (WGS) data generated from whales sampled in the WNP and in Mexican waters. While the results suggest possible contemporary admixture between whales presumed to be of historical western descent and those from the eastern North Pacific, evidence consistent with the persistence of individuals of potentially 'pure' western descent was also presented.

Attention: SC, AWS, IST
*After reviewing the results of genomic analyses, the Committee **agrees** that the stock structure hypotheses currently under consideration remain appropriate for use in the Implementation Review of North Pacific gray whales.*

10.1.2 Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas bowhead whales
An Implementation Review for Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas (BCB) bowhead whales is scheduled for 2028. Following review of available data during the previous Implementation Review in 2018, it was agreed that the results of genetic analyses were consistent with a lack of substructure within the BCB stock, but that some historic or contemporary gene flow could occur between the BCB stock and the eastern Canadian-Western Greenland (ECWG) stock (IWC, 2020c). Suggestions for additional analyses were made (IWC, 2020c) and later recommended for completion prior to the Implementation Review (IWC, 2024d). During this meeting, new genomic and genetic analyses addressing aspects of that recommendation were presented. The results of mitochondrial DNA analysis support recognition of four stocks, although nuclear DNA analyses suggest some gene flow might occur between the BCB and ECWG stocks.

Attention: SC, AWS, IST
*After reviewing new genetic and genomic evidence pertaining to the population structure of bowhead whales, the Committee **agrees** that the findings are generally consistent with the stock structure considered in the 2018 Implementation Review and support recognition of the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas (BCB), eastern Canadian-western Greenland (ECWG), Okhotsk (OKS), and eastern Greenland-Svalbard-Barents Sea (EGSB) stocks as separate units.*

*The Committee looks forward to reviewing the results of additional SNP analyses at SC71 and **encourages** the use of kinship-based approaches, which might provide further insight into connectivity between the BCB and ECWG stocks by allowing identification of related individuals within and between areas.*

*In noting the value of mtDNA in revealing population structure at a scale important to management, the Committee **encourages** analysis of whole genome sequencing data (both nuclear and mitochondrial), which may enable novel inferences potentially relevant to the Committee, such as possible abundance estimation by close-kin-mark-recapture, identification of recent or ancestral inbreeding, evaluation of adaptive variation, or reconstruction of demographic history.*

10.1.3 Western North Pacific common minke whales
Western North Pacific minke whales are the subject of an In-depth Assessment which considers three stock-structure hypotheses (Annex J). In previous years, the Committee has reviewed the results of extensive genetic analyses aimed at evaluating the plausibility of Hypothesis E, which, unlike the other two hypotheses, incorporates a fourth coastal stock (P) (IWC, 2019c). While the Committee endorsed incorporating all three stock-structure hypotheses in the simulation framework, it noted that different views remain concerning the validity of a coastal P stock and encouraged additional exploration, including spatially explicit genetic analyses (IWC, 2020c).

Attention: SC, IA, IST
*After reviewing the results of new spatial genetic analyses of western North Pacific minke whales, which showed inconsistent results when input parameters were varied, the Committee **agrees:***

(1) That further information on convergence, assignment strength and model support is needed to fully evaluate the results, and thus:
(2) That review of the evidence presented was not sufficient to determine the validity or otherwise of the P stock as proposed by Hypothesis E.

*Therefore, the Committee **agrees** that the assignment of plausibility to the three hypotheses (A, B and E) has not changed, and all three should continue to be considered in the Simulation Trials. It **recommends** that Hypothesis E be retained for conditioning and further evaluation and **welcomes** additional genetic analyses for further evaluation of the plausibility of the current stock-structure hypotheses.*

10.1.4 North Pacific humpback whales
The Committee reviewed the results of new genetic analyses that support persistent matrilineal fidelity of humpback whales to feeding grounds in the eastern North Pacific. The Committee **concludes** that the results are consistent with current stock-structure hypotheses being implemented as part of the Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific humpback whales (SC/70/REP/12).

10.1.5 Bryde's whales
After reviewing new information on the recognition of Rice's whale as a new species (IWC, 2022), the Committee agreed that there is a need to better resolve the taxonomy of whales that are part of the Bryde's whale complex. The Committee was informed that additional genomic work is in progress and **agrees** to form an ICG to facilitate the integration of these data across regions.

10.2 DNA registers

The Committee **thanks** Iceland, Japan and Norway for submitting voluntary updates on their DNA registers, which provide detailed information on samples collected and data generated through 2025 and use the standard format agreed in 2011. Details are provided in Annex P.

Representatives of Iceland and Norway submitted a statement reasserting the position of the Governments of Iceland, Norway and Japan on DNA registers (Annex P - DNA registers).

10.3 DNA data quality and genetic analysis guidelines (including checklist)

The Committee maintains two sets of guidelines providing recommendations for: (1) ensuring data validation and systematic quality control in genetic and genomic studies;[5] and (2) analysing genetic and genomic data (Waples *et al*., 2018). Substantial progress has been made in updating both sets of guidelines in recent years, and the Committee discussed plans for making such updates publicly available. Given continuing advances in the production and analysis of genomic data, the Committee **agrees** that the two ICGs on these topics should continue.

10.4 Recommendations on the avoidance of sample depletion

This Item was established based on concerns about the depletion of tissue samples collected as part of the IWC's SOWER and POWER surveys (IWC, 2019d). In reviewing progress on this item, the Committee notes that previous recommendations have focused on prioritising whole genome sequencing of tissue samples that were at risk of depletion (IWC, 2021a). Given that multiple WGS approaches are now available, the Committee suggests that long-read sequencing, which produces superior data for some applications, should be prioritised. Given continuing advances in technology, the Committee **agrees** that the ICG on avoidance of sample depletion should continue and report to SC71.

10.5 Review terminology used for stock structure related terms used within the IWC

Following a recommendation arising in 2011 (IWC, 2013), a 'go-to' glossary of stock-related terms was compiled, with the aim of encouraging consistent use of stock-related terms within reports from and in papers submitted to the Committee. In reviewing the current definitions, the Committee notes evidence demonstrating the influence of culture in shaping population structure in cetaceans and **agrees** to explicitly include 'culture' as a factor that can distinguish sub-stocks.

10.6 Progress on previous recommendations

Recommendation SC1818 was closed, as it was addressed in the presentation of the results of genetic analyses of bowhead whales.

10.7 Biennial work plan

The work plan and ICGs can be found in Annex P.

11. STOCK ABUNDANCE AND STATUS

At its November 2025 Workshop, the Sub-Committee on Abundance Estimation, Status of Stocks, and International Cruises (ASI) was reconstituted as the Sub-Committee on Stock Abundance and Status (SAS). The primary duties of SAS remain unchanged. Further information and new Terms of Reference for both SAS and its Steering Group are provided in SC/70/REP/02 (Annex D).

11.1 Review of abundance estimates

During the 2024-2026 intersessional period and SC70, SAS (formerly ASI) and its Steering Group held two intersessional meetings and a pre-meeting to examine 23 papers, resulting in the evaluation and endorsement of hundreds of abundance estimates for a variety of species. Full details, including criteria for website posting, are in Annex O and SC/70/REP/02. Endorsement category specifications are given in Annex U.

11.1.1 Abundance estimates

Attention: SC, S, C
*The IWC Table of Accepted Abundance Estimates is important for the work of the Committee and the Commission. The Committee **endorses** the following estimates to be incorporated into that table and uploaded to the IWC website when indicated. In some cases, the list below is only a subset of all regions/years, with the remainder provided in SC/70/REP/13 or SC/70/REP/02.*

- *North Pacific humpback whales:*
  - *Asia breeding area estimate: 391 (CV = 0.179) for 1991-1993. Category 2n.*
  - *Hawaii breeding area estimate: 4,769 (CV = 0.16) for 1991-1993. Category 3.*

[5] https://iwc.int/public/documents/Fiu84/dna-guidelines.pdf (accessed 3 June 2026)

Attention: SC, S, C - cont.

- *California–Oregon feeding area estimates: 639 (CV = 0.01) for 1991-1994 and 1,554 (CV = 0.04) for 2003-2006. Category 1A.*
- *Hawaii breeding area estimates: 4,000 (CV = 0.08) for 1991-1996 and 7,658 (CV = 0.06) for 2004-2006. Category 3.*
- *Mexico breeding area estimates: 1,628 (CV = 0.06) for 1987-1990 and 5,007 (CV = 0.03) for 2003-2006. Category 3.*
- *California-Oregon feeding area estimates (May-October): The entire time series from 1989: 336 (SE = 8.2) to 2023: 3,905 (SE = 45.4). Category 1An. See Table 2 of SC/70/REP/13.*
- *Washington to S British Columbia (S of 49.5°N) feeding area estimates (May-October): The entire time series from 1997: 122 (SE = 12.89) to 2023: 1,443 (SE = 19.84). Category 1A. See Table 3 of SC/70/REP/13.*
- *California Current Ecosystem feeding area estimates (July-November): The time series of eight specific years between 1996: 1,181 (CV = 0.319, 95% CI 642-2,173) and 2018: 4,784 (CV = 0.307, 95% CI 2,658-8,609). Category 1A. See Table 4 of SC/70/REP/13.*
- *Central America/Southern Mexico-California/Oregon/Washington demographically independent population estimate: 1,496 (CV = 0.171) for 2019-2021. Category 1A.*
- *Hawaii breeding area estimate: 1,407 (95% CI 1,113-1,701) for 1980-1983. Category 3.*
- *Aleutian Islands and Alaska Peninsula feeding area estimates: 2,402 (CV = 0.37) for 2001, 2,604 (CV = 0.23) for 2002, and 2,945 (CV = 0.18) for 2003. Category 1A.*
- *Basin-wide estimates: The entire time series from 2002: 16,875 (SE = 5,955) to 2021: 26,662 (SE = 4,192). Category 1A. See Table 6 of SC/70/REP/13.*
- *Hawaii breeding area estimate: 2,754 (95% CI 2,044-3,463) for 1993, 3,776 (95% CI = 2,925-4,627) for 1995, 4,358 (95% CI 3,261-5,454) for 1998 and 4,491 (95% CI 3,146-5,836) for 2000. Category 3.*
- *Winter abundance estimates for 2004-2006: Asia: 1,110 (CV = 0.09), Hawaii: 11,501 (CV = 0.04), Mexico: 2,943 (CV = 0.07), Central America: 750 (CV = 0.24). Category 1A.*
- *Summer abundance estimates for 2004-2006: Russia: 1,382 (CV = 0.23), Eastern Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea: 7,947 (CV = 0.21), Gulf of Alaska: 2,140 (CV = 0.08), Southeast Alaska and Northern British Columbia: 5,925 (CV = 0.07), Northern Washington and Southern British Columbia: 364 (CV = 0.25), California and Oregon: 1,500 (CV = 0.13). Category 1A.*

- *North Pacific blue whales, California Current Ecosystem estimates (July-November): The entire time series from 1996: 1,946 (CV = 0.382, 95% CI 945-4,009) to 2018: 670 (CV = 0.430, 95% CI = 299-1,502). Category 1A. See Table 5 of SC/70/REP/13.*
- *North Pacific fin whales, California Current Ecosystem estimates (July-November): The entire time series from 1996: 3,804 (CV = 0.305, 95% CI 2,120-6,826) to 2018: 11,065 (CV = 0.405, 95% CI 5,156-23,747). Category 1A. See Table 5 of SC/70/REP/13.*
- *North Pacific sperm whales, California Current Ecosystem estimates (July-November): The entire time series from 1996: 2,783 (CV = 0.295, 95% CI 1,578-4,907) to 2018: 2,606 (CV = 0.315, 95% CI 1,425-4,765). Category 3. See Table 5 of SC/70/REP/13.*
- *The survey data for North Pacific common minke whales, California Current Ecosystem estimates (July-November), 1996 to 2018, are endorsed as Category 4. No abundance estimate is endorsed because only 49 sightings were obtained.*
- *Eastern Bering Sea beluga abundance estimate (traditional design-based): 19,811 (CV = 0.343) for 2022. Category 3.*
- *Eastern Bering Sea beluga abundance estimate (spatial model-based): 11,654 (CV = 0.115) for 2017 and 13,313 (CV = 0.216) for 2022. Category 1A. Add to the IWC website.*
- *Vaquita: 7-10 different individuals for 2025 (0.67 probability). Category 1A.*
- *Franciscana: 4,966 (CV = 0.4; 95% CI 2,319-10,637) for FMA IIa in 2020 and 20,797 (CV = 0.32, 95% CI 11,236-38,495) for FMA IIb in 2020. Category 1A. Add to the IWC website.*
- *Arabian Sea humpback whales: 62 (SE = 7) for 2018 in the Arabian Sea as Category 2. This estimate should be added to the website.*
- *Southern Hemisphere fin whales: 2,057 (CV = 0.36) for 1980/81, 2,144 (CV = 0.45) for 1987/88, and 5,455 (CV = 0.53) for 1994/95 circumpolar surveys south of 60°S as Category 2.*
- *Sperm whales: 5,367 (CV = 0.38) for 1980/81, 10,450 (CV = 0.15) for 1987/88, and 8,329 (CV = 0.16) for 1994/95 circumpolar surveys in the Southern Hemisphere south of 60°S as Category 3.*
- *Killer whales: 27,168 (CV = 0.26) for 1987/88 and 24,790 (CV = 0.23) for 1994/95 circumpolar surveys in the Southern Hemisphere south of 60°S as Category 3.*
- *Southern bottlenose whales: 71,560 (CV = 0.13) for 1987/88 and 53,743 (CV 0.12) for 1994/95 circumpolar surveys in the Southern Hemisphere south of 60°S as Category 2.*
- *Hourglass dolphins: data from CPI, CPII and CPIII surveys as Category 4.*
- *Sei whales: data from CPI, CPII and CPIII surveys as Category 4.*

Attention: SC, S, C - cont.
- *Eastern North Pacific gray whales*
  - *12,950 (95% CI: 11,690-14,450) for 2025 as Category 1A. This estimate and the entire time series from Eguchi et al. (2025) should be added/updated on the website.*
  - *213 (CV = 0.07) for the Pacific Coast Feeding Group in 2023 as Category 1A. This estimate and the entire time series should be added/revised on the webpage.*
- *Antarctic blue whales: 1,817 (95% CI 714-4,624) in 2019 for the Southern Ocean as Category 3. This estimate should be added to the website, revising any previous estimates.*

The long time series of abundance estimates for eastern North Pacific gray whales, which are based on counts of whales as they migrate south past central California, supports the provision of subsistence whaling management advice, making these data particularly important to the Commission. Prior to the start of the most recent UME in 2019, the US generally conducted these counts for two out of every five years; since that time, counts have been conducted annually to better monitor the status of the population.

Attention: C, CG USA
*The Committee **strongly encourages** that continued, frequent surveys of the eastern North Pacific gray whale population be funded, conducted and reported to the Committee.*

Some key aspects of the analysis of those surveys are increasingly outdated.

Attention: C, CG USA
*The Committee commends US Scientists for undertaking the work on updating group size estimate calibration for the analysis of eastern North Pacific gray whale survey data and **reiterates** its previous recommendation for updating estimates for the other components of the bias correction.*

11.1.2 Review process

SAS reviewed its workload and internal procedures, and explored the integration of emerging technologies into the review process to enhance the efficiency and rigour of abundance estimate evaluations.

SAS workload continues to be high, and its review and endorsement process is challenged by last-minute requests, reviewer recruitment and fatigue, fluctuating and unpredictable workflow, and lingering open items.

At SC70, the process has been further complicated by the requirement that scientific papers behind paywalls require the permission of the author or publishing journal before being shared with the SC.

Attention: S
*The Committee **requests** that the Secretariat establish processes to ensure timely confirmation of open-access or paywall waivers for all documents requested for SAS review, noting that SAS **emphasises** that it is unable to begin the review of a paper until such confirmation is received.*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology offers new opportunities for the Committee to improve and accelerate decisions by screening abundance estimation papers for potential concerns. The Committee reviewed a bespoke prototype AI multi-agentic system that emphasised analytical rigour, mitigation against known AI biases, and post-review human interrogation. Expressly calibrated to the Committee's nuanced standards, the prototype yielded incisive reviews that could sometimes surpass human efforts. Moreover, the process requires minutes rather than months for only a small cost (~ £0.30 each).

The Committee **endorses** the prototype system, while recognising that a degree of cautious scepticism and human oversight remains essential.

Attention: SC, NI Givens, Mahoney
*The Committee **recommends** that Givens and Mahoney develop, deploy, and test the multi-agentic AI system for reviewing abundance estimates. The system will be integrated into the SAS review process during the next intersessional period, and its performance will be evaluated at upcoming workshops and meetings. The initial usage mode will be as a screening tool, relying on one human and the combined multi-agent AI output, and only for suitable papers for which relevant AI expert agents have been developed.*

An ICG was established to advise the developers on technical matters related to system development, deployment, and access, and to ensure that the AI system instructions adequately reflect Committee standards, priorities, and judgment.

11.2 IWC Table of Agreed Abundance Estimates and the abundance page on the IWC website

11.2.1 Updates to the IWC Table completed or proposed intersessionally

Routine updates of agreed estimates were added to the IWC Table of Agreed Abundance Estimates.

11.2.2 Updates to IWC webpages on abundance completed or proposed intersessionally

The IWC webpage on population estimates has been updated in accordance with Committee recommendations.

11.2.3 Other related progress by the Secretariat

Katara has built a global, spatially explicit geodatabase of large whale abundance estimates using the IWC Table of Agreed Abundance Estimates. The dataset is supported by an open-access web-based tool, addressing increasing demand for spatially explicit cetacean data and supporting research and conservation.

Attention: S, SC, C

*The Committee **draws attention to** and **expresses its appreciation** to Katara for her efforts to develop the IWC Abundance Tables geodatabase and associated tools, and recognises this work as a valuable and innovative contribution not only to the Committee, but also to the wider research community.*

11.3 Methodological issues

The Committee provides advice on the estimation of common minke whale abundance in the eastern North Atlantic, focusing on methods to compensate for incomplete survey coverage.

11.3.1 Mark-recapture abundance estimation and diagnostic methods

The Committee continues to develop a guidance document for using mark-recapture techniques to estimate abundance, including considerations on study design, photo-ID and matching, mark-recapture models, software, and situations with long-term and/or heterogeneous survey effort.

11.3.2 Estimation of Franciscana abundance from passive acoustic monitoring

Passive acoustic monitoring offers a promising avenue for estimating the abundance of Franciscana. Mura *et al*. (2025, 2026) provide a workflow to achieve this aim, although some methodological issues remain to be investigated.

11.4 Provide advice to the Commission on the status of stocks

The Committee began its work on the Status of Stocks Initiative (SOSI) in 2018 in response to the Commission's request for summary advice on the status of stocks (IWC, 2018c, p.383). In 2024, the Status of Whales (SoW) webpages were published. The Introduction to Status webpage, which now also promotes the new SoW content, remains the second-most visited page on the IWC website. Visitors typically continue to either the SoW 'at-a-glance' (thermometer) page or more detailed SoW content.

At SC70, the number of stocks recommended by SAS for listing on the SoW 'at-a-glance' landing webpage increased from three to 16. This five-fold increase in content, including many improvements to style and presentation, demonstrates that SOSI has made strong progress.

11.4.1 Status of Stocks Initiative (SOSI) intersessional groups

Without the intersessional workshop of ASI in November 2025 and the intersessional work of SOSI ICGs, little progress would have been made. The substantial increase in SOSI content was also attributed to the contributing experts, who the Committee **thanks** for their research, writing, and computing: F. Cipriano, J. Crance, C. de Moor, G. Givens, S. Holloway, J. Jackson, I. Katara, D. Linden, D. Palacios, A. Punt, P. Rosel, A. Ross-Gillespie, M. Wilberg, K. Wilson, and A. Zerbini.

11.4.2 Review of proposed new SOSI content

The Committee reviewed and **endorses** new content for the SoW website, including completing new assessments and additions to the 'at-a-glance' thermometer page. The Committee also **agrees** to a large number of changes in style and design for existing and planned SoW pages, detailed in Annex O.

Attention: S, SC

*The Committee **recommends** that SOSI results be added to the Status of Whales website for four new stocks: eastern North Pacific right whales, North Atlantic right whales, western North Pacific Bryde's whales, and Rice's whales.*

Attention: S, SC

*The Committee **recommends** that the thermometers, ratings, and 'brief statements' for Southern Hemisphere humpback whale (SHHW) breeding stocks A, B1, B2, C, D, E, O, and G be added to the Status of Whales website.*

11.4.3 Revisions to existing content

Many of the approved changes to website style and design mentioned above are also applicable to the improvement of existing SoW content. Annex O documents several minor technical analyses used to derive SOSI statistics, as well as suggestions for a comprehensive review by the Secretariat to ensure ease of use, especially navigation. Currently, there is no systematic approach to identifying when SoW updates are needed or to developing updated content.

Attention: ASW, CMP, IA, IST, NH, SH, SM

*The Committee **recommends** that other sub-committees introduce a standing agenda item to prepare new material and review online Status of Whale stocks text relevant to them. As updated information becomes available, these sub-committees should inform SAS and provide any new and/or revised information (e.g., text on threats, catastrophic mortality events, revised stock definition or range, etc.) that SAS would be unable to develop itself, since SAS efforts should be mostly limited to processing simulation output files. The new information provided by other sub-committees might be derived either from updated IWC assessments or from outside sources.*

The relevant sub-committees should also nominate a member(s) to engage with SAS and join the SOSI Working Group on Language, Terminology and Content Development to facilitate such collaboration.

11.4.4 SOSI work plan

Stocks identified for future SOSI assessment include: North Atlantic fin whales, North Pacific humpback whales, Western North Pacific common minke whales, Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas bowhead whales, Antarctic blue whales, completion of several Southern Hemisphere humpback whale assessments, and updates to existing assessments (especially vaquita and eastern North Pacific gray whales). Further future work will be identified by the SOSI Steering Group.

A better system is required to archive the code, input files, documentation, and all other SOSI content so that it is accessible to future Committee members overseeing SOSI and to the Secretariat's Media and Communications Manager and Lead for Statistics and Modelling. There is also a growing need to standardise the format of modelling outputs from diverse Committee model-based assessments.

Attention: S, NI Givens, Punt, Katara

*The Committee **recommends** that methods for archiving, drafting, and creating SOSI material be modernised and standardised. Givens should re-implement the SOSI thermometer code in R Shiny and update his code documentation. Punt and Katara should develop standards to make Committee model-based assessments consistently formatted. All SOSI materials should be archived systematically on a permanent cloud-based hosting platform.*

11.5 Progress on previous recommendations

11.5.1 Document consolidating procedures for the review of abundance estimates

Intersessional work to consolidate, streamline, and improve SAS procedures is now finalised.

Attention: SC

*The Committee **draws attention** to its newly endorsed Scientific Committee Procedures for Submission, Review and Validation of Abundance Estimates (Annex U).*

11.5.2 Correction factors

Approximately 60 publications reporting correction factors have been examined, and key information (e.g., dive surface times, availability and perception bias, etc.) has been collated. This is a valuable resource to aid in abundance estimation, but it does not replace the need to estimate species- and region-specific values. Future work includes expanding the compilation, improving accessibility, and clarifying future directions and possible funding.

11.6 Biennial work plan

11.6.1 Future SAS and/or SAS-SG workshops

The Committee considered two proposals from SAS: one for an intersessional workshop and the second for a pre-meeting ahead of SC71. Both were considered by SAS to be essential to prevent an unrealistic SAS workload at SC71, and to ensure the work of other sub-committees can proceed.

Attention: C, SC

*The productivity of SAS over the 2025-2026 biennium in support of diverse Committee priorities, including In-depth Assessments and Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Management Procedure SLAs, would not have been possible without intersessional and pre-meetings (20 sessions to supplement eight at SC70). Therefore, reaffirming Recommendation SC23118, the Committee **recommends** that intersessional workshops (in odd-numbered years) and pre-meetings (in even-numbered years) of SAS must continue to be supported and conducted as permanent, regular components of the Committee's scheduled biennial workflow.*

11.6.2 Budget

Despite the cost of in-person intersessional SAS meetings, the Committee recognises that online options are infeasible due to the need for highly interactive, nonlinear discussion of technical material, the potential for running re-analyses and sensitivity tests, and the impracticality of distributing more than 30 hours of virtual meetings throughout the year at mutually agreeable times that would necessarily include unreasonable hours and continual distraction for many participants. It is anticipated that most costs for a 2027 intersessional workshop could be defrayed with carry-forward funds. A 2028 pre-meeting for SAS-SG will require new funding.

11.6.3 Recommendations database

SAS reviewed and updated its table of extracted recommendations and agreed to close completed items and to tag others to 'draw attention' and direct them to other targets as detailed in Annex O.

11.6.4 Work plan and correspondence groups

The work plan and intersessional groups can be found in Annex O.

12. BYCATCH AND ENTANGLEMENTS

12.1 IWC's Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI)

The Committee discussed updates on the initiation of bycatch mitigation pilot projects. While some are still in the discussion stage, there are promising proposals for work in the Republic of Congo, Tanzania and Thailand (SC/70/HIM/22). In Cambodia, work is underway to test the use of plastic bottles as a bycatch mitigation method in gillnet fisheries (SC/70/HIM/08; Item 12.5). Data on small cetacean strandings along the Peruvian coast highlight the need to strengthen multidisciplinary approaches that integrate scientific monitoring, technological innovation in fishing gear, community participation and regional cooperation (SC/70/HIM/20).

Another key area of the BMI's work has been the FAO Common Oceans Programme tuna project, for which the IWC is an implementing partner. In February 2026, a series of workshops took place in New Caledonia and Fiji to progress cetacean bycatch work in the Pacific Ocean. Significant data limitations, relating to low observer coverage in longline fisheries, and challenges in species identification, were identified in the BMI workshop (SC/70/REP/07). An IWC cetacean identification guide for Pacific Ocean purse seine observers is in development, in collaboration with the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

The Secretariat has identified further opportunities for collaboration with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and WCPFC. IWC Contracting Parties that are members of IOTC or WCPFC are **encouraged** to engage with the Secretariat to explore opportunities for the development of new Conservation Management Measures that could reduce bycatch in these RFMOs.

In 2024, the Committee recommended that the BMI build on the Ecological Risk Analysis for the western Indian Ocean described in Kiszka *et al*. (2023), using additional sources of data that provide more detailed representations of fisheries effort as well as cetacean distribution. While this work has not progressed, the Committee notes the value of an updated spatial bycatch risk assessment, which would contribute to the collaboration between IOTC and IWC.

Attention: SC, R
*The Committee **recommends** a study that:*

(1) Integrates multiple data sources to improve understanding of overlap between fisheries and cetaceans to produce a revised spatial bycatch risk assessment for the western Indian Ocean (WIO) and the Arabian Sea;
(2) Identifies priority risk areas and key data gaps and provides clear recommendations and a transferable approach for broader regional use in the wider Indian Ocean basin;
(3) Provides an update to SC71 and materials that the IWC can present to the IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB).

*The Committee notes that Research Proposal 71 presented to SC70 addresses these items and **recommends** that it should be funded.*

Since 2024, several bycatch risk assessment toolbox (ByRA) trainings have been funded by the BMI or organised by BMI members (SC/70/HIM/21Rev1). Regional workshops, including participants from multiple countries, were held in Brazil, Colombia and West Africa (Cameroon and Congo).

ByRA workshop participants in Congo identified a sharp decline in Atlantic humpback dolphins over the last decade, highlighting the importance of mitigating bycatch in small-scale artisanal bottom-set gillnet fisheries and the need to scale up bycatch work across the wider west coast of Africa throughout the range of Atlantic humpback dolphins.

Attention: S, SC, CC
The Committee notes the apparent success of Bycatch Risk Assessment (ByRA) trainings conducted in multiple locations in 2024-2026, and the fact that bycatch in small-scale artisanal fisheries is known to be the main driver of decline for many species (SC2386), including the Critically Endangered Atlantic humpback dolphin. The Committee ***recommends****:*

(1) That ByRA trainings continue to be organised to support BMI pilot projects and other efforts to mitigate bycatch; and
(2) That bycatch mitigation trials using plastic bottles (Item 12.5) or other low-cost methods are conducted in the Republic of Congo and other locations within the range of the Critically Endangered Atlantic humpback dolphin and other threatened species.

The IWC's large whale entanglement response initiative has continued to build global capacity, with almost 2,000 responders from 48 countries now trained. Progress on disentanglement training in Brazil was presented, and it was noted that recent examples of disentanglement from Brazil and Scotland reinforce the importance of the IWC's work. The next training sessions are planned for the Dominican Republic, Panama and Scotland. The IWC Principles and Guidelines for large whale entanglement response efforts have been updated and reviewed by the Expert Panel and are available on the IWC website.

12.2 Collaboration on bycatch mitigation with IGOs (including FAO, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, CCAMLR and others)

The Scientific Committee of the Commission for the Conservation of Marine Antarctic Living Resources (SC-CAMLR) Working Group on Incidental Mortality Associated with Fishing (WG-IMAF) has been collaborating with the IWC in response to reported humpback whale mortalities in the krill trawl fishery operating in the SW Atlantic. Further information that was not in the reports to CCAMLR regarding these whale interactions revealed some discrepancies. In one of these incidents, although the report stated that the whale was released alive, it was hauled onto the deck, where it remained for 40 minutes and showed no signs of movement or blows following release. The Committee **agrees** that the whale was unlikely to have survived. The IWC has been invited to contribute to the next WG-IMAF meeting, which will take place in South Africa in June 2026, and an ICG has been established to provide advice (ToR in Annex I).

The Committee considered several outputs from the EU-funded Coordinated Development and Implementation of Best Practice in Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic, Baltic and Mediterranean Regions (CIBBRiNA) project (SC/70/HIM/15). These include bycatch monitoring/design (Lusseau, 2025), analysis of a large, long-term bycatch dataset from the UK (Moyes *et al*., 2025), a bycatch mitigation toolkit (Sugurdsson and Jusufovski, 2025) and best practice in stakeholder engagement (Mackinson & Siemensma, 2025).

Macaulay *et al*. (2026) describe tests of an animal-activated pinger to reduce harbour porpoise bycatch, minimise underwater noise pollution, and avoid any increase in seal bycatch through a 'dinner bell' effect. The Committee notes the challenges of automated detection systems and producing a pinger that is activated by cetacean vocalisations. Given these challenges, and to function effectively in different soundscapes, there is a need to adapt detection algorithms to specific applications and locations.

Attention: SC, CC BMI
The Committee ***recommends*** *a collaborative approach using an open platform for the development of pingers designed to reduce cetacean bycatch that respond to cetacean vocalisations, and the creation of a standardised set of trial scenarios that can be used to assess their performance.*

12.3 Review new methods and estimates of bycatch and entanglement rates, risks and mortality

The Committee considered new information on understanding injuries which could improve assessment of bycatch and entanglement, including a European Cetacean Society workshop report on the use of pathology to better inform welfare impact assessments (Wessels, 2024) and a year-long monitoring of an entangled common bottlenose dolphin (Genov & Paller, 2026).

Bycatch monitoring in Ghana continues to show high bycatch rates (SC/70/HIM/05) that represent the longest bycatch time series in West Africa, and the continuation of this monitoring effort is **encouraged**. Other monitoring studies considered include an analysis of bycatch mitigation and monitoring in the UK (SC/70/HIM/06), highlighting the need to further address bycatch in the small-scale (<10m) gillnet fleet.

12.4 Reporting on bycatch and entanglements (both small and large cetaceans), including National Progress Reports

The Committee notes that 13 countries have submitted National Progress reports in 2026 and that Argentina, Australia, Colombia, Germany, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK and the US all report bycatch. The Committee expresses concern at the limited number of reports and **reiterates** previous recommendations to encourage submission of National Progress Reports, noting the value of the information to the work of both the SC and IWC initiatives. The importance of being able to distinguish between no information on bycatch and reports of zero bycatch is also noted.

12.5 Review mitigation measures for preventing bycatch and entanglement

Trials of Bycatch Reduction Devices in Korean Fisheries have included work with rope systems for surface buoys, and modifications to trawls and stow nets (SC/70/HIM/02Rev1). The Committee welcomes this information and notes that the escape devices on the stow nets appear to be very effective at reducing bycatch of narrow-ridged finless porpoises.

On-demand fishing gear (also known as ropeless or pop-up gear) continues to be developed and tested in US fisheries with improvements in acoustic retrieval success rate. Challenges remain regarding geolocation needs, gear-conflict issues, standards, and data governance frameworks (SC/70/HIM/04).

The Committee welcomes information on a workshop hosted by the Government of Brazil, which advanced a science-based, participatory discussion on mechanisms to mitigate small cetacean bycatch. This will contribute to bycatch reduction efforts that, in turn, will support the CMPs for several South American cetacean populations.

The Committee notes that, following the promising results presented in SC/69B/HIM/16 and SC/70/HIM/03Rev1 on the use of plastic bottles as acoustic reflectors to mitigate bycatch in bottom-set gillnets in southern Brazil, multiple initiatives are being proposed to assess the effectiveness of this method in other fisheries.

Attention: CC BMI
*The Committee **recommends** those implementing trials of plastic bottle acoustic reflectors to: (1) contact the BMI co-ordinator, who could initiate appropriate contacts to facilitate following a step-wise approach; and (2) share data and experiences that would facilitate understanding of the effectiveness of the technique in different situations.*

*The Committee notes that this method has particular relevance for small-scale fisheries, particularly in low-income regions. However, given the high franciscana mortality in the larger-scale industrial bottom-set gillnet fishery operating in southern Brazil, the Committee also **recommends** trials in this fishery.*

The Committee has previously noted deep concern over the negative impact of gill and trammel nets on the conservation status of many cetacean populations and strongly encouraged investment in the development and adoption of alternative fishing gears. In previous recommendations, the Committee notes that in many situations, there may be no technical option that can be implemented effectively to reduce bycatch and that the only solution is to stop using high-risk fishing gears. Further consideration at SC70 included discussion of policy tools to enable equitable gear transition and co-design of gear transition with fishers (Whale and Dolphin Conservation, 2026).

Attention: CG
*The Committee reiterates the global nature of bycatch in gillnets and its recommendation that IWC Contracting Parties invest in the use, development and adoption of alternative fishing gears. It **requests** focused engagement with fishers to investigate the potential for alternative gears, attitudes towards these, and how they could be incentivised.*

12.6 Progress on previous recommendations

The Bay of Biscay is one of the main areas of concern for common dolphin bycatch in the Northeast Atlantic. In 2024, the Committee welcomed measures taken that year by France and Spain and noted evidence for a substantial reduction in common dolphin bycatch during the period of fisheries closures. The Committee recommended continued work to estimate total annual bycatch and examination of seasonal patterns to assess whether the closure period included the timing of the highest bycatch risk. At SC70, the Committee discussed new information addressing these recommendations (SC/70/HIM/18; Deslias *et al*., in prep.; Deslias *et al*., in review).

The Committee notes that, while the evaluation of the fisheries closures shows they have been effective at reducing common dolphin bycatch during the closure period (SC/70/HIM/18), estimates of annual bycatch are still in excess of quantitative objectives agreed by OSPAR. In 2024, the Committee recommended that the three-year period of closures should be used to develop and implement a longer-term strategy for structural changes to fisheries in the Bay of Biscay that minimises bycatch of cetaceans and other protected species but enables continuation of a viable fishing industry, including by transitioning to fishing gears with less deleterious effects on biodiversity. The Committee notes that there has been limited progress with this recommendation, and, as such, closures remain the only measure demonstrated to be effective.

Attention: CG France
*The Committee **requests** that the fisheries closures implemented since 2024 in the Bay of Biscay to reduce common dolphin bycatch should continue.*

In 2024, the Committee recommended that the Scottish Government develop and implement a plan to enable the widespread implementation of a negatively buoyant line in Scottish creel fisheries to reduce entanglement risks to whales and basking sharks. Progress indicates that implementation is not only practically viable but also likely to be widely adopted, provided that appropriate economic incentives for voluntary adoption are developed (SC/70/HIM/09).

In 2024, the Committee reiterated its previous recommendation for immediate actions to effectively reduce and, where possible, eliminate bycatch of harbour porpoise throughout Iberian Peninsula waters (SC2483). An ICG established at SC69B to respond to requests from the contracting governments had received no requests for advice. The Committee **agrees** that the group should be maintained with the existing Terms of Reference so that it can continue to be called upon if requested.

Attention: CG Portugal, Spain
*The Committee **reiterates** its previous recommendations (SC2221, SC2483) for immediate actions to effectively reduce and, where possible, eliminate bycatch of harbour porpoise throughout Iberian Peninsula waters. The Committee remains ready to provide advice on the issues listed in the Report of SC69B (IWC, 2024e, Annex J, item 2.8.2).*

The Committee **reiterates** its previous concern about the Baltic porpoise (SC2485) and notes that ASCOBANS continues to review progress in implementing the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises as well as the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat (SC/70/O/28rev5).

12.7 Work plan

In discussion of the work plan, it was noted that the Committee last discussed Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) in 2022. Since then, there have been developments in many countries, and it is a fast-moving field, particularly with the use of AI systems to analyse camera data. In its work plan, the Committee therefore includes a request to the IWC Expert Panel to gather information intersessionally that could facilitate a more in-depth review at SC71.

The work plan and intersessional groups can be found in Annex I.

13. VESSEL STRIKES

13.1 Review new methods and estimates of rates of vessel strikes, risk of vessel strikes and mortality (including review progress on vessel strike database)

Across the IWC, work related to vessel strikes is coordinated by the Vessel Strikes Working Group. SC/70/HIM/10 describes the work of the Expert Panel, progress on addressing vessel strike risks in high-risk areas identified in the Vessel Strike Strategic Plan, and the Vessel Strikes Database. The Committee considered updates on mitigation measures in high-risk areas, including Sri Lanka, the Hellenic Trench (Greece), the NW Mediterranean Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), and the Canary Islands (Spain). The Expert Panel has also continued to support the development of a PSSA proposal, which would include measures to reduce risks to the Arabian Sea humpback whales. Oman submitted a paper (MEPC 84/Inf.27) to the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee in April 2026 outlining the intended PSSA proposal.

The Vessel Strikes Database is currently undergoing significant reformatting and quality control processes to facilitate future use, responding to longstanding Committee recommendations. Following this exercise, pending datasets from Australia, South Africa and global records from sailing vessels will be included. The Committee recognises the importance of acquiring data from the US and **reiterates** its previous recommendation for integrating these data into the database (SC2491). The Committee commends the impressive work undertaken by the Vessel Strikes Data Manager, particularly driving forward the development of the database and convening productive workshops.

Attention: SC
*The Committee notes the great value of the work of the Data Manager. The Committee **recommends** the continuation and funding of the Vessel Strikes Data Manager role, which is critical to all aspects of the Vessel Strikes Working Group.*

The Vessel Strikes Working Group has also co-organised workshops in line with the Committee's previous recommendations to strengthen cooperation with IMO, the shipping industry and other relevant stakeholders.

Attention: S, HIM, CC, R
*The IWC co-hosted a workshop with the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory on collaborative solutions for reducing vessel strikes, which was held at IMO headquarters in London in January 2026. Based on the workshop report (SC/70/REP/03Rev1), the Committee **recommends**:*

(1) The Expert Panel identify issues that should be included in any update of the 2009 IMO Guidance for minimising the risk of ship strikes with cetaceans;
(2) The Secretariat compiles and shares practical examples of mitigation measures on the IWC website, including recent examples of routing measures, speed reductions and voluntary initiatives;
(3) The Secretariat investigate the potential for organising regional workshops in areas of known or emerging risk, such as the Western Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, in collaboration with regional organisations, to review available data, assess feasible mitigation options and develop practical regional roadmaps;

Attention: S, HIM, CC, R cont.
(4) The Expert Panel develop guidance on performance criteria and methods for estimating the expected risk reduction from onboard detection systems;
(5) The Secretariat continues dialogue with Global Fishing Watch on global AIS data provision;
Committee members to communicate with telemetry researchers the importance of fine-scale depth data close to the surface for vessel strike risk models.

The Committee also discussed priority regions that would benefit from further assessment and engagement via regional vessel strike workshops.

Attention: CG Spain
*The Committee **reiterates** its concern for sperm whales in the Canary Islands and the urgent need to implement mitigation measures that will reduce the risk of vessel-whale collisions. The Committee **reiterates** its previous recommendation to hold a multi-stakeholder workshop in the Canary Islands (SC2492).*

In 2024, the Committee identified the need to develop metrics to allow risk assessments to be compared between areas and help the IWC identify high-risk areas within the Vessel Strike Strategic Plan. Guidance for those developing vessel strike risk assessments was developed based on the principles agreed at the January 2026 workshop and also includes suggestions for terminology and a specification for a global data product (in collaboration with Global Fishing Watch) to provide AIS data for vessel strike risk assessments (SC/70/HIM/13).

Attention: S, SC, R
*The Committee **recommends** that the finalised version of SC/70/HIM/13 should be made available through the IWC website and other dissemination channels, as IWC guidance for standardising reporting of vessel strike risk assessments.*

The Committee has previously recommended further work to identify high-risk areas of vessel strikes. Lane *et al*. (in review) focused on the heavily trafficked San Francisco Bay and its entrance, where humpback whales are now sighted regularly from April to November.

Attention: CC
*The Committee recognises San Francisco Bay as a high-risk vessel strike area for both humpback whales and gray whales. The Committee therefore **recommends** adding San Francisco Bay and its entrance as a high-risk area in the IWC Ship Strikes Strategic Plan.*

The Vessel Strikes Strategic Plan identifies the Port of Cape Town as a priority high-risk area requiring a dedicated risk assessment as a prerequisite for developing area-specific mitigation strategies. SC/70/HIM/01 presents a preliminary assessment of vessel strike risk to whales along South Africa's west coast, which hosts some of South Africa's busiest shipping corridors, including approaches to Cape Town. Investigation of offshore routes indicated that modest shifts in traffic could reduce strike risks by 20–50% across species, with the greatest benefit for coastal whales, such as Bryde's and humpback whales. However, further research in offshore habitats is needed to understand the effects of rerouting in these areas.

Attention: SC, CC
*The Committee received information on the vessel strike risk off the west coast of South Africa in response to SC2152. It **draws attention** to the acute and growing risk of vessel strikes in this region, where vessel traffic has increased substantially in the last few years, and **recommends** funding to support a proposed multistakeholder workshop in Cape Town (SC/70/RP/66) focused on vessel strike risk in South African waters.*

A preliminary vessel strike risk assessment in the western Indian Ocean identified higher-risk areas for humpback whales around Reunion, the southern Madagascar shelf, and South Africa's east coast (SC/70/SAN/03Rev1). In particular, shifting shipping routes south of the southern Madagascar shelf could substantially reduce humpback whale vessel strike risk with limited additional distance to the main shipping route. The Committee notes that the ships transversing these regions in the Indian Ocean are also transversing along South Africa's south and west coasts. It is therefore important that advice to mitigate vessel strike risks in these regions is linked so that voyage plans take all high-risk areas into account.

Attention: SC, CC
*Noting the high risk to humpback whales off southern Madagascar and to several species off the west coast of South Africa, the Committee **recommends** that:*
(1) Both these areas should be considered as high-risk areas in the IWC Vessel Strike Strategic Plan;
(2) Further work is conducted to investigate risk assessments for the south and east coasts of South Africa.

13.2 Mitigation of vessel strikes in high-risk areas

Vessel speed reductions have been demonstrated to reduce strike risks, but different organisations and jurisdictions use different methods to assess the levels of cooperation or compliance with speed restrictions in whale protection zones, making it impossible for mariners to know whether the actions they take will be judged consistently across areas. This undermines the willingness to cooperate. To address this, there was a request to the Expert Panel to develop recommendations for standard metrics for assessing cooperation/compliance (SC/70/HIM/12).

Attention: S, SC, R
*The Committee **endorses** the suggestions in SC/70/HIM/12 as a guidance document for standard metrics for assessing cooperation/compliance with speed restriction zones and **recommends** that these metrics are made available through the IWC website and other dissemination channels.*

13.2.1 Review progress towards assessing and mitigating vessel strikes in previously identified high-risk areas

Based on high densities of whales and overlap with vessel traffic in waters near the sub-Antarctic island at 54°15'S; 36°45'W, an area around the island was added to the list of high-risk areas where mitigation measures should be considered in the Vessel Strikes Strategic Plan. Subsequently, from the 2022/23 austral summer season, vessels have been requested to limit speed to 10 knots in an area around the island. SC/70/HIM/16 examines cooperation with the speed restriction and data from onboard observers, which includes sightings on the edge of the speed restriction area. The Committee **encourages** data collection on whale densities to the west of the island to further inform the speed restriction area.

13.2.2 Review new research relevant to mitigation

The IWC first produced guidance for organisers of offshore sailing races in 2014. Since then, the sector has evolved considerably. The number of races being organised globally has grown; routes increasingly overlap with critical cetacean habitats; the widespread adoption of foiling technology has substantially increased vessel speeds (SC/70/HIM/11); and the potential lethality of collisions has increased for smaller cetacean species that had previously been considered as lower risk.

Attention: S, SC, R
*The Committee **endorses** the revised guidance in SC/70/HIM/11 as best practice for organisers of offshore sailing races and **recommends** that they are made available through the IWC website and other dissemination channels.*

Previous discussions within the Committee have identified a need to develop guidance for bridge officers on how to respond to whale sightings or detections within the potential strike zone ahead of a vessel. This was discussed in the context of tourism expedition vessels operating in the Antarctic (SC/70/HIM/17), but the Committee notes that guidance is also needed for other sectors, and emphasises that there is a need to ensure any guidance is provided in a clear form that can be actioned by mariners.

Attention: CC
*The Committee **notes** the need for guidance on actions to reduce the risk of vessel strikes that is specific to shipping sectors and **recommends** that the Vessel Strikes Expert Panel initiates work on this to be reviewed at SC71.*

The Committee has previously agreed that the only proven, effective mitigation measures for vessel strike risk are to avoid areas with known concentrations of whales or to reduce speed while transiting these areas. Although there has been considerable discussion of technology-based measures, the Committee found no basis on which to revise its previous conclusion. The Committee notes proposed changes to vessel speed restriction rules on the US East Coast and the concerns for the status of North Atlantic right whales (Annex L, item 2.2). The US National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is considering possible deregulatory action to replace current seasonal speed restrictions with alternative management areas and advanced, technology-based, strike-avoidance measures.

Attention: S, CG USA
*The Committee **reiterates** its previous recommendation that the best overall vessel-strike mitigation measures are to voyage plan to avoid high-risk areas or, if they cannot be avoided, restrict speed to 10 knots, which has been shown to be an effective speed to reduce fatal collisions with most large whales (SC19117). The Committee **recommends** that the speed restrictions remain in place on the US East Coast, noting that there are no currently available technologies that allow increased vessel speeds in areas with whales without increasing vessel strike risk.*

13.3 Cooperation with IMO Secretariat and relevant IMO committees

Cooperation between the IMO and IWC is largely focused on underwater radiated noise and vessel strikes. The connection between the two Secretariats has continued, with the IWC regularly attending meetings at the IMO (SC/70/O/28Rev5).

13.4 Progress on previous recommendations
The Committee reviewed its recommendations, and updates have been shared with the Secretariat.

13.5 Work plan
The work plan is available in Annex I.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

14.1 Environmental Concerns and stocks subject to Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling
To improve the sharing of information on environmental concerns that impact whale populations subject to Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling, prior to the SC meeting, the Convenors of E and ASW reviewed all papers and noted those relevant for discussion at a joint E-ASW session. Using this process, ASW were made aware of relevant discussions during the meeting.

14.2 Chemical pollution
14.2.1 Review intersessional work on Pollution 2030
The Pollution 2030 ICG provided an update on the intersessional work on chemical pollution. The group prioritised the following key information: (1) emerging contaminants known or likely to affect cetaceans, but currently overlooked; (2) new findings on effects of legacy contaminants; (3) evidence of direct threat to vulnerable populations from either emerging or legacy contaminants; and (4) new findings on how cetaceans metabolise certain compounds, which may make them either more or less susceptible to effects of pollutants. In addition, the group emphasised the importance of continued monitoring of pollutant concentrations in tissues from both stranded and free-ranging animals, and the collation of such information in relevant databases.

14.2.2 New information on pollution
The Committee reviewed documents on maternal transfer of persistent organic pollutants to killer whale calves, as well as on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in harbour porpoises and other taxa in the Netherlands (Annex F, item 2.2).

Attention: CG, SC
*The Committee **reiterates** its previous recommendation (SC24100) that per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are globally emerging contaminants of concern in aquatic systems, bioaccumulate in cetaceans, and potentially impair cetacean health and **recommends** both compound-specific and broad-spectrum analyses are conducted to characterise emerging PFAS compounds in cetaceans.*

14.3 Diseases of concern
14.3.1. Review progress in intersessional work on emerging diseases
The Committee monitors Cetacean Diseases of Concern (CDOC), e.g., highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1, and biotoxins as causes of cetacean mortality, and assesses emerging technologies for detecting infectious diseases. The Committee highlights that such disease surveillance is vital as cetaceans are sentinels of ocean health. Pathogens vary geographically and are adapting, as seen with HPAI spreading from poultry to marine animals. Additionally, rabies has only recently been recognised as a marine mammal risk.

14.3.2 Other information
SC/70/E/12 details health assessments of the Amazon river dolphin in Lake Amanã, in the Brazilian Amazon, between 2022 and 2025. SC/70/E/17 discusses zoonotic pathogens in the Guiana dolphin.

Four papers relevant to the stocks subject to ASW were identified. SC/70/ASW/11 contains health-related information on the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas (BCB) bowhead whale stock. New information on gray whale parasites, ectoparasites haplotype diversity and toxicology was also reviewed (SC/70/ASW/06; SC/70/ASW/09; SC/70/ASW/12). Annex D contains a full discussion.

14.4 Strandings and mortality events
14.4.1 Review progress of steering committee for the IWC's Strandings Initiative
Between May 2024 and April 2026, the IWC Strandings Initiative (SI) focused on capacity-building activities (SC/70/E/16), with training provided to 40 field rangers and 25 veterinarians in Sri Lanka and 40 delegates in India, alongside workshops and webinars. Since SC69B, the Stranding Expert Panel (SEP) supported 11 emergency responses, mainly in low-capacity regions and frequently involving mass mortality events. Issues continue with a humpback whale live stranding in the Baltic Sea, with statements published on the IWC website:
(*https://iwc.int/resources/news/further-statement-of-iwc-strandings-expert-panel-on-humpback-whale-germany*).

The Committee **commends** the SI for their valuable work, recognising in particular the role played by members of its Expert Panel in the response to the Baltic Sea humpback stranding, a particularly difficult case for several reasons, and emphasises the need to secure funding for all of its components. The uncertainty of funding presents an existential threat to this initiative, and the Committee **strongly encourages** Contracting Governments to support this work. Cetacean

strandings yield uniquely valuable evidence on cetacean populations and the marine environment, informing IWC work on assessments, stock structure, disease, contaminants, marine debris, entanglement, vessel strikes, UMEs and emerging zoonotic threats, such as HPAI. The Committee **notes** that, despite its reporting line to the Commission's WKM&WI Working Group, the Strandings Initiative is integral to the work of the Committee and fully supports its continuation.

Attention: CG, C, S
*Noting the intersessional progress made by the Strandings Initiative, the Committee **strongly urges** Contracting Governments and the Commission to identify stable, long-term funding for the IWC Strandings Coordinator role at a minimum of 0.8 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE). The Committee **encourages** Contracting Governments to provide dedicated funding or to make donations to this end and **requests** the Secretariat to secure this position on a long-term basis in advance of SC71.*

Attention: CG, C, SEP
*The Committee **acknowledges** the significant emergency response support provided by the Strandings Expert Panel (SEP) during the intersessional period and **recommends** the Emergency Response subgroup continue developing formalised procedures to ensure consistent, well-supported responses to future requests.*

*West Africa and the wider Indian Ocean are priority regions identified in the 2025-2028 work plan. The Committee therefore **encourages** Contracting Governments and external funders to support ongoing capacity-building efforts in these and other under-resourced regions, noting that progress against the work plan's regional objectives depends on securing adequate project funding.*

Attention: SEP
*The Committee **welcomes** the establishment of the joint IWC/GSN (Global Stranding Network) Marine Mammal Case Study Cafés as a global knowledge-sharing and networking forum for strandings responders. It **encourages** Strandings Expert Panel (SEP) members and stranding networks to continue to participate in and contribute to these sessions.*

*The Committee **endorses** the collaborative approach to developing a global cetacean strandings database in partnership with ASCOBANS and ICES.*

14.4.2 New information on unusual mortality events
No new information was presented.

14.4.3 Other information
Several documents are presented, including SC/70/E/07 on ongoing stranding and disease surveillance in cetacean species of Korean waters, and SC/70/SM/09 on a large-scale analysis of Guiana dolphin strandings along the Brazilian coast.

The Committee highlights ongoing challenges with free-swimming 'out-of-habitat' (OOH) cetaceans, including recent cases of sperm whales entering inshore waters. The Committee proposes that the SEP assist in arranging early interventions to guide animals and prevent stranding.

The Committee has valuable resources for decision makers, managers, industry and the wider public; the IWC and its Secretariat play a vital role as a source of accurate scientific information and advice on a variety of issues, including out-of-habitat cetaceans, strandings, entanglements, environmental issues and whale watching.

The Global Strandings Network website (*https://globalstrandingnetwork.com/*) and the SI are also highlighted as ideal platforms for sharing information. A specific OOH section on the IWC website would be useful.

Attention: S, SC, CG, CC, WKMWI
The Secretariat is periodically contacted by national authorities and media to provide input, advice or commentary on incidents involving free-swimming individual cetaceans that are 'out of habitat' (OOH) - some of which may also eventually or intermittently strand - in locations that are outside their typical range or preferred habitat.

*To assist national authorities in appropriate response to OOH animals, in terms of the animal welfare or rescue and managing public response and expectations, the Committee **recommends** developing a page within the Strandings Initiative section of the IWC website (https://iwc.int/management-and-conservation/strandings/strandings-initiative) dedicated to resources and information on OOH individuals.*

*The Committee **recommends** that additional funding be provided to the Secretariat to create a Strandings Initiative Portal and communicate wider IWC resources more effectively.*

14.5 Climate change
14.5.1 Review progress in intersessional work on climate change
The Intersessional Group on Climate Change (joint with the Conservation Committee) regularly meets and monitors relevant scientific literature. The ICG also contributed to the CMS workshop in 2025. It is developing plans for further engagement on this topic intersessionally.

14.5.2 Review new information

SC/70/E/15Rev1 provides an overview of reports of emaciated whales worldwide from the scientific literature and other sources. It is suggested that the growing number of incidents of emaciated or skinny whales could be an indicator of widespread declines in cetacean health and may hinder population recovery. Nutritional health of free-ranging animals is of growing interest in conservation research and provides a powerful metric linking environmental change with biological outcomes. Furthermore, understanding the bioenergetic consequences of environmental change is vital to predicting species' resilience to climate change. Continued monitoring through standardised technologies is essential for detecting population trends and informing conservation strategies.

The changing physical properties of the Southern Ocean are known to impact the recruitment and survival of Antarctic krill (*Euphausia superba*). This can result in reduction of energy intake and body condition of whale species, which may lead to population-level effects. Research on southern right whales in their South African wintering ground shows that calving intervals increased in recent decades. In addition, analysis of morphological body condition via aerial photogrammetry shows a 23% reduction in maternal body condition in this population in recent decades, potentially contributing to the decreased population reproductive rate. These findings align with the hypothesis of a trade-off linked to the reduced maternal body condition in this population, likely indicative of diminished foraging success associated with recorded regional Antarctic sea ice declines and reduced prey availability. A significant decline in reproductive output of southern right whales in the last three decades was documented off southwest Australia and has been driving a slowed rate of population growth over the last decade (Annex Q, item 4.1.1.1). Analyses revealed that prolonged calving intervals coincide with declining Antarctic sea ice, persistent positive Antarctic Oscillation, and increases in surface chlorophyll-a, signalling broader ecosystem shifts. The Committee notes that these studies add to the growing evidence that baleen whale reproduction is influenced by environmental change, reinforcing the need for long-term monitoring to understand population dynamics and their potential role as sentinels of ocean health. The Committee concludes that long-term datasets are indispensable for detecting and interpreting ecosystem change over ecologically meaningful timescales.

Attention: CG, SC

*Given the value of long-term datasets and the desirability of collaboration between research groups collecting data across multiple regions (including for example stable isotopes, telemetry, modelling, and drone-based assessments of body condition), the Committee **urges** Contracting Governments to support the maintenance of such long-term datasets.*

*The Committee further **encourages** scientists to pursue interdisciplinary work that integrates multiple ecological metrics to assess ecosystem health in relation to climate change, and to establish collaborations between research groups in support of this aim.*

14.6 Anthropogenic underwater noise

14.6.1 Review progress from intersessional work on impacts to cetaceans from underwater noise

The ICG on Anthropogenic Underwater Noise (AUN) provided an update on its work during the intersessional period, including updates regarding underwater noise, its impact on marine life, and coordination with international bodies, such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). The ICG's ongoing scientometric review of IWC documents related to acoustic research trends was also discussed (SC/70/E/06). The ICG updated its Strategic Plan to align with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF; https://www.cbd.int/gbf) and the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Treaty (BBNJ; High Seas Treaty; https://www.un.org/bbnjagreement/en).

SC/70/E/18 reviews underwater noise work undertaken by other international organisations. Anthropogenic underwater noise has increased significantly over the past century and is now widely recognised as a major threat to marine biodiversity, particularly cetaceans, which rely on sound for survival. Since the 1970s, scientific research and international concern have steadily expanded, leading to coordinated action across multiple global, regional and intergovernmental organisations. The Committee plays a key role in advancing research, promoting mitigation measures, and collaborating with bodies such as the IMO, CMS (including ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS), CBD, regional seas conventions and the wider UN. There is growing global convergence towards recognising underwater noise as a critical environmental pressure requiring coordinated research, regulation and practical mitigation across sectors.

Attention: SC, CC, C, CG, S

*The Committee notes that the International Maritime Organization (IMO) is considering a global Underwater Radiated Noise (URN) study to support work on developing targets for reducing URN. The study would provide a very valuable dataset for assessing the impacts of URN from shipping on cetaceans. The Committee **requests** that the Secretariat write to Contracting Parties to encourage them to support the study, emphasising the value of this to the work of IWC and to future collaborations between the IWC and IMO.*

The Committee highlights that, since 2023, due to conflict in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and currently in the Strait of Hormuz**,** there has been a rerouting of shipping around the Cape of Good Hope, with vessels transiting through areas of

high cetacean abundance, including the Mozambique Channel (Annex I, item 3.1.5). This increased shipping transiting these areas by more than double.

14.6.2 Review new information

Anthropogenic underwater noise has become an increasing environmental and governance concern. In SC/70/E/06, 7,830 Committee documents, produced between 1951 and 2024, are compiled and screened to reconstruct how acoustics and anthropogenic underwater noise emerged and diversified within the Committee. Explicit underwater-noise content was identified in 180 documents (2.16%), first appearing in 1979 and recurring across 38 years. This provides the first long-term synthesis of how underwater noise evolved within the Committee from a technical acoustic topic into a policy-relevant environmental issue, offering a historical framework for understanding the development of ocean noise governance within the Committee.

SC/70/E/21 reports on the impact of anti-submarine acoustic activities on beaked whales. Evidence from three decades of multiple complementary approaches including epidemiological studies, pathological findings, and experimental and behavioural studies links naval sonar to atypical mass strandings of beaked whales, especially Cuvier's beaked whale. Together, these lines of evidence point toward a coherent mechanism: an extreme stress response that disrupts normal diving physiology and behaviour and can lead to decompression-like pathology, standings and/or death. Such strandings are a recurring issue in several regions and countries in Europe, including Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Spain. Prior to 2004, the Canary Islands were a hotspot of atypical beaked whale strandings with eight known atypical mass stranding events. In November 2004, the Spanish Government implemented a moratorium on the use of active mid-frequency naval sonar in the waters surrounding the Canary Islands, prohibiting its use within 50 nautical miles of the coastline. No atypical mass strandings have occurred since. This provides the first direct evidence that such a moratorium can be an effective management measure.

The Committee considers that there is clear evidence that the moratorium on sonar in the Canary Islands has been an effective conservation measure. It also notes that the Mediterranean Sea is a high-risk area, and current measures are insufficient in the absence of spatial management.

Attention: SC, CC, C, CG

*The Committee recognises that the implementation of a moratorium on the use of anti-submarine sonar in 2004 has been associated with the absence of further atypical mass strandings of beaked whales for more than two decades. The Committee **strongly encourages** the Government of Spain to maintain the current moratorium on the use of anti-submarine sonar in Canary Islands waters in order to ensure the continued prevention of atypical mass strandings of beaked whales.*

*The Committee further **recognises** the potential relevance of this approach to other regions where atypical mass strandings of beaked whales have been documented.*

The Committee recognises that there is currently a period of great international strife, with significant military activity, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz and the Black Sea, and that it is highly likely that there are currently significant impacts on cetaceans and other marine species in these areas from multiple sources of anthropogenic underwater noise. The Committee notes the ACCOBAMS has developed a post-war plan for Black Sea cetaceans (ACCOBAMS, 2025, Resolution 9.10).

14.7 Marine debris

14.7.1 Review progress on recommendations on marine debris

The IWC has a global mandate to protect cetaceans from marine plastic pollution, as enshrined in the IWC Plastic Resolution adopted in 2022 (Item 10). The ICG on Marine Debris (joint with the CC) reported on continued surveying of the growing scientific literature and sharing of new papers on the topic. Global plastics output has doubled since 2000, with impacts on cetaceans including ingestion, entanglement, inhalation and toxic pathways that contribute to injury, impaired health and mortality. SC/70/E/10 discusses the ongoing Global Plastics Treaty (GPT) negotiations and establishment of the new UN Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution, which represent milestones in the international community's efforts to understand, monitor and mitigate the escalating impacts of plastic pollution on marine ecosystems and species. The Committee notes that the Global Plastics Treaty is not yet in place but looks forward to collaborating and contributing to it in the future.

14.7.2 Review new information

Abandoned, lost and otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) is a pervasive threat to marine ecosystems, maritime safety and coastal livelihoods. SC/70/E/09 presents a short overview of best practice for gear marking and reporting as potential tools to mitigate the risks of ALDFG, particularly with regards to cetacean welfare and conservation. The Committee **agrees** that the suggested actions outlined in SC/70/E/09 can be taken forward by the marine debris ICG, including drafting a report for the Plastics Treaty to highlight the risks that marine debris poses to cetaceans.

Several papers on both floating marine debris as well as that ingested by cetaceans were presented, providing additional evidence of risk to cetaceans.

14.8 Habitat alteration as anthropogenic impact on cetaceans

14.8.1 Review progress in intersessional work on impacts on cetaceans of deep-sea mining

At SC69A, the Committee established an ICG on deep-sea mining and its potential impacts on cetaceans.

The development of the deep-sea mining industry and implementation of active mining sites is progressing very rapidly. The Committee notes that commercial-level deep-sea mining is being expedited in certain jurisdictions and could begin as early as late 2026 outside of international oversight. The Committee emphasises that several countries are interested in developing deep-sea mining and **expresses concern** at the rate at which this is progressing without accompanying environmental protection.

The Committee notes that approximately 50 years of data collection and monitoring were required before the severe impacts to cetaceans from anthropogenic sources (e.g., mid-frequency sonar on deep-diving cetaceans; persistent organic pollutants on health) were demonstrated. The Committee therefore **expresses concern** that, once deep-sea mining starts, it will be very hard to monitor and stop and/or mitigate any impacts.

The Committee **notes** that the scientific community is in the unusual position where discussions of a potential threat to ecosystems are ongoing before activities related to this threat are implemented. The need to proactively implement regulatory measures, e.g., within recognised Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), was discussed, and the Committee notes that Norway's moratorium on deep-sea mining as a precautionary measure was an example to other nations.

Attention: SC, CC, C, CG

*The Committee **draws attention** to the recent reaffirmation by the Convention for Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) of its position on deep-sea mining.*

*The Committee **reiterates** SC2393 and its extreme concern regarding the potential impacts on cetaceans from commercial deep-sea mining and, once again with urgency, **encourages** the Commission to consider this information as soon as possible, with a view to establishing a position on deep-sea mining.*

*The Committee therefore **reiterates its recommendation** (SC24111) that:*

(1) The CC discuss possible steps for the Commission to follow up on this issue during its next meeting, making use of the work done by the ICG and other relevant multilateral agreements, such as CMS; and

(2) The Commission works, communicates, consults and partners with other international bodies, in particular the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and CMS, regarding the impact of deep-sea mining on marine animals and ecosystems, including those on which cetaceans depend.

14.8.2 Review new information

The Committee **notes** the recent decision by the US Government's Endangered Species Committee to exempt offshore energy development and shipping from protections related to the US Endangered Species Act within the primary habitat of the critically endangered Rice's whale. This includes relaxing acoustic threshold limits for seismic surveys and oil exploration in core Rice's whale habitat, but it also proposes the removal of mandatory 10-knot speed limit zones for transiting shipping and overturning prohibitions on nighttime vessel movement, which is the highest-risk period for vessel strikes. The Committee **notes** that the removal of these protections did not involve scientific evaluation of impacts to Rice's whale, but rather the conservation measures were removed in order to facilitate oil and gas extraction in the Gulf of Mexico.

Attention: SC, CC, C, CG

*The Committee **expresses deep concern** regarding recent exemptions of impacts from oil and gas activities on Rice's whales under the US Endangered Species Act by the US Government.*

*The Committee **considers** that this exemption did not consider the relevant science and associated conservation concerns. The Committee **strongly encourages** the US Government to reinstate conservation measures and to continue monitoring and mitigating the impacts of underwater noise, vessel strikes, oil spills and other environmental threats from oil and gas activities on the Rice's whale.*

14.9 SOCER

In response to several IWC resolutions, the State of the Cetacean Environment Report (SOCER) provides regular updates on environmental matters that affect cetaceans. The 2026 SOCER (SC/70/E/11) focuses on the Atlantic Ocean. A new five-year compendium is now available (*https://iwc.int/management-and-conservation/environment/socer-report*).

14.10 Impacts of plastics on cetaceans

SC/70/E/13 was developed in response to IWC Resolution 2022-1 on impacts of marine plastics on cetaceans, which *inter alia* requested the Committee to develop an approach to be considered by the IWC that would assess the current knowledge of the impact of marine plastic pollution on cetaceans and provide a global risk assessment that identifies 'hotspots' of

cetacean exposure to plastic debris. The PRISMA[6] approach was used to systematically search for evidence of plastic pollution-cetacean interactions in peer-reviewed studies and grey literature. A total of 384 sources of information were identified. By interaction type, plastic ingestion by odontocetes was most represented (*n*=251), followed by entanglement of mysticetes (*n*=155) and entanglement of odontocetes (*n*=154), with the least sources available on plastic ingestion by mysticetes (*n*=113). Two sources documented interaction through inhalation of microplastics by odontocetes. The most represented ocean basin by number of sources was the North Atlantic for both ingestion (*n*=104) and entanglement (*n*=85), followed by the North Pacific (ingestion: *n*=46; entanglement: *n*=39) and the Mediterranean Sea (ingestion: *n*=44; entanglement: *n*=18). The South Atlantic had 31 sources related to ingestion and 14 for entanglement. Details and recommendations can be found in SC/70/E/13. Work on the further fulfilment of IWC Resolution 2022-1, taking into account further advice from the Commission (IWC/69/10.1/09), will be taken forward intersessionally by the marine debris ICG and the Secretariat.

Attention: SC, S, SEP
Plastic ingestion of both macro- and microplastic is an increasingly reported finding in stranded cetaceans, yet recording practices vary considerably across stranding networks. The Committee ***endorses*** *the recommendations presented in SC/70/E/13 and* ***requests*** *the Strandings Expert Panel to develop protocols for use during post-mortem investigations designed to be applicable across networks with varying levels of capacity and to present them to SC71 for endorsement.*

14.11 Other items

SC/70/O/23 describes the IWC-Renewables Environmental Research Initiative (IWC-RERI) supported by a voluntary contribution of $5 million AUD, made by the Australian Government. The initiative aims to deliver research on the potential impacts of offshore renewable energy (ORE) developments on cetaceans. Research will address five themes: ecosystem impacts of ORE developments; behavioural and physiological disturbance responses; impacts on migratory whale movements and bioenergetics; passive acoustic monitoring frameworks for baseline data collection; and distribution and abundance modelling of key species including southern right whales, humpback whales, and blue whales. The IWC-RERI Steering Committee, Technical Advisory Group, and the Secretariat oversee grant calls, grant selection, project management, and the assessment and communication of outputs. The voluntary contribution included a provision to fully fund the necessary support from the Secretariat. The initiative complements parallel contributions to CMS for cetacean impact assessment frameworks. IWC-RERI aligns closely with the Committee's existing priorities and is not expected to alter the Committee's current work agenda. The partnership is presented as a significant step in connecting cetacean conservation science with the global transition to sustainable energy.

The Committee agrees to establish an ICG to consider issues related to renewable energy and to include this as a standing agenda item for future meetings. This item would allow for updates on the IWC-RERI programme, as well as the presentation of new evidence on the impacts of renewable energy developments on cetaceans and on measures to mitigate these impacts.

14.12 Progress on previous recommendations

The Committee reviewed its recommendations, and updates have been shared with the Secretariat.

14.13 Biennial work plan

The biennial work plan is presented in Annex F.

15. ECOSYSTEM MODELLING

15.1 Role of Cetaceans in Ecosystem Functioning

15.1.1 Review new and updated information

The Committee received an outcome report (SC/70/EM/03) from the CC on the pilot project to assess the socioeconomic value of cetaceans, that included the development of a naturalcapitalbased framework to assess how cetaceans contribute to ecosystem services. Following a systematic review of ecological and economic theory, the study introduces the novel Keystone Species Contribution Pathway (KSCP) and highlights that most existing literature assumes a direct link between cetaceans and ecosystem services without accounting for underlying ecological and biophysical complexity.

CMS, with whom the IWC has collaborated on this issue, has reiterated the importance it places on this work and its interest to continue. The Committee notes that the framework provides an initial set of models and a starting point for future research, and that further understanding of cetacean-environment interactions and their contributions to ecosystem services remains necessary. Suggestions include incorporating this work into existing ecosystem models, collaborating with modelling experts, and focusing on key species to improve model performance and consideration of the appropriate level of model complexity.

[6]The PRISMA 2020 statement (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) is an updated, evidence-based, 27-item checklist and flow diagram designed to improve the transparency, completeness, and reproducibility of systematic reviews.

The Committee notes that estimating the value of cetacean contributions requires consideration of additional ecological, biophysical and economic factors, such as variation in the social cost of carbon, the extent to which increased primary productivity translates into harvestable fish production, and the value of the fisheries affected. Furthermore, other ecosystem functions partially supported by cetaceans, including carbon sequestration associated with enhanced primary productivity, should be assessed in additional study sites with appropriate ecological and biophysical conditions.

Attention: CC, SC-CC, CG
The Committee reviewed results from a pilot project commissioned by the CC on cetaceans and ecosystem functioning that aimed to assess the contribution of cetaceans to the provision of socio-economic benefits. The Committee thanks the contractors for their efforts and ***encourages*** *an update on progress at SC71 and discussion of the next steps.*

15.1.2 Work plan
A joint session between EM and SM highlighted the complexity of ecosystemfunctioning hypotheses and the need for multidisciplinary expertise. Other organisations, such as CMS and ACCOBAMS, also incorporate ecosystemfunctioning elements into their work plans. The Committee will therefore consider a work plan on the role of small cetaceans in ecosystem functioning at SC71.

15.2 Ecosystem modelling in the Antarctic Ocean
15.2.1 New and updated information
SC/70/EM/02 analyses satellite-tracked humpback and Antarctic minke whales together with krill fishery vessel tracking (AIS) data (2012-2018) to quantify spatial and temporal overlap in CCAMLR Subarea 48.1 (Antarctic Peninsula). The study finds substantial and increasing overlap for humpback whales but less for Antarctic minke whales. The valuable contributions from this paper emphasise how ongoing baleen whale data collection around the Antarctic Peninsula - now supported by technologies that deliver nearrealtime behavioural, physical and physiological indicators - could inform CCAMLR's revised Krill Fishery Management Approach (KFMA), CCAMLR's Ecosystem Monitoring Program (CEMP), and the Committee's advice to CCAMLR on cetacean data to support adaptive krill fishery management.

The Committee highlights the challenges of using observation data, and the potential value of using controlled experimental designs while krill catches remain low, noting ecological responses may take decades to detect. Modern survey methods now allow non-lethal sampling, and the Committee's experience with morphological data and population health may also help refine the proposed sampling strategy. Few cetacean surveys have been conducted in CCAMLR Area 48, where the krill fishery operates, though a German-led krill biomass survey in 2027 will include helicopter-based marine mammal observations.

The Committee stands ready to provide further guidance should CCAMLR request advice on which parameters best support its management objectives.

15.2.2 Cooperation with CCAMLR
A review of how cetacean data could support CEMP and the revised KFMA recommends priority data on abundance, distribution and seasonal presence of key baleen whales for Spatial Overlap Analysis (SOA) development (Johannessen *et al*., 2025). CCAMLR (WGEMM 2025) highlights the need for appropriate survey designs, clear indicators and further work on preyconsumption models. Building on these discussions, SC/70/EM/06 provides draft guidelines for cetacean data collection and analysis to support the SOA, including initial reviews of methods for abundance estimation, krill consumption and spatial-temporal distribution, with the aim of standardising data collection and contributing to ecosystembased management.

The Committee recalls the CCAMLR objective to ensure krill catch limits leave sufficient krill for the ecosystem and dependent predators. It reviewed the IWC Table of Agreed Abundance Estimates to identify any remaining estimates to be referred to SAS, noting that early intersessional referral would assist planning for a possible 2027 workshop. The Committee also notes the abundance table developed for the second IWC-CMS workshop on ecosystem functioning (IWC/SC/69B/REP/04). Methods to estimate krill consumption by baleen whales are important to both CCAMLR's SOA and IWC ecosystem modelling, and the Committee acknowledges the value of having a common standard.

SC/70/EM/05 provides an initial summary of highlevel strategic objectives for Southern Ocean ecosystem modelling and a brief review of ecosystem modelling within CCAMLR. The review notes that ecosystem models are useful aids for assessing the state of Antarctic krill and dependent whale populations, including the direct and indirect effects of fishing, and could also serve as operating models to test management approaches.

The Committee recalls that, in preparation for the 2023 CMS-IWC Workshop on Cetaceans and Ecosystem Functioning, a list of useful ecosystem models was compiled (SC/69B/REP/04), which may assist in reviewing IWC-CCAMLR ecosystem modelling needs. It further notes ongoing work to help bridge IWC and CCAMLR efforts to advance whale conservation within CCAMLR.

Recognising the adoption of Resolution 20241 on Cooperation in Antarctica at IWC69, a key aim of the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the IWC and CCAMLR is to strengthen collaboration between the Scientific Committees of both organisations. The Committee notes that EM remains the primary forum for discussions on data and research to support CCAMLR's ecosystembased management, and that advice to CCAMLR should clearly distinguish whether it concerns direct fishery impacts. The Committee will consider advice on cetacean data to support CCAMLR's ecosystem-based approach to management of its krill fisheries at SC71.

15.3 Standing topics

15.3.1 Modelling of competition among whales and relationships between whales and prey

Buss *et al*. (2025) examines historical ecological baselines for ecosystem modelling using stable isotope analyses of whale bone samples. The Committee notes technical issues regarding isotope interpretation, including differences between bone and skin collagen, fasting effects, seasonal depthrelated carbon shifts, sexrelated variation, and variability in krill isotopic signatures. It **welcomes** the paper and further notes that similar dietary breadth in fin whales has been reported in the Northeast Atlantic and aligns with historical whaling records showing their broad spatial range.

15.3.2 Progress on multi-species distribution models (MSDMs)

No new information was presented. Nevertheless, the Committee emphasises the importance of this work for understanding spatial overlap between whales, krill and fisheries, and therefore looks forward to receiving new studies at SC71.

15.3.3 Progress on considering effects of long-term environmental variability on whale populations

The issue of environmentally-induced variability in baleen whale demographics was last examined at a workshop held in 2010 (IWC, 2011). The question then posed was whether MSYR is affected by environmental variability. The Committee notes that this topic is relevant to the review of MSYL for cetacean species, as a recently published study (Kanaji *et al*., 2024) attempted to estimate MSYL levels without accounting for stochastic errors, including those potentially arising from environmental variability. The Committee **reiterates** the importance of understanding the relationships between MSY-related quantities and long-term environmental variability.

15.3.4 Progress with development of individual-based energetic models (IBEMs)

No IBEMrelated papers were submitted, and no funding is currently available. The Committee **agrees** to keep IBEMs as a standing agenda item and **encourages** submission of relevant papers to SC71 due to the importance of this topic and the availability of several recent publications.

15.4 Progress on previous recommendations

The Committee reviewed progress on previous recommendations and closes 12 of these where work has been completed or superseded (Annex G).

15.5 Biennial work plan

The biennial work plan and intersessional groups can be found in Annex G (item 7).

16. SMALL CETACEANS

16.1 Small cetaceans of the South Pacific

Small cetaceans of the South Pacific is the Small Cetacean Sub-Committee's (SM) current priority topic, addressed in a series of meetings and workshops focusing on assessment of short-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*), false killer whales (*Pseudorca crassidens*), melon-headed whales (*Peponocephala electra*), pygmy killer whales (*Feresa attenuata*) and rough-toothed dolphins (*Steno bredanensis*). The first workshop, held in Auckland, New Zealand, in February 2024 (SC/69B/REP/06), produced an initial knowledge gaps matrix, identified bycatch as the primary threat, and set out a multi-year work plan requiring sustained intersessional effort and broad stakeholder engagement. In February 2026, a pre-meeting was held in Nouméa, New Caledonia, co-hosted by The Pacific Community (SPC) and the BMI, to address the critical need for:

(1) Improved data access and collaborative planning for cetacean stock assessment and bycatch risk evaluation in the Western and Central Pacific; and
(2) Direct engagement with the WCPFC Regional Observer Programme.

The pre-meeting identified five priority research questions addressable with existing observer data, which were presented to the 2nd Workshop on the Small Cetaceans of the South Pacific, Nadi, Fiji (February 2026). The workshop included evaluating the steps required to implement these research questions, reviewing new biological information on the focal species, identifying and involving national scientists from the South Pacific region, advancing collaboration with island communities, and assessing next steps in the priority topic work plan. Given the success of this workshop and pre-meeting, it was recommended to hold an in-person workshop in Auckland in 2027.

The proposed 2027 Auckland workshop directly responds to SC priorities in three areas: (1) advancing population assessment for small cetaceans in a data-poor but high-threat region, consistent with the SC's long-standing commitment to understand the size, structure and status of cetacean populations; (2) supporting the IWC's BMI by deepening the collaborative relationship with SPC and the WCPFC needed to improve observer data collection, bycatch estimation and mitigation measures for the focal species; and (3) consolidating the integration of information from regional RFMOs, local researchers and local communities.

Attention: SC
*The Committee **highlights** the significant progress made following the 2024 and 2026 in-person meetings, in conjunction with SPREP and BMI, including identification of data sources and analysis of knowledge gaps, establishment of a regional network spanning scientists, fisheries observers' programmes, and regional fisheries management organisations, and built upon an ongoing dialogue between IWC, SPREP and SPC to move from information exchange towards concrete, collaborative actions and projects that support bycatch risk assessment and cetacean conservation in the region. It therefore **recommends** that an in-person workshop be held during the 2027-28 biennium to progress the work of this assessment and increase engagement with fisheries agencies and scientists from the South Pacific region.*

New information was presented on foraging ecology and foraging tactics of false killer whales, which the Committee **welcomes** and acknowledges the value of in relation to the current priority topic.

16.2 Update on previous priority topics

16.2.1 Hector and Maui dolphin

A pre-meeting focused on the spatial risk assessment of threats to Hector's (*Cephalorhynchus hectori*) and Māui dolphins (*C. h. maui*) was conducted prior to and during SC70. An update of the spatial risk assessment is underway, and the focus of meetings prior to and during the pre-meeting was to review fulfilment of previous IWC Recommendations and to provide expert advice as the risk assessment model was being updated, rather than comment on a final product. As in previous years, this work was supported by the Government of New Zealand. The Committee thanks the reviewers who worked with the New Zealand Government for several months prior to SC70 and acknowledges the invaluable input and discussion provided by pre-meeting participants.

The New Zealand Government thanks the SC for providing a thorough review of the draft Hector's and Māui dolphin Multi-threat Risk Assessment and the reviewers' thoughtful consideration and feedback, which have supported the development of the SEFRA model. This feedback will help inform New Zealand's evaluation of the fisheries management settings in place to protect this taonga (treasured) species. New Zealand looks forward to providing further information once the assessment has been finalised. The pre-meeting report is provided in Annex R (Appendix 2).

16.2.2 Iberian killer whale

New information on Iberian killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) confirms that they are a genetically distinct sub-population containing 37 individuals (in 2023), which qualifies them for the IUCN Critically Endangered (CR) category under Criterion D. The sub-population growth rate is currently stable at 0.46, but reproductive rates are low, with an estimated interbirth interval of 8.3 years.

Interactions between this sub-population and vessels in the Strait of Gibraltar have been and continue to be reported since 2020, compromising vessel safety. Although no significant overall increase in interactions was reported, interactions in the Strait of Gibraltar decreased, and the number in the Galician-Cantabrian area increased. Trends are difficult to interpret as reporting mechanisms are not standardised and have differed over the years. In response to these interactions, seafarers continue the illegal use of deterrents, posing a significant risk to the sub-population given its small size, limited genetic connectivity and long interbirth interval.

Attention: CG Spain, Portugal, Morocco, France, CC, SC
*The new information provided to the Committee indicates that fewer than 40 Iberian killer whales remain. Given that interactions between Iberian killer whales and sailing vessels are still being reported, posing risks to whales and compromising vessel safety, the Committee **strongly encourages** the range states of Spain, Portugal, Morocco and France to treat this species as a priority candidate for a CMP and develop a proposal for consideration at SC71.*

*The Scientific Committee considers that Iberian killer whales would benefit from the development of a CMP and **recommends** that the SWG-CMP treat the species/population as a 'priority species/population' for the purpose of the CMP development process. In making this recommendation, the Scientific Committee acknowledges that a nomination would not be required for the species/population, and the Scientific Committee **encourages** the SWG-CMP to commence outreach to relevant range states and stakeholders to encourage and support the development of a CMP.*

16.2.3 Vaquita

The 2025 vaquita research effort in the Upper Gulf of California combined extensive visual and acoustic surveys to assess distribution, minimum abundance, body conditions, and the presence of calves. Sightings and acoustic detections confirmed

the presence of vaquita within and outside the Zero Tolerance Area (ZTA) and Extension Area (EA), but still within the Vaquita Refuge. The Committee reviewed an estimate of abundance derived from visual and acoustic data, derived within an expert elicitation framework, and agrees on an estimate for 2025 of 7-10 individuals (the range held 67% of the expert's belief), recognising that this is likely to be an underestimate of the total population. In 2024, the agreed estimate was 6-8 individuals, and in 2023, 8-12 individuals (all ranges held 67% of the expert's belief). These results indicate the persistence of a small population. All individuals observed appeared to be in good body condition, and both calves and juveniles were recorded.

The reports of the 12th and 13th meetings of the Comité Internacional para la Recuperación de la Vaquita (CIRVA) reviewed the modifications to the 2020 Regulatory Agreement proposed by Mexico based on the results of the 2025 vaquita research effort. These proposed modifications include expanding the ZTA and modifying the Vaquita Refuge. The expanded ZTA would encompass all areas where passive gillnet deterrents (i.e., concrete blocks with hooks) are deployed and only permit clam diving and vessel transit. The modified Vaquita Refuge would prohibit passive gillnetting but permit vaquita-safe fishing methods, namely clam diving, rodeo-style corvina fishing or alternative-gear shrimp fishing. CIRVA agreed the proposed modifications were justified but stipulated that this agreement was contingent on: improved enforcement and compliance by management authorities; improved cooperation with fishing communities; the development of vaquita-safe fishing gear; the deployment of passive gillnet deterrents; and the continued monitoring of vaquita distribution.

The IWC's first Extinction Alert, issued in 2023, brought heightened attention to the plight of the vaquita and is thought to have effectively shifted the perception of the issue from a domestic problem to an international one, contributing to increased governmental attention to the issue at that time.

Attention: C, CG Mexico, SC

*The Committee welcomes the information documenting the continued survival of the vaquita provided in the CIRVA 12 and 13 reports and broadly **agrees** that the proposed changes to the larger area are justified in the context of recent vaquita sightings and acoustic detections.*

*The Committee **respectfully requests** that Mexico prioritise the recommendations detailed in the CIRVA reports that detail the implementation of compliance, enforcement and sanction improvements; strengthened departure and landing inspections; the development of vaquita-safe fishing gear; the continued monitoring of vaquita abundance and distribution in relation to fishing activity; and strengthened cooperation with fishing communities.*

16.2.4 Atlantic humpback dolphin

A range-wide update on the distribution and status of Atlantic humpback dolphins (*Sousa teuszii*), based on data collected from 2015 to 2025, was presented by the Consortium for the Conservation of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (CCAHD). The update focused on new information from the Gulf of Guinea. The species remains Critically Endangered, with fewer than 3,000 individuals estimated across 19 range states. Bycatch in artisanal fisheries is now confirmed as the most serious threat. Noting the Critically Endangered status, the Committee **reiterates** its previous recommendation that the Secretariat continue supporting the implementation of the CMS Single Species Action for the Atlantic humpback dolphin. The Committee **encourages** all Contracting Governments within the range states to prioritise and support research and conservation efforts for this species and **requests** an update at SC71.

16.2.5 Indian Ocean humpback dolphin

New information was presented on Indian Ocean humpback dolphins (*Sousa plumbea*) from the KwaZulu-Natal coast, South Africa, along with a progress update on the Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin Conservation Network (HuDoNET), which released a Network Action Plan (NAP) in January 2026. The Committee **encourages** implementation of the NAP and **requests** an update at SC71.

16.2.6 Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin

A standardised welfare assessment framework for Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins (*Sousa chinensis*), which complements the existing IWC Welfare Assessment Tool, was presented. The Committee **encourages** the incorporation of welfare assessment tools in cetacean monitoring programmes and **welcomes** future information on welfare science.

The Committee received an update and statement on the serious and continued decline of Taiwanese humpback dolphins (*S. c. taiwanensis*), based on a predicted abundance of 46-60 individuals in 2028, compared with an estimated abundance of 99 individuals in 2002-04 (CVs were requested but not provided). The Committee notes that bycatch is the greatest threat to this sub-species, and if this threat is not eliminated, the population may be beyond recovery. A statement was prepared by some members of the Committee urging the IWC to highlight the plight of this population (Annex R, Appendix 3). The Committee **expresses its deep concern** at the predicted decline in the Taiwanese humpback dolphin population and will review the situation intersessionally, e.g., via formation of an Intersessional Correspondence Group or a Task Team.

16.2.7 Yangtze finless porpoise

A progress update was presented on the conservation status of Critically Endangered Yangtze finless porpoise (*Neophocaena asiaeorientalis asiaeorientalis*). Population estimates have increased from ~1,000 individuals in 2017 to over 1,400 individuals in 2025 (using eDNA metabarcoding techniques). This increase is attributable to a combination of *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation measures, including a 10-year Yangtze River-wide fishing ban under China's National Yangtze River Protection Law and a network of oxbow lake reserves. To date, six individuals have been successfully reintroduced from the largest oxbow lake reserve, Tian-e-Zhou (TEZ), into the mainstream of the Yangtze River.

The Committee **commends** the achievements of Wang Ding, for his tireless work promoting the protection of this species and its habitat and facilitating the classification of the Yangtze finless porpoise as a Grade I Protected Species (National First-Level Protected Wild Animals), thereby affording this vulnerable population the highest level of conservation priority in the People's Republic of China.

Attention: CG People's Republic of China
*The Committee commends the 10-year Yangtze River-wide fishing ban, which has significantly improved the conservation status of the Critically Endangered Yangtze finless porpoise. While recognising that ex situ conservation serves as an interim measure in support of the long-term goal of re-establishing a self-sustaining wild population of Yangtze finless porpoise (Neophocaena asiaeorientalis asiaeorientalis), the Committee **strongly encourages** the People's Republic of China to continue and progressively expand the reintroduction of Yangtze finless porpoise from ex situ reserves into the Yangtze River mainstream, commensurate with the ongoing recovery of natural river habitat. The Committee **respectfully requests** that an update be provided on this work at SC71.*

16.2.8 Beaked whales

Data collected between 2019 and 2023 confirms the presence of Deraniyagala's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon hotaula*) in the northern South China Sea. These data provide new information on the acoustic signals, group size, mixed-species associations and habitat preferences of this poorly-known species. The Committee **welcomes** the new information and **encourages** international collaboration to protect beaked whales and their habitat in the north South China Sea.

An increase in beaked whale strandings in European waters since mid-2025 (Annex F, item 6.2) is being investigated as a potential unusual mortality event (UME) by ASCOBANS and the IWC Strandings Expert Panel and will be reviewed by both E and the Beaked Whale ICG. A report will be provided to SC71.

16.2.9 Tursiops Taxonomy

The *Tursiops* Taxonomy ICG continues to update and maintain a database of peer-reviewed publications, organised by geographic region, on information pertaining to species and subspecies (taxonomic) and population-level distinction. Improvements to the methods for presenting and accessing this information on the IWC website are being developed.

16.2.10 Bycatch of coastal cetacean species and increased trade in fish products

New information was presented on the demand for fish maw, which has developed into an international, multimillion-dollar trade and is a significant and escalating threat to small cetaceans. The threat associated with this trade, specifically bycatch, is compounded by inadequate fisheries management, limited trade traceability and lack of international coordination. A resolution, recently adopted by CMS, identifies the fish maw trade as an emerging issue of concern and seeks collaboration with CITES and the IWC to review its impacts and develop mitigation measures.

Based on this information, and in light of UNEP/CMS/Resolution 12.22 (Rev.COP15) that recognises the increasing concern that fisheries that supply the growing global demand for fish maw are seriously impacting marine species, including CMS-listed species caught as bycatch, and the importance of ongoing CMS collaboration with the IWC, CITES and other relevant organisations, the Committee **agrees** to establish an ICG to support this collaborative strategy (see https://www.cms.int/document/bycatch-and-other-fisheries-induced-mortality-3).

Attention: SC, C, CG, CITES, CMS, BMI
*In light of the information that has emerged in the last biennium, the Committee aligns its **concerns** with CMS (COP15) Resolution 12.22 that the international fish maw trade, mainly from high value croaker (Sciaenidae) species, is a significant and escalating threat to small cetaceans, especially in light of inadequate fisheries management, limited trade traceability and lack of international coordination. The Committee **agrees** to work with CMS, CITES and other relevant organisations to encourage states with maw fisheries within their jurisdictions to undertake cetacean bycatch assessments in these fisheries, implement effective monitoring and management with a view to reduce cetacean bycatch to the lowest possible level needed to prevent population decline, and to consider restrictions on exports of high value maw. The Committee **requests** that the IWC-CMS-CITES ICG report on progress at SC71.*

Attention: SC-CC, BMI, CG
*The Committee **reiterates** its previous serious concern at the growing international demand for swim bladders from croaker (Sciaenidae) species which results in the bycatch of small cetaceans, some of which already face a high risk of extinction (SC24129), and **requests** that these concerns are communicated through the joint SC-CC report at IWC70 with a view to encourage Contracting Governments to collaborate with CMS, CITES and other IGOs to address these impacts and support listing of species caught for their swim bladders on CITES to ensure that international trade is regulated and, thereby, that cetacean bycatch is mitigated.*

16.2.11 Harbour porpoise
Preliminary results from a multi-year project on tagging harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) in Dutch waters were presented. To date, five individuals have been tagged, providing insights into harbour porpoise movements in the southern North Sea. An ICG to provide structured scientific support to the programme is under consideration.

16.2.12 Beluga
New research on beluga whales (*Delphinapterus leucas*) in the Western Bering Sea confirms that the Anadyr Estuary, containing a genetically and geographically distinct sub-population, is a key habitat during the summer (July-August) feeding season. The Committee **welcomes** this work and **encourages** the researchers to provide further updates as the work progresses.

16.3 Retrospective recommendation review
16.3.1 Review of recommendations prior to SC69B
All recommendations relevant to this Sub-Committee, made between 1980 and 2024, were compiled into a database containing 636 recommendations. The status of these recommendations will be reviewed and updated by members of the Recommendation Review ICG. A report on these updates will be provided at SC71.

16.4 Review direct takes and live captures of small cetaceans
16.4.1 Direct takes
Several documents were considered under this agenda item: (1) a review of Japanese hunts of 11 species of small cetaceans that occurred between 2000-23; (2) an update of catch records from small cetacean hunts in the Solomon Islands and an update of species records using genetic analyses of teeth, which confirms at least six species are targeted; (3) a report that quantified whaling and aquatic wild meat takes for all CMS Appendix-I listed cetaceans between 2014 and 2024; (4) a report on the drivers of cetacean exploitation in Ghana, based on interviews with 389 fishers from four identified cetacean hotspots in the Western and Central Regions; and (5) an overview of the Power BI report which compiles data on reported bycatch, vessel strikes and direct catches of small cetaceans submitted though the IWC Progress Reports Portal and compiled from publicly available data from NAMMCO and Japan. Although the Power BI report increases the accessibility of these data for the Sub-Committee, inconsistent reporting effort limits its utility, particularly for longitudinal analyses of trends.

Attention: S, SC SM
*The Committee **commends** the efforts made to consolidate data on bycatch, vessel strikes and direct catches for small cetaceans into a publicly available database, and **agrees** that improving the data quality, coverage and usability would be beneficial. The Committee therefore **encourages**:*

(1) Research to compile metadata on existing national monitoring frameworks, including observer programmes, stranding networks and reporting requirements for small cetacean bycatch and vessel strikes;
(2) Research to identify which countries lack systemic monitoring or data collection programmes on bycatch, vessel strikes and direct catches for small cetaceans; and
(3) Contracting Governments to submit information on existing national monitoring frameworks to the Secretariat.

In discussion, Japanese observers noted some errors in the paper that summarised take of small cetaceans in Japanese waters. Japan highlighted that, while it is not a member of the IWC, it voluntarily publishes progress reports on both large and small cetaceans via its official website.

16.5 The role of small cetaceans in ecosystem modelling
A joint session held with EM led to the establishment of an ICG with the objective of developing a work plan to better understand the role of small cetaceans in ecosystem functioning. A report will be provided at SC71.

16.6 Status of the voluntary fund for small cetacean conservation research
16.6.1 Fund status
As of 1 April 2026, the Voluntary Fund totals £104,288, containing contributions received from the Government of the Netherlands and NGOs, namely the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), Campaign Whale, Cetacean Society International,

Greenpeace, OceanCare, ProWildlife and the Whaleman Foundation. Between 2024 and 2026, the fund will support six projects and two workshops, as well as the attendance of five IPs at SC70.

16.6.2 Update on funded projects

Progress updates from six funded projects were received:

(1) Unveiling Threats, Protecting Traditions: Scientific Expedition on Small Cetaceans in Saint Vincent and The Grenadines;
(2) Porpoise and People: Engaging Fishing Communities and Mitigating Bycatch (in Hong Kong);
(3) Genomic and Ecological Connectivity of False Killer Whales Around the Southern Hemisphere and Pacific;
(4) Assessment of Small Cetacean Populations, Fishery Bycatch and Dolphin Watching Activities in Tañon Strait Protected Seascape, Philippines;
(5) Genetic Assessment of an Endangered Killer Whale Sub-population; and
(6) Analyses of Samples from Free-ranging *Inia geoffrensis* in the Brazilian Amazon: Assessing the Health Status of Two Populations and Preparing for Future Threats to the Species' Conservation.

A progress update from a previously funded project titled 'Population Assessment of Lahille's Bottlenose Dolphin in Argentina' was also received.

The Committee **expresses gratitude** for all contributions to the Voluntary Fund and notes that these funds support critical conservation research projects of direct relevance to SM.

16.7 Progress on previous recommendations

At SC69B, 11 recommendations were made by SM. At SC70, two of these recommendations have been closed; nine are still open.

16.8 Biennial work plan

The work plan is provided in Annex R (item 9).

17. WHALE WATCHING

17.1 Assess the impacts of whale watching and swim-with-whale operations on cetaceans

The Committee received two papers about the impacts of whale watching and swim-with operations on cetaceans. SC/70/WW/01Rev1 examines impacts from tourism, both large cruise ships and smaller boats, on Hector's dolphins in Akaroa Harbour, Aotearoa, New Zealand, an area of core use by this endangered species. Long-term monitoring data documents a change in the distribution of the dolphins, which might be linked to underwater noise from tourism vessels. SC/70/WW/05 provides an update on swimming with killer whales in Baja California Sur, Mexico, an activity that the Committee previously expressed serious concern over potential impacts to animals and swimmers. The Secretaría del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT) has implemented a Management Plan that legalises the activity, allowing year-around interactions during daylight hours, and up to 24 vessels in the activity area at one time, which could result in considerable disruption to the whales' normal activities (Annex S, item 2.1).

Attention: CG Mexico, S, SC

The Committee notes previous concerns regarding swim-with-killer whale activities in the Cerralvo Channel region in Baja California Sur, Mexico (SC24131). While welcoming the Secretaría del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT) Management Plan, this activity continues to be potentially harmful to whales. Given these killer whales have been identified as the mammal-eating ecotype, the Committee also expresses deep concern over human safety.

The Committee:

(1) ***Encourages*** *SEMARNAT to develop a systematic programme to monitor the effectiveness of the regulations, allowing managers to adapt the regulations as necessary to ensure the interactions do not have a negative impact on the animals or swimmers;*
(2) Offers its assistance to SEMARNAT in developing such a programme and ***requests*** *the help of the Secretariat in facilitating a dialogue between Committee representatives and the agency; and*
(3) ***Encourages*** *the submission of an update on this situation to SC71.*

The Committee received information on solitary sociable and out-of-habitat (OOH) cetaceans as they are often subject to intense public viewing and approach. New information was received, largely from European waters, including a comprehensive review of such occurrences, a suite of definitions to aid future research and management, and a detailed assessment of potential drivers of this phenomenon. The review concludes that authorities need to be better prepared to respond to these occurrences, as evidenced by the specific case of an OOH humpback whale in the Baltic Sea that has drawn a great deal of media attention (Item 14.4; Annex S, item, 2.2; Annex F, item 4.4.3). While this is a cross-cutting issue, most of the Committee's relevant expertise remains in E.

17.2 Progress with regional reviews of whale watching

SC/70/WW/03 reports on a Management Plan for whale watching in the Dominican Republic's Silver Bank and Navidad Bank Sanctuary, one of the most important humpback whale breeding areas in the North Atlantic. The Plan was established in 2025 to promote research, education and ecotourism. Whale watching has strict operational controls and contributes substantially to the economy of the area. The Dominican Republic serves as a global model for whale watching sustainability through the integration of science, policy and tourism. The Committee honours the memory of Kim Beddall (1956-2025), who was a pioneer of sustainable and regulated whale watching in the Dominican Republic.

The Committee welcomes this update and **encourages** the continuation of the monitoring work for a better understanding of the sanctuary's benefits. The Committee **encourages** the submission of analyses of these long-term datasets to future meetings (Annex S, item 3.2)

SC/70/SAN/03 provides an update from the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) which details its Sustainable Whale and Dolphin Watching Tourism Network. This network fosters regional cooperation through information sharing, capacity building and access to expertise, with the overarching goal of ensuring the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the industry across the Indian Ocean. Contracting Governments can apply to network's intergovernmental co-financing mechanism, and the Secretariat could also collaborate with France who leads the coordination of this network, to apply for these funds. The IWC, via the Secretariat and the Standing Working Group on Whale Watching (SWGWW), regularly communicates with IORA to provide information to IORA newsletters (Annex S, item 3.4).

The Indian Ocean is one of the priority regions for the next biennium, with a focus on Mauritius where there is heavy pressure on whales from whale watching and illegal swim-with-cetacean activities.

17.3 Collaborative work within the IWC

17.3.1 Communication with the Conservation Committee's Standing Working Group on Whale Watching

SC/70/WW/02 updates the work of the CC's SWGWW which focuses on strengthening best practice guidance, enhancing the link between whale watching and conservation outcomes, and improving coordination across IWC bodies and relevant international fora and processes, including CMS. The Whale Watching Handbook website remains extremely popular, and visitor numbers continue to increase. Given the Handbook's popularity, the Committee continues to be available to provide guidance and advice (Annex S, item 4.3).

The Committee **welcomes** the work of the SWGWW and thanks CMS for its continued support of the Whale Watching Handbook.

The Committee **agrees** that reinvigorating the ICG on communication between the SWGWW and WW would help enhance communication and coordination (Annex S, Table 2). The upcoming Joint CC-SC Meeting is the next opportunity to reinvigorate communication. If necessary, a virtual meeting of WW and the SWGWW could be held intersessionally (to be organised and facilitated by the Secretariat). The plan must ensure its proposed actions stay within the available resources of the Secretariat.

17.3.2 Collaboration with other SC sub-groups on platforms of opportunity and citizen science

The Committee received information on the use of data from whale watching vessels as platforms of opportunity (Cheeseman *et al.*, 2024; Seyboth *et al.*, 2025) and notes that linkages between PH and WW should be strengthened.

17.4 Progress on previous recommendations

The Committee **agrees** to close 15 completed recommendations. The Committee also agrees to add a review of proposals submitted to the Carole Carlson Memorial Fund as a standing item on future agendas. The Secretariat reports that the UK government recently made a contribution to support an update of the Whale-Watching Handbook. The Committee expresses sincere gratitude for this generosity and encourages contributions from all parties interested in the IWC's ongoing work on whale watching.

17.5 Biennial work plan and ICGs

The biennial work plan and intersessional groups can be found in Annex S (item 7).

18. WHALE SANCTUARIES

18.1 Southern Ocean Sanctuary (SOS)

18.1.1 Review of information received via the SOS review portal

In 2022, the Secretariat established an online portal (see URL in recomendation box) to receive information for the Southern Ocean Sanctuary's (SOS) 10-year review which also captured relevant high-level information about research in the contiguous Indian Ocean Sanctuary (IOS). Recent submissions have come from a broad range of countries, as well as research collaboratives (e.g., IWC SORP) (Item 22.2; Annex N, item 4.1).

Attention: SC, CC
*The Committee **welcomes** the continued submission and compilation of research conducted in IWC Sanctuaries via an online submission portal (https://forms.cloud.microsoft/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=7ps8IRk6ZE-XE4jjFDUwmkglA_OyI1BAoLQWUkZmvJBURjRWS0dRSVRNRUIwUEMzMTBISE9UNlEyNC4u&route=shorturl). The Committee **reiterates** its previous recommendation (SC24136) **requesting** the Secretariat to maintain the portal and continue to solicit submissions via annual circulars.*

*The Committee also **requests** the ICG on Compiling Sanctuary Research (ICG-SAN INFO) to prepare a draft summary of the submitted information for presentation to the Committee one biennial period before a Sanctuary review, and then prepare a complete summary for presentation at the meeting at which the review takes place.*

18.1.2 Receive report from the Sanctuary Review Criteria ICG

Three decadal reviews of the SOS were conducted since its establishment in 1994 (2004, 2016 and 2024) with specific review criteria adopted in 2014. In 2018, the Commission endorsed the SOS Management Plan (IWC, 2016b, pp.86-89; IWC, 2018d, p.39) which expanded the objectives from a largely singular focus on the prohibition of commercial whaling to a broader framework that includes rehabilitation of the marine ecosystem, secure habitat for cetaceans, population protection, coordinated research on the effects of environmental change, and assessment of the effects of zero catch.

The Expert Review Panel that conducted the decadal review in 2024 concluded that the 2014 review criteria were no longer consistent with the expanded objectives of the SOS Management Plan. During the intersessional period, updated review criteria were developed to be broadly consistent with the new SOS Management Plan (IWC, 2024c, p.67).

The new proposed review criteria provide a more systematic and comprehensive framework for evaluating the SOS, including alignment with the SOS Management Plan objectives, clear links to measurable outcomes, incorporation of emerging issues such as climate change, and an approach that would be proportionate to long-term recovery timelines for whales (SC/70/SAN/04). These criteria also provide the foundation for the proposed review criteria for the Indian Ocean Sanctuary (IOS) (Annex N, Appendix 3).

Attention: SC, C, CC
*The Committee **agrees** the revised criteria proposed for future reviews of the Southern Ocean Sanctuary (SOS) (Annex N, Appendix 2) and **notes** their applicability for reviewing other IWC Sanctuaries.*

*The Committee **encourages** the Commission to adopt the revised SOS review criteria and endorse their use in future reviews of all Sanctuaries.*

18.2 Indian Ocean Sanctuary (IOS)

18.2.1 Commission guidance about the IOS

At SC68B, SC69A and SC69B, the Committee requested guidance from the Commission with regards to a review process for the Indian Ocean Sanctuary (IOS). As yet, no guidance has been forthcoming. The Committee **welcomes** the opportunity afforded by SC/70/SAN/01 to support a more substantive and focused request to the Commission to instruct the Committee to develop a Management Plan, establish a periodic review process for the IOS and implement the next IOS review.

18.2.2 A rationale for reviewing the IOS

SC/70/SAN/01 summarises the situation with the IOS, which was adopted by the Commission in 1979, renewed in 1989 and extended indefinitely in 1992. The IOS does not have a formal periodic review process and has only been reviewed once by the Committee in 2002. Furthermore, the IOS does not have a Management Plan with defined objectives to measure progress in implementation. The absence of a review process and Management Plan is inconsistent with best practice for area-based management, and contrasts with the SOS. The measures in the SOS plan enable adaptive management by the IWC in response to evolving scientific knowledge. Implementation of a review process and Management Plan for the IOS would strengthen its contribution to cetacean conservation, support the coordination of research across the Indian Ocean basin and contiguous SOS, and enhance the IWC's contribution to broader international marine biodiversity commitments, including the GBF and BBNJ Treaty. It would also be consistent with connectivity conservation commitments adopted by CMS. There is no need for the Commission to amend the Schedule to adopt a review process and Management Plan for the IOS as it has broad authority to recommend measures related to whale conservation (ICRW Article VI).

The Committee expresses appreciation for the information provided in SC/70/SAN/01 and **agrees** that a review process and Management Plan for the IOS should be developed that is consistent with those of the SOS. It emphasises that the migration of some Indian Ocean breeding whale populations to Antarctic feeding grounds increases the need for coordinated adaptive management between the two Sanctuaries. The development of a periodic review process and Management Plan for the Indian Ocean Sanctuary will provide updated scientific information to support and strengthen synergies within the Committee (e.g., the CMP for Arabian Sea humpback whales) and between the IWC and other multilateral environmental agreements, such as CMS.

The Committee **agrees** to a proposed IOS Management Plan, adapted from the SOS Management Plan (Annex N, Appendix 3). The plan has six objectives: (1) protection from commercial whaling; (2) habitat protection; (3) migratory-range protection; (4) coordinated information collection; (5) research on environmental change; and (6) regional cooperation/capacity building. The Committee **agrees** to add an additional objective related to communication and outreach. Proposed research elements can be found at Annex N (item 5.2; Appendix 3).

The Committee **agrees** five proposed IOS review criteria (Annex N, Appendix 3): protection from direct exploitation and other anthropogenic threats; protection of migratory populations across their full range; ecosystem health, habitat security and environmental change; scientific research, monitoring and adaptive management; and governance, international consistency and the Precautionary Principle.

The Committee proposes an ICG to advance implementation of the proposed IOS Management Plan and to support preparations for a future IOS review, if directed by the Commission. The Committee notes that implementation of the proposed IOS Management Plan and IOS review will have budget implications, and it **agrees** that a budget request should be submitted to the Research Fund (SC/70/RP/81). The Committee **agrees** that future Sanctuary reviews will be scheduled, organised and budgeted to ensure the most effective use of resources.

Attention: SC, C, CC
*The Committee **draws attention** to the absence of a Management Plan for the Indian Ocean Sanctuary (IOS) and the lack of a current mandate from the Commission to undertake a regular review of the Indian Ocean Sanctuary, noting that more than two decades have elapsed since the last review. It also **draws attention** to previous requests for guidance from the Commission on reviewing the IOS.*

*The Committee **encourages** the Commission to:*

(1) Review and adopt the proposed Management Plan for the Indian Ocean Sanctuary, including clearly defined objectives, review criteria with measurable performance indicators and a monitoring strategy (Annex N, Appendix 3);
(2) Review and adopt the proposed review criteria for the Indian Ocean Sanctuary (Annex N, Appendix 2);
(3) Endorse the application of the Southern Ocean Sanctuary review process to the review of the Indian Ocean Sanctuary;
(4) Instruct the Committee to conduct a review for the Indian Ocean Sanctuary.

18.3 Progress on previous recommendations

18.3.1 Receive information on initiatives in the IOS

In response to previous recommendations (SC19156), SC/70/SAN/03 provides a progress report on the Indian Ocean Cetacean Network (IndoCet), a consortium whose core purpose is to generate robust scientific evidence on cetacean distribution, ecology and threats across the Western Indian Ocean, and apply these in support of effective conservation management. The network includes around 65 members plus 10 associate members from six Western Indian Ocean States (Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania) plus Reunion and Mayotte (France). It meets as regularly as resources permit. Details about IndoCet's work on stranding, surveys, photo-ID, underwater noise, fisheries interactions and outreach can be found in Annex N (item 6.1).

The Committee **welcomes** the comprehensive report on the work of IndoCet, **commends** the extensive and valuable work conducted within the IOS area, and **congratulates** IndoCet on its work to address vessel strikes and bycatch. In particular, the Committee **recognises** the value of IndoCet's proposed marine mammal action plan and its applicability to, and synergy with, future IOS planning. The Committee **encourages** implementation of the action plan and invites updates for SC71.

18.4 South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary (SAWS) proposal

No update is required.

18.5 Any other sanctuary-related matters

The Committee observes that other sub-committees (E, HIM, SAS and SH) address issues that are relevant to the IOS and SOS and notes the potential for future joint sessions. Attention is also drawn to the newly established SLG which provides a pathway for the Commission to convey their directions and priorities to the Committee (SC/70/O/21).

18.6 Biennial work plan

The biennial work plan and intersessional groups can be found in Annex N (Tables 1 and 2).

19. EXTINCTION ALERT

The Extinction Alert was endorsed by the Commission at IWC68, and an Alert for the vaquita was issued in 2023. At SC69, the Committee agreed that the process for identifying and prioritising populations required refinement. Additional criteria were developed (IWC, 2024f, Annex U) and an ICG established to take forward further work.

The ICG met during SC70 to reflect on the process and lessons from the vaquita Extinction Alert. The group considered two real-world timelines:

(1) Well-documented, evidenced decline where all other IWC measures have been exhausted, which could be handled within the IWC's decision-making processes and timelines; and
(2) Extreme, sudden and unexpected decline where an urgent intersessional response may be appropriate.

While the foundations of this process have been developed, further work is required, including consideration of how Extinction Alerts should be integrated into the existing and robust SC assessment processes. This will provide clarity to SC members and reassurance to the Commission. The process will be considered intersessionally via the ICG and the CC-SC.

Task Teams may also have a role to play in this process. The Committee invites interested parties to engage, including by joining the Task Teams Steering Committee. The Committee also notes that, while Extinction Alerts should be used sparingly, they must be deployed before it's too late and extinction occurs, and that both flexibility and progress are required during the intersessional period.

20. IWC LIST OF RECOGNISED SPECIES

The Committee notes that the SMM's Taxonomy Committee made two changes since SC69B.[7]

20.1 Genus Lagenorhynchus

Galatius *et al.* (2025) used robust phylogenomic data (over 3,000 nuclear genes and complete mitochondrial genomes) that included all species in the genera *Cephalorhynchus*, *Lagenorhynchus* and *Lissodelphis* to investigate the relationship among the Lissodelphininae. The authors also reevaluated morphological and acoustic evidence. Strong evidence demonstrated that *L. australis* and *L. cruciger* are more closely related to the four members of the genus *Cephalorhynchus* than they are to the other *Lagenorhynchus* and should, therefore, be placed into the genus *Cephalorhynchus*. Monophyly of *L. obscurus* and *L. obliquidens* and their distinctiveness from other lissodelphinines was also observed in this study. Since *australis* was the type species for the genus *Sagmatias*, falling in synonymy with *Cephalorhynchus*, and due to the lack of previously available generic name for *L. obliquidens* and *L. obscurus*, Galatius *et al.* (2025) also proposed a new genus, *Aethalodelphis*, for these two species. Both nuclear and mitochondrial data support the proposal of Vollmer *et al.* (2019) for the restriction of *Lagenorhynchus* to *L. albirostris* and the re-assignment of *Lagenorhynchus acutus* to *Leucopleurus. Lissodelphis peronii* and *L. borealis* are supported as sister species and basal to the remaining Lissodelphininae. The Committee follows all the recommendations provided in Galatius *et al.* (2025).

20.2 Franciscana

Using new genetic data, the Franciscana dolphin was split into two subspecies, *P. b. blainvillei* (distributed between southern Rio de Janeiro in Brazil and Chubut province in Argentina) and *P. b. pukusi* (distributed, not continuously, between Espírito Santo and northern Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil) following Nara *et al.* (2024).

In reviewing the population structure of Franciscana dolphins (IWC, 2023a), the Committee recognises that there are two different, geographically isolated populations (named FMA Ia and FMA Ib) within the range of *P. b. pukusi*.

The Committee **agrees** to keep this item on the agenda and reiterates the need to ensure the IWC list is synchronised with the SMM's Taxonomy Committee and the IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group. The Committee notes that, while it currently maintains a list of recognised species, the status of cetacean subspecies is often discussed and referenced in its work. Therefore, the Committee **agrees** to include subspecies recognised by the SMM Taxonomy Committee on the IWC List of Recognised Species.

The Committee expresses appreciation to the SMM Taxonomy Committee for the work it does to create a standard classification and nomenclature for marine mammals.

21. IWC DATABASES AND CATALOGUES

21.1 Guidelines for IWC catalogues and photo-ID databases

The IWC Guidelines for Photo-identification Catalogues were prepared to support the Committee's work in conducting population assessments using photo-ID databases. The aim is that catalogues adhere to common standards for photograph subject and quality, data submission and reporting at a level sufficient to allow the Committee to meet its population assessment goals. Photo-ID is an evolving methodology, and regular revisions are therefore necessary. The latest version of the Guidelines is available on the IWC website (*https://iwc.int/resources/protocols-guidelines-and-how-to-guides*).

21.2 Progress with existing or proposed new catalogues

21.2.1 Right whale photo catalogues

The Committee welcomes an update on the development and trials of an automated photo-ID system designed specifically for southern right whales, conducted by the Southern Right Whale Consortium (SRWC). A large regional photo-ID catalogue

[7]Committee on Taxonomy (2025). List of marine mammal species and subspecies.
Society for Marine Mammalogy, *https://www.marinemammalscience.org* (accessed 8 May 2026).

exists that covers the species' range. The SRWC and the Australian Antarctic Division are working with the developers of the Australasian Right Whale Photo-ID Catalogue (ARWPIC) to develop a fully automated photo-ID system. Two of the three steps in this process have been completed. When completed, an estimated 500,000 photographs will be contained in this new system.

Southern Hemisphere right whales are currently in pre-assessment in SH (Item 8.2.2). Two populations, southwest Atlantic and southeast Pacific, have CMPs.

Attention: CMP, SH, R
*The Committee **recommends** continuation of this work on a Southern Hemisphere-wide catalogue of southern right whales, noting its foundational role in assessment processes.*

21.2.2 Happywhale database

Happywhale has continued to grow rapidly, receiving ~1,000 photos/day from the public and researchers. This platform facilitates the matching of large external datasets and allows matches across a much larger area that was previously limited by manual matching.

The global humpback whale collection totals 116,924 individuals with the most comprehensive coverage in the North Pacific (>68% capture probability; Cheeseman *et al.*, 2023). Substantial regional collections exist across all major ocean basins, with varying capture probabilities.

Cetacean data excluding humpback whales comprise ~10% of encounters (52,347 across 80 species and ecotypes), including notable collections of sperm whales, Risso's dolphins, short-finned pilot whales, killer whale ecotypes, and rare beaked whales. The authors welcome new research partnerships, including legacy catalogues.

Given the incredible success in the number of contributed humpback whale photos to Happywhale in recent years, the Committee's attention is drawn to the possibility of increasing the submissions of southern right whales and blue whales. Photographs collected from tourist vessels could fill data gaps for Southern Hemisphere populations, especially as they are currently in the pre-assessment phase in SH.

To support this, the Committee proposes a short guide and accompanying PowerPoint for distribution to tourist vessels and other potential platforms of opportunity for collecting photographs. Included in the materials would be guidance for expedition leaders, naturalists and vessel operators on how to allow guests to observe whales with minimal impact, with measures such as slowing vessel speeds in the presence of whales, which increases the likelihood of finding whales and minimises the potential for vessel strikes. These outreach tools will be developed intersessionally.

The Committee **recognises** the extreme value of Happywhale, especially with large, multi-decade catalogues, and **praises** the continuous improvements that the platform is undertaking.

21.2.3 Flukebook

SC/70/PH/03 provides a user guide to both Flukebook and Happywhale platforms. Tailored for researchers new to these tools, the guide covers essential workflows such as data importing, catalogue organisation, matching, and GIS mapping to streamline research analysis, in addition to a decision framework to help users select the best platform for their objectives. While the platforms share many similarities, particularly strong matching algorithms, they are structured very differently and offer distinctive features. Notably, both platforms are free to use. They facilitate collaboration, and, given the advancement of AI, early adoption is encouraged to maximise future benefits of these platforms and the rapidly-evolving field. The Committee **thanks** the author and **recognises** the considerable value of this paper to multiple sub-committees and the wider photo-ID science community.

21.2.4 Southern Hemisphere Blue Whale Catalogue

The Southern Hemisphere Blue Whale Catalogue (SHBWC) represents the collaboration of over 30 research groups and individuals with blue whale identification photos from the Southern Hemisphere and is now updated to January 2026. It holds photo-IDs from left and right sides and flukes of 2,710 blue whales from waters off Antarctica, Chile, Peru, Ecuador-Galapagos, in the Eastern Tropical Pacific, off Australia, Timor-Leste, New Zealand, Southern Africa, Madagascar, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

All matching of Australian blue whales has been completed. The combined Australian catalogue comprises photographs collected from 1993-2022. These data were used in a population abundance estimate presented to the Committee (SC/70/SH/16).

New photographs from Chile have been prioritised as a preliminary abundance estimate showed an annual decline of 3% (Fewster & Chopra, 2024). An all-new matching process, photo-quality coding and database management for Chile was completed, with new entries from 2016 and 2017 now added. SC/70/SH/19 presents an abundance estimate based on the updated dataset.

The New Zealand matching process was completed previously (Galletti Vernazzani *et al.,* 2019). The dataset was used to estimate abundance for this population (SC/70/SH/19).

Matching is currently ongoing between Australia and Timor-Leste, with one match found to date.

Ongoing data gaps were identified, particularly in the Southwest Indian Ocean and new photographs were identified from Oman and Brazil. The Committee **encourages** an increase in data contributions from underrepresented regions.

This Catalogue is essential to the ongoing population assessment of non-Antarctic Southern Hemisphere blue whales (Item 8.2.1).

Attention: PH, SH, R
*The Committee **recommends** the sharing of identified existing datasets from Oman and Brazil to increase the sample size of blue whale ID photographs from under-represented areas in the Southern Hemisphere.*

21.2.5 Antarctic Blue Whale Catalogue (ABWC)

Recently available identification photographs of 23 Antarctic blue whales (14 left side, 14 right side) from the 2024-2026 period, collected by researchers, naturalists and citizen scientists on tourist vessels across four of six IWC Management Areas (I, II, V and VI), were compared with the Antarctic Blue Whale Catalogue of 581 individuals. One resighting was recorded of whale ID1940 which was first photographed at a sub-Antarctic island (54°15'S; 36°45'W) in January 2019 and again in January 2026, marking the first resight of an identified blue whale at that location since the Discovery Marking Program (1934-1964). These new identifications increase the catalogue to 603 whales (448 left, 440 right sides, noting some whales were photographed on both sides), representing an estimated 12.5-17% of the super-population of 3,506 whales for the years 2003/2004-2018/2019 (Olson *et al*., 2024). The total number of photo-identifications in the Catalogue from the sub-Antarctic island at 54°15'S 36°45'W has increased to 54. Opportunistic photographs now account for 18% (110/603) of identified whales. The catalogue supports the In-depth Assessment of Antarctic blue whales (Item 8.1.3), while remaining key to IWC-SORP (Theme 1) and the British Antarctic Survey's Lost Giants project.

21.2.6 Gray whale photo catalogues

This multi-year collaboration focuses on developing and training computer vision and deep learning matching algorithms for gray whale lateral flank images contained in catalogues that span the North Pacific and held within https://flukebook.org. The current operational model, MiewID, achieves approximately 96% matching accuracy, enabling improved understanding of gray whale biology and management information across the species' range. Future work includes adding video and drone imagery, further integration with Flukebook, and securing additional computational resources within Wild Me to enhance processing times, while also addressing the challenges of balancing data privacy with collaborative data sharing and large-scale integrative analyses.

The Committee **praises** the work as an impressive contribution to the development and use of AI with photo-ID data, particularly as a research tool for gray whale populations.

21.2.7 Rice's whale photo catalogues

Between 2004 and 2019, US National Marine Fisheries Service vessel surveys compiled a photo-ID catalogue of 31 individually identified whales based on dorsal fins and body marks (Aichinger Dias *et al*., 2025). Twenty-eight whales were resighted over intervals ranging from seven days to over 15 years. Genotyping confirmed that whales identified via photographs were genetically unique and sexing identified 14 females and 11 males (including three presumed mothers). Imagery also documented various deformities and confirmed the identity of a deceased whale. Additional identifications have been documented, and the catalogue now stands at 35 whales

Rice's whale received considerable attention under Item 8.2.6. The Committee notes the need to monitor this population and better understand the anthropogenic threats.

Attention: HIM, NH, PH, R
*The Committee **strongly recommends** that the Rice's whale photo-ID catalogue and associated research be continued, given the critically endangered status of this species.*

21.2.8 Humpback whale photo catalogues

SC/70/PH/04 presents collaborative photo-ID work on humpback whales from Southern Hemisphere Breeding Stocks B and C, compiling a database of 13,439 individuals from African coasts and western Indian Ocean islands (1988-March 2025) and comparing them with the global Happywhale database. A total of 71 individuals moved between low-latitude breeding grounds of Breeding Stocks B and C, with matches also found in Australia, Brazil, Colombia, high-latitude feeding areas (IWC Management Areas II and III), the sub-Antarctic island at 54°15'S 36°45'W and the sub-Antarctic Islands at 56°36'S 027°43'W, challenging previous assumptions about stock boundaries and informing assessments under IWC-SORP (Theme 4). The Committee **commends** this work, noting that it has the potential to significantly advance the understanding of humpback whale population structure and movements.

Evans *et al*. (2025) developed a novel aerial-ID method using drone imagery to identify humpback whales via tubercles and cookiecutter shark scars. Applied to 1,498 whales (Jan.-Mar. 2022), Fluke-ID yielded 164 re-sightings (76 lactating

females, 88 others), while aerial-ID yielded 372 re-sightings (249 and 123, respectively), representing a 227% increase for lactating females and 40% for others. The approach was extended to a multi-year, cross-regional dataset (2018-2025) of 54 individuals verified with fluke-ID and successfully matched 54 individuals, with the longest re-sight spanning 6.5 years. The work is ongoing, with a focus on mapping tubercle pattern development over time, so that the feasibility of matching individuals from calf to adulthood is better understood. In addition, a collaboration with Happywhale is underway to develop a matching algorithm for vertical perspective in humpback whales

The Committee **welcomes** further updates at SC71 regarding this innovative new method.

21.2.9 Fin whale photo catalogues

SC/70/PH/05 provides an update of a deep learning framework for automated photo-ID of Southern Hemisphere fin whales using aerial drone footage. The framework addresses two distinct challenges: (1) automated extraction of individual whales from continuous video; and (2) subsequent re-identification via dorsal pigmentation patterns. A scientifically usable tool for assisted catalogue construction is achievable within the next 1-2 years, while a fully automated, end-to-end system remains a longer-term objective (3-5 years), depending on data availability and collaboration

The Committee **commends** the work on this project and **recognises** that, as Southern Hemisphere fin whales progress to the pre-assessment phase, this is an important contribution to the work of SH.

21.3 Progress with existing IWC databases

21.3.1 Summary of IWC databases and current priorities

21.3.1.1 IWC Catch Databases

A report was provided outlining changes to the IWC's Summary Catch Dataset (Annex H, Appendix 1). Updates include standardisation of terminology, improved clarity, and resolution of historical inconsistencies. A version of the dataset is now available on Zenodo (see below), and the associated data paper is currently in preparation.

The Secretariat has also continued the coding of the D. Rice archive, prioritising expeditions where data gaps previously existed. This work is helping to disaggregate catches in the IWC Summary Catch Data that were previously grouped across multiple expeditions due to missing information. Work to reconcile corrections to the historical Spanish catch records from ~1920-1980 is being finalised (SC/68D/RP/23; IWC, 2023b, p.168; see also Annex L, item 8.3.9).

Updates and changes to the IWC's Individual Catch Dataset since 2024 are summarised in Annex H (Appendix 2). In addition to the routine annual updates, the Secretariat worked closely with Greenland authorities to resolve discrepancies in data from 2015-2020. These data have now been reviewed, reconciled and successfully integrated into the database.

The use of AI tools to accelerate the entry of individual catch data from diverse sources, including Excel files, PDFs and scanned documents is being explored. If effective, this approach could streamline validation processes and reduce manual data entry to targeted checks. Considerable work is required to address the backlog of coding and resolve inconsistencies in historical data.

The Committee **welcomes** progress on the continued refinement of these databases and the work towards a publishable dataset, particularly given the widespread interest in these databases from both scientists and historians.

21.3.1.2 IWC Vessel Strike Database

Planned updates to the IWC Vessel Strikes Database include a public-facing data submission portal and changes to the underlying database architecture governing how submitted data are stored and managed. These updates will improve data quality and usability. Implementation is due to be completed by the end of 2026.

The revised structure will provide a consistent framework for analysis, with a single authoritative record per event and an audit trail linking records to source reports. The reporting portal remains the primary submission mechanism for vessel strike data. The Secretariat plans to upload metadata of the database to Zenodo (see below) to support more informed data requests and increase the usability and uptake of the database.

21.3.1.3 Global Cetacean Strandings Database

Since SC69B, the IWC's Data Manager and Strandings Coordinator have been in discussions with ASCOBANS and ICES to advance this initiative, and following funding from the UK Government, it can now progress. ICES has the technical capacity and data policy expertise to develop and host the database to the highest standard. Working jointly with ASCOBANS will ensure that there is one single, coherent global platform rather than duplicating effort across organisations.

The Committee **welcomes** the collaboration with these international organisations and thanks the UK Government for funding the development of a Global Cetacean Strandings Database.

21.3.1.4 Zenodo

The Secretariat described the creation of a Cetacean Research Community[8] within Zenodo (Annex H, Appendix 3). Zenodo (*https://zenodo.org/*) is a free, open-access repository developed by CERN and OpenAIRE. It enables researchers to share

[8]Communities are shared areas on Zenodo where projects, institutions, domains and conferences can curate and manage their research outputs.

Table 5
Summary of data submissions through National Progress Reports for 2025 and 2026.

	No. of countries	
NPR Section	2025	2026
Fishery Bycatch of Large Whales	5	8
Vessel Ship Strikes of Large Whales	1	4
Fishery Bycatch of Small Cetaceans	8	6
Vessel Ship Strikes of Small Cetaceans	2	2
Strandings	10	8
Systematic Surveys information	7	9
DBs DSs Archives	8	9
International Organisations	1	1
Small Cetaceans Direct Takes	-	1

and preserve datasets, publications, software, and other research outputs in either an open or closed community. Each deposit is assigned a Digital Object Identifier (DOI), ensuring persistent access, visibility and citation. Zenodo is one of the most widely used repositories by scientists, enabling transparency, reproducibility, and collaboration. This Cetacean Research Community can provide a single, accessible platform for sharing and accessing IWC-related cetacean research and datasets. The Community is intended to streamline collaboration and enhance the visibility and uptake of the IWC's scientific outputs (Annex H, Appendix 3).

21.3.1.5 IWC-DESS Database

The Committee was informed about work being undertaken by Seashore Ambiental on the development of a system 'Nereo' that originated out of work to improve data collection and archiving of data from aerial surveys. The IWC-DESS database was originally developed in the 1980s to store sightings data, including functions for mapping and facilitating the provision of abundance estimates using the program DISTANCE. IWC-DESS needs updating or replacing. Using example IWC datasets provided by the Secretariat, database designers are therefore assessing the feasibility of importing IWC data into this powerful contemporary database system with additional functionality, at no cost to the IWC. If successful, this project will safeguard existing IWC data, support data analyses, and facilitate incorporation of new data, such as IWC-POWER data. The objective is also to integrate photographic, biopsy and acoustic data sheets, and link to the IWC photographic database. The Committee thanks Donovan for initiating this project and supports continued development work.

21.3.1.6 Status of Current IWC Databases and Priority Actions

The Committee reviewed the current list of databases developed and managed to support the work of the Committee that also identifies those databases prioritised for development or maintenance (Table 6). The Committee identifies the Global Cetacean Strandings Database as a high priority for development given the collaboration with ICES and ASCOBANS (see Item 21.3.1.3).

The Committee **thanks** the Secretariat for their considerable efforts to develop and maintain the IWC's scientific databases.

21.3.2 IWC National Progress Reports

National Progress Reports continue to show uneven participation across countries and thematic areas during the 2025 and 2026 reporting cycles. While a core group of countries consistently submit reports across multiple sections, overall engagement remains fragmented, with several topics systematically underreported (Table 5). A total of 13 countries submitted National Progress Reports for 2026.

The Committee thanks those countries that consistently submit National Progress Reports and **requests** all Committee working groups to highlight when they use data from them. The Committee specifically thanks Türkiye, a new member of the IWC, for submitting its progress report.

The Committee continues to **encourage** all Contracting Governments to report relevant cetacean data to the Secretariat via National Progress Reports or in any reasonable format.

21.3.3 Review database procedures, evaluate integration and consolidation of existing databases, and define rules for accessing data

The Secretariat informed the Committee about the IWC's Data Management Project. This project involves consolidating multiple databases currently managed by various departments within the IWC (*https://portal.iwc.int*, *https://crm.iwc.int*, *https://recommendations.iwc.int*). These databases contain valuable information that requires unification to improve accessibility and management. The Secretariat plans to consolidate these databases ahead of SC71 (see *https://datamanagement.iwc.int*).

Table 6

Scientific Committee Databases.

Database/Application	Status	Work required	SC priority for development	Development progress	SC priority for maintenance	SC Sub-Committee/Group
Review of IWC data holdings	Starting 2024	Develop and implement strategy for integrated data management. New database structures will deliver fewer stand-alone databases and allow greater opportunity to integrate data flows and analyses	High	Starting 2024	N/A	ALL
Catch Summary Database	Live	See SC/69A/GDR/02	High	Ongoing	High	IST/IA/SAS
Individual Catch Database	Live	See SC/69A/GDR/02, integration of historical data from multiple sources	High	Ongoing	High	IST/IA/SAS
Discovery Marking Data	Live	Currently includes all species in the N. Atlantic and Antarctic waters. For the N. Pacific, sei and Bryde's whales are included and the addition of other species is currently stalled	N/A	Completed	Medium	SAS/IST/IA
Journal *https://journal.iwc.int/*	Live	We have improved access to the JCRM archive by moving all volumes to OJS. We are now in the process of improving access to the JCRM Supplements (SC Reports) by moving these to OJS	N/A	Completed	High	JCRM Editorial Board
National Progress Reports* *https://portal.iwc.int/*	Live	Integration of standard FAO areas	Medium	Ongoing	Low for current system	ALL
Research and Data Requests *https://forms.office.com/r/wEmk6Py8U5*	Live	None required	Medium	Completed	High	ALL
SH Blue Whale Catalogue *https://www.bluewhalecatalogue.org/*	Live	Migrated to IWC server - development ongoing	None required	Ongoing	High	SH/CMP/PH/IA
Vessel Strikes* *https://portal.iwc.int/*	Live	Bulk import tool (CSV) - Not done, but potential dataset arriving summer 2024 to develop this on. Allow data to be submitted via API directly from country databases - Not done, low priority. Update records found to have errors - Mostly done. Vessel and species finished, encoding errors almost finished, updating NW Mediterranean data partially done	Medium	Ongoing	Medium	HIM/IA/IST
IWC photographic cruise database and archive	Live	Updates only on utility of database such as such as integrated sightings, photo-ID, database (in progress)	Medium	Ongoing	High	PH/SAS/NH/IA/IST
Small Cetaceans Catches (Bycatch and Direct)	Under development	Checks and documentation to be completed when intern time is available	Medium	Ongoing	Medium	SM
Global Cetacean Strandings Database	Under development	Development of database and data submission platform in collaboration with ASCOBANS and ICES, including data cleaning and validation protocols and data dissemination and visualisation tools. UK government funding secured for IWC participation. Development to begin once a collaboration agreement with ICES is finalised	High	Ongoing	N/A	E/HIM
Marine Debris database	Under development	The database will collate global incidents of cetacean interactions with marine debris to identify hotspots and support further work by the IWC on marine debris	Low	Paused (dependent on progress of the Strandings Database)	N/A	HIM/E
SOWER/POWER databases						
Survey database	Under development	See SC/69A/GDR/02	Low	Ongoing	N/A	SAS
IWC biopsy sampling database	Under development	Updates only (in progress)	Medium	Ongoing		SD-DNA
IWC photographic cruise database and archive	Live	Updates only (in progress)	Medium	Ongoing	Low	PH
Acoustics database	Under development		Low		NA	NH/SH
Sightings, weather, effort database	Under development		Low		NA	SAS
New integrated sightings photo-ID database	Stalled	Updates only (funding available)	Medium		NA	PH/NH/SH

*scheduled for migration to *https://datamanagement.iwc.int/*.

The Committee **welcomes** this initiative as it could deliver greater efficiencies in the management of IWC databases and facilitate a view of IWC data holdings from a single portal rather than interacting with a suite of standalone databases. The Committee **encourages** a report on progress at SC71.

21.4 Potential future IWC databases

21.4.1 IWC database proposal pro forma

The Committee was reminded of the IWC database request proforma previously developed by GDR (IWC, 2023b, Annex N). In 2024, the Committee recommended the development of an online version of the proforma to assist tracking and archiving database requests (Recommendation 24143). This work is now complete, and the form is available as part of the new online Research Proposal tool.

21.4.2 New proposals for IWC databases

No proposals were received.

21.5 Biennial work plan

The work plan and intersessional groups can be found in Annex M (Tables 1 and 2).

22. MULTINATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMMES AND NATIONAL SURVEYS

Due to reduced meeting time and budget, the Committee has developed a process whereby it will no longer review, discuss or endorse most survey plans and reports. Brief summaries will be reported, with longer summaries available in Annex V.

22.1 Surveys that include IWC funding and/or support, including IWC-POWER and IWC-SORP

22.1.1 IWC-POWER

The Committee **welcomes** the results of the 15th and 16th annual IWC-POWER cruises conducted in 2024 and 2025 in the eastern North Pacific (SC/70/O/03 and SC/70/O/04; Annex W). The western and central Bering Sea were surveyed in both years. The southern Chukchi Sea was surveyed for both years - the first time the cruise had been conducted in this area. The primary purpose of the survey in the Bering Sea was to estimate the abundance of large whales using the IWC guidelines, while the survey in the southern Chukchi Sea was designed to collect photo-ID and biopsy sampling data on gray whales.

These cruises were successfully completed and provided important information on cetacean distribution, in particular gray, fin and humpback whales, in an area of rapid environmental change where limited survey effort had been conducted in recent years. Full results can be found in SC/70/O/03 and SC/70/O/04.

The Committee received the reports of the IWC-Power Steering Group on detailed plans for the 2025 and 2026 IWC-POWER cruises and the preliminary plans for the 2027 survey (SC/70/REP/06, SC/70/REP/09). In addition to the line transect survey with acoustic stations, priority will be given to photo-ID and biopsy sampling of target species - gray, humpback and fin whales.

The IWC-POWER Technical Advisory Group (TAG) presented the report of the workshop planning for Phase II of the IWC-POWER programme (SC/70/REP/05). The report presents a comprehensive collation of the results of the cruises since the programme started in 2010. After 16 annual cruises, the first phase of the programme is now complete, and the TAG is planning Phase II. The only significant gap in survey coverage is Russian waters, but due to the current geopolitical situation, this component is on hold.

The TAG discussed new $g(0)$ corrected abundance estimates for fin, sei, humpback and blue whales, which are long-standing priority species. Spatial distribution modelling is progressing and remains a priority to complete, both to improve abundance estimates and to inform Phase II design.

Phase II will use the same core methods: line transect, biopsy, photo-ID and acoustics, with increased use of telemetry for key species. The TAG is prioritising power analyses to determine what survey effort is needed to detect trends.

Right whale sightings remain extremely important but sparse, with just eight over the entire programme. The focus for this species in Phase II will be targeted acoustic and photo-ID work rather than line-transect estimates. For blue and humpback whales, the TAG recommends pursuing mark-recapture estimates through collaboration with US and Japanese photo-ID catalogues.

The Committee highlights the importance of the IWC-POWER programme which has provided valuable information on cetaceans for over a decade, noting the international effort as one of its key strengths. The Committee is pleased to hear that remaining abundance estimates will be presented at the forthcoming POWER TAG meeting later this year.

To continue operating the cruises in 2027 and 2028, funding is requested from the IWC (Item 23). This cost is minimal given the generous contribution of a vessel by Japan and acoustic equipment by the USA.

The IWC-POWER programme could not operate without the generous financial and logistical support of the Japanese Government who provide the vessel, crew and some of the scientists. The Committee **acknowledges** the contribution of the US who have provided *inter alia* researchers and acoustic equipment. Without such support, our understanding of cetacean populations in the North Pacific would be severely limited. The Committee thanks the TAG members, the scientists from numerous countries and the Government of Japan for making this programme such a success.

Japan remains committed to continuing IWC-POWER in cooperation with the Committee. With respect to future cruises, as Japan operates under a single-year budgeting system, funding has not yet been secured beyond the current fiscal year. Nevertheless, Japan will make its best efforts to maintain the same type of research vessel and the same number of crew members as in previous cruises.

Attention: SC, C
*The Committee **reiterates** the great value of the data contributed by the IWC-POWER cruises which have covered many regions of the North Pacific Ocean not otherwise surveyed in recent years.*

*The programme addresses important information gaps for several species and contributes to ongoing Committee assessment work. The Committee **endorses** the report of the Steering Group (SC/70/REP/05 and SC/70/REP/09) and **recommends** the programme continues and looks forward to receiving the abundance estimates that are outlined in the TAG reports.*

22.1.2 IWC-Southern Ocean Research Partnership

The Southern Ocean Research Partnership (IWC-SORP) was established in March 2009 as a multi-lateral, non-lethal scientific research programme, with the aim of improving the coordinated and cooperative delivery of science to the IWC. IWC-SORP currently has 13 member countries: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa and the USA. The IWC-SORP ethos prizes open collaboration, communication and data sharing. It welcomes new partners.

There are seven ongoing IWC-SORP themes:

(1) The Antarctic Blue Whale Project;
(2) Distribution, relative abundance, migration patterns and foraging ecology of three ecotypes of killer whales in the Southern Ocean;
(3) Foraging ecology and predator-prey interactions between baleen whales and krill;
(4) Distribution and extent of mixing of Southern Hemisphere humpback whales of breeding stocks B and C[9];
(5) Acoustic trends in abundance, distribution and seasonal presence of Antarctic blue whales and fin whales in the Southern Ocean;
(6) The right sentinel for climate change: linking foraging ground variability to population recovery in the southern right whale; and
(7) Recovery status and ecology of Southern Hemisphere fin whales.

Proposals for new themes are welcomed by the IWC-SORP Scientific Steering Committee (IWC-SORP SSC).

The Committee welcomes the IWC-SORP Biennial Report 2024-26 that reports on the progress of research undertaken within the seven themes since the 2023-24 reporting period (SC/70/SH/08Rev1). Expeditions were conducted around the Antarctic Peninsula, in the waters off eastern and western Australia, Chile, New Zealand, around Península Valdés, Argentina, and South Africa. Valuable long-term southern right whale aerial surveys were conducted in Australia, Brazil and South Africa. Hundreds of photo-ID images were collected; satellite tags were deployed on southern right, humpback and minke whales; biopsy samples were collected from killer, humpback, southern right, fin, Antarctic minke and humpback whales; and long-term passive acoustic moorings were deployed at monitoring sites throughout the Southern Ocean, with hundreds of hours of cetacean acoustic recordings made and analysed.

IWC-SORP has also contributed to the development and implementation of photo-ID (e.g., the Antarctic blue whale Catalogue [ABWC], the Southern Hemisphere Blue Whale Catalogue [SHBWC], the Australasian Right Whale Catalogue [ARWPIC]) and genetic catalogues; standardised protocols for *inter alia* assessing body condition and analysing blubber steroid hormones; new technologies (e.g., a drone-based biopsy system) and methodologies to facilitate research and analyses (e.g., AI and Machine learning techniques).

IWC-SORP researchers produced 54 peer-reviewed publications during the 2024-26 biennium, bringing the total number published since the start of the initiative to *ca.* 365. Moreover, 264 IWC-SORP-related papers have been submitted to the Committee for consideration, including 29 to SC70.

The initiative builds capacity, particularly for early-career researchers. To date, it has supported 36 Ph.D., 26 Masters and 26 Honours theses, plus the work of at least five postdoctoral fellows.

The Committee notes that research under IWC-SORP auspices has contributed to the work of multiple sub-committees and working groups, and informs the management and review of the Southern Ocean Sanctuary (SOS).

SC/70/SH/09 provides detail on the progress of 11 ongoing research projects supported by the IWC-SORP Research Fund following four open, competitive grants rounds (2016-present). Voluntary contributions to the IWC-SORP Research Fund

[9]Since SC69B, the regional focus of this theme has moved from Oceania humpback whales to Breeding Stocks B (West Africa) and C (East Africa/Western Indian Ocean).

made by the Governments of Australia, Belgium, France and The Netherlands, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), WWF-Australia and Emma Abel, were gratefully acknowledged. Following contributions and expenditures, £30,633 GBP remain unassigned and unspent in the IWC-SORP Research Fund (SC/70/O/24). The Committee welcomes further voluntary contributions.

The Committee **thanks** Bell for her work in the role of IWC-SORP Secretariat, Seyboth for her support preparing the biennial reports, and **welcomes** Seyboth to the IWC-SORP Secretariat. The Committee also **thanks** the IWC Secretariat for their work in administering the IWC-SORP Research Fund, particularly Pinder and Bartmeier.

The Committee welcomes the news that, following IWC70, Vermeulen will become the new Chair of the IWC-SORP SSC and Goetz will become the new Vice-Chair. The Committee **thanks** Lundquist for his work as Chair during the 2024-2026 biennium.

The Committee agrees that IWC-SORP is cross-cutting, extremely productive, highly collaborative, builds capacity, and contributes to methodological and technological advancement and standardisation. It **strongly encourages** continuation of the Partnership.

Attention: SC, R, CG
*Recognising the great value and success of the IWC's Southern Ocean Research Partnership (IWC-SORP), the Committee **commends** its work and welcomes updates at SC71. The Committee again **encourages**:*

(1) The continued collation of information relevant to upcoming population and/or stock assessments for priority Southern Ocean whale species, in particular Antarctic and non-Antarctic blue whales, southern right whales and fin whales;
(2) Research that enhances understanding of krill consumption rates, spatial distribution of cetaceans and their krill swarm-preferences, and/or baleen whale interactions with krill fishing operations to support the work of the IWC/SC and contribute toward collaboration with SC-CAMLR;
(3) The continued development of collaborations that allow for research and/or data sharing with IWC-SORP and the wider Committee;
(4) The continued, collaborative development of technologies and methodologies that advance the abovementioned priorities.

*The Committee **agrees** that IWC-SORP is cross-cutting, highly collaborative, builds capacity, contributes to methodological and technological advancements, and continues to be very productive and **strongly supports** the continuation of the Partnership.*

22.2 Surveys that seek advice from the committee regarding survey or analysis methods

Cooperation between ATLAFCO/COMHAFAT and the IWC represents an important opportunity to strengthen scientific capacity in the region, particularly in the context of limited dedicated cetacean survey efforts, limited data, emergent national stranding networks, integration of cetacean observations into existing fisheries research surveys, and development of participatory monitoring approaches. Strong engagement from member countries, along with continued technical support from the IWC is advised (SC/70/O/28Rev5). Plans for two cetacean sightings surveys off the coast of Morrocco and Mauritania were presented by the Secretariat on behalf of the proponents (SC/70/O/01, SC/70/O/02).

The Committee **agrees** to establish an ICG to support and provide advice to ATLAFCO as it develops these cruise plans. ATLAFCO thanks the IWC for the offer of further support to the West African region, notes the opportunity it presented to strengthen scientific capacity, and looks forward to working further with the IWC Secretariat.

22.3 Other survey reports and plans

22.3.1 Japan

22.3.1.1 North Pacific Cruises

SC/70/O/11 and SC/70/O/12 describe systematic large-scale vessel-based sighting surveys conducted by Japan to examine the distribution and abundance of large whales in the North Pacific in the summers 2024 and 2025 (see summary in Annex W). The methodology was consistent across both years and followed IWC guidelines.

Additionally, photo-ID images and biopsy samples were collected, and satellite tagging experiments were conducted during both years.

SC/70/O/13Rev1 describes Japan's plan for systematic vessel-based sighting surveys in the North Pacific to estimate the abundance of large whale species (see summary in Annex W). Cruise reports of the 2026 and 2027 sighting surveys will be reported at SC71.

22.3.1.2 JASS-A Cruises

SC/70/O/14 and SC/70/O/15 report the results of the sixth and seventh research cruises of JASS-A (see summary in Annex V). Two dedicated sighting vessels were engaged in line-transect surveys following IWC/IDCR-SOWER survey procedures, with two survey modes used (Normal Passing mode and Independent Observer mode). In addition to collecting systematic

sighting data, Estimated Angle and Distance Experiments, oceanographic observation, biopsy, photo-ID and satellite tracking experiments were conducted in both years.

SC/70/O/20 reports the results of the mid-term review workshop of the JASS-A surveys (see summary in Annex V). JASS-A has two main objectives for large whale species: (1) the study of their abundance and abundance trends; and (2) the study of their distribution, movement and stock structure. The mid-term review workshop was held in Tokyo, 20 and 22 October 2025, with the aim of evaluating the work conducted so far and discussing recommendations for further field and analytical work toward the final review of the programme. JASS-A is open to international participation under the guidelines of the Institute of Cetacean Research.

SC/70/O/16 outlines the objectives, survey procedures and schedule of the 2026/27 and 2027/28 line-transect whale sighting surveys under the JASS-A programme in a part of Area V-East (170°E-170°W) and Area I-West (120°W-90°W), south of 60°S. The main research objectives of JASS-A are: (1) the study of the abundance and abundance trends of large whale species; and (2) the study of the distribution, movement and stock structure of large whale species.

Attention: G Japan
*The Committee thanks Japan for providing the report of the workshop of JASS-A and information on its cruises and **encourages** submission of its 2026 and 2027 results to SC71. In particular, the Committee notes the importance of research in the Southern Ocean in areas that are difficult to survey and, as a result, rarely surveyed, and it emphasises the importance of international collaboration in this research. Data from this region are of great interest to the Committee.*

22.3.2 Korea

22.3.2.1 Aerial Line-Transect and Photographic Survey in Korean Waters in 2025

Aerial surveys were conducted in Korean waters in 2025 to investigate the distribution of marine mammals. The survey areas included the East Sea/Sea of Japan, Yellow Sea, South Sea and East China Sea (SC/70/O/18; see summary in Annex V).

22.3.2.2 Vessel-Based Line Transect Survey in the Yellow Sea in 2025

Vessel-based line-transect surveys were conducted to gather information on the spatial distribution and abundance of common minke whales and other marine mammals in the Yellow Sea in both spring and autumn 2025 (SC/70/O/19; see summary in Annex V).

For 2027, the line transect survey for common minke whales will be conducted in Korean waters from spring to autumn. The primary objective of this survey is to obtain information on the distribution and estimate the abundance of common minke whales for stock assessment. The secondary objective is to collect general information on the distribution of other cetaceans in the area (SC/70/O17; see summary in Annex V).

Attention: CG Korea
*The Committee **thanks** Korea for providing information on its cruises and **encourages** submission of its 2026 and 2027 results to SC71.*

22.3.3 Russia

22.3.3.1 Sighting Surveys in the Western Sea of Okhotsk

The main objective of both the 2024 and 2025 surveys was to obtain information on distribution and abundance of cetaceans according to the IWC standard sighting survey methods, including both the normal closing mode and the passing mode (SC/70/O6, SC/70/O7; see summary in Annex W).

Research plans for 2025, 2026 and 2027 can be found in SC/70/O/8-10. In 2026, the survey will take place in the western Sea of Okhotsk since, in 2024, it was not possible to fully survey this area. In 2027, the survey is planned for the central Sea of Okhotsk.

Attention: CG Russia, R
*The Committee **thanks** Russia for providing information on its cruises and **encourages** submission of its 2026 and 2027 results to SC71. The Committee **encourages** Russian scientists to engage with the IWC-POWER programme and consider attending its TAG meetings.*

22.4 Biennial work plan

The Committee **commends** the impressive amount of work presented at SC70 and thanks Japan, Korea and Russia for sharing the results of their cruises and their forthcoming plans. International collaboration is encouraged, and the Committee looks forward to learning about the results of these cruises.

The Committee **encourages** all countries to submit the results of their research surveys and plans for future work to the relevant sub-committees.

23. SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE BUDGET

Since 2025, the Committee has developed its biennial budget without prior knowledge of available funds, i.e., using a 'zero-based budget'. The budget includes the cost of hosting meetings (e.g., workshops), as well as its required modelling work, database development, research projects and reports.

In 2022, the Commission provided some guidance on how to prioritise future work of the SC and indicated that priority should be given to proposals related to 'ASW-related topics' (IWC, 2022b). Using the procedure established at SC69B to prioritise funding proposals (SC/69B/O/10), the Convenors strictly ranked all projects in order of priority against the Committee's work and Commission priorities.

As at SC69B, the Committee again requests that the Commission allows the Committee to carryover unspent funds from one biennium to the next. SC/70/O/24 highlights the high amount of closing balance remaining unspent in the Research Fund at the end of 2025. The Budgetary Sub-Committee of the Finance and Administration Committee is working collaboratively with the SC Leadership to address the issue of recurring unspent project funds. An update on this matter will be provided to the IWC70.

23.1 Report from the Budgetary Steering Group

The SC Budgetary Advisory Group (SC-BAG), which includes members of the Committee, was formed at SC68D (2022) to address the need to reduce Committee costs considering the Commission's budget deficit. The SC-BAG did not meet at SC69B or SC70 but will continue to work intersessionally.

23.2 Status of funded research, workshops proposals, data processing and computing needs

SC/70/O/24 provides information regarding the position of the Committee's Research Fund at the end of the 2025 financial year. The remaining balance of the contingency fund on 31 March 2026 was £32,032, which represents 16% of the 2026 research budget. A contingency level of 10% is permitted, as set out in the Financial Regulations.

23.3 Fund reallocations and contingencies for the Research Fund, Voluntary Fund for Small Cetaceans, and SORP Voluntary Fund

Contributions to the IWC-SC Research Fund, Small Cetacean Voluntary Fund (SCVF) and IWC-SORP Fund are welcomed. These funds contribute to the research programme of the Committee and, if not used, are reallocated to provide support to other research projects or to support core work.

23.3.1 Small Cetaceans Voluntary Fund

The Committee was updated on the status of the Small Cetacean Voluntary Fund (SCVF) and the progress of previously funded projects. Since January 2025, voluntary contributions totalling £17,066 have been gratefully received from the Government of The Netherlands, the Animal Welfare Institute, Campaign Whale, Cetacean Society International, Greenpeace, OceanCare, ProWildlife, and the Whaleman Foundation. At 1 April 2026, the SCVF stands at £104,288, of which £54,691 is allocated to projects endorsed by Commission and is due for dispersal by September 2026 and £49,597 is not yet allocated, noting that an Assessment Panel can allocate discretionary funding of up to £10,000 per budget period without the endorsement of Commission, to ensure the smooth running of approved programmes (RoP Appendix 1). Following a call for new SCVF proposals in 2024, the SCVF Review Panel and the SC proposed a list of seven projects to be funded to a total of £111,522. This allocation was approved by the Commission at IWC69. See Item 16.6.2 for progress on all ongoing SCVF projects.

23.3.2 Southern Ocean Research Partnership Fund

The Committee was updated on the progress of projects funded through the IWC-Southern Ocean Research Partnership (IWC-SORP). Since 1 January 2025, there have been no voluntary contributions to the SORP Fund. At 1 April 2026, the IWC-SORP Fund stands at £84,151. Of this amount, £53,518 is already allocated to projects endorsed by Commission following previous grant rounds but is, as yet, unspent (see SC/70/SH/08Rev1 for progress reports), and £30,633 is not yet allocated, noting that the IWC-SORP SSC can allocate discretionary funding of up to £15,000 per budget period without the endorsement of Commission, to ensure the smooth running of approved programmes (IWC, 2017a, Annex W). Following a call for new IWC-SORP proposals in 2024, the IWC-SORP Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) and the SC proposed a list of seven projects to be funded to a total of £120,028. This allocation was approved by the Commission at IWC69. See Item 22.1 for further information on IWC-SORP.

23.3.3 Research fund

A total of £12,509 of Voluntary Contributions have been received into the SC Research Fund to support attendance at SC70. A contribution towards IP attendance at SC70 was received in March 2025 from the Government of Spain (EUR 15,000). The Committee is grateful for all voluntary contributions, which have greatly assisted the Committee in its work.

Table 7

Projects considered the most important to the Committee's work, ranked from 1 to 24.
This includes modelling, workshops, databases and research.

RP ID	Project Title	Proponent	Type of project	Sub-Committee	2027 Budget £	2028 Budget £	TOTAL	Ranking
	IPs							1
32	Securing legacy in computing and modelling Legacy II	Katara	Modelling	IST, ASW, IA, NH, SAS	21,000	21,000	42,000	2
69	Joint IWC-NAMMCO workshops on population structure of common minke and fin whales in the North Atlantic	Wilberg	Workshop	IST, SDDNA	10,000	20,000	30,000	3
62	2028 pre-meeting of the SAS Steering Group (SAS-SG)	Givens	Workshop	SAS, ASW, CMP, NH, SDDNA, IST, IST, SH, EM, IA		15,458	15,458	4
42	Technical meetings of the IWC Scientific Committee Modelling Group: advancing priority stock assessments in line with SC recommendations (2026/27 and 2027/28)	Katara	Workshop	IA, ASW, SAS, IST	20,823	20,822	41,645	5
61	2027 intersessional workshop for SAS Steering Group (SAS-SG)	Givens	Workshop	SAS, ASW, CMP, NH, SDDNA, IST, SH, EM, IA	9,500		9,500	6
44	Eastern North Pacific gray whale: up-date and enhancement of the assessment with catastrophic events and management scenarios	Katara	Modelling	IST, ASW, NH, SAS, IA	38,146	24,800	62,946	7
45	Western North Pacific minke whale assessment model documentation	Katara	Modelling	IA, SAS, IST	14,000	9,000	23,000	8
46	IWC-POWER cruise in 2027 and 2028 including associated workshop/meetings and processing	Staniland	Research	ALL	28,400	12,500	40,900	9
67	Proposal for a Workshop on South and Central American CMPs in 2027	Zerbini	Workshop	CMP, SDDNA, WW, SAS, E, HIM, IA	36,700		36,700	10
43	North Pacific humpback whale comprehensive assessment model: finalisation and validation	Katara	Modelling	IA, NH, SAS	3,695	7,391	11,086	11
58	IWC Strandings Initiative: Strandings Coordinator role funding	Secretariat	Other	E, NH, GDR, WW, HIM, SH	15,024	15,023	30,047	12
51	Progressing the development and use of the IWC Vessel Strike Database, coordination of and support for other work within the IWC Vessel Strikes Programme	Secretariat	Database	HIM, E, GDR	11,927	11,926	23,853	13
65	Improving assessment of Chile and Australia/Timor Leste blue whales using bi-lateral photo-ID modelling and providing first abundance estimates for Sri Lanka	Galletti	Modelling	SH, PH, SAS, E, HIM	19,900	39,801	59,701	14
75	Review of data available for potential future assessment of sperm whales in the eastern North Pacific	Mesnick	Workshop	NH	22,500		22,500	15
57	Multi-ocean pre-assessment of southern right whale demographic parameters	Vermeulen	Modelling	SH, CMP, E, IA	10,000	6,000	16,000	16
52	Reproductive dynamics of southern right whales at Península Valdés: linking demographic variability to population trajectories under climate variability	Agrelo	Report	CMP, PH, E, SH	2,967		2,967	17
70	State of the Cetacean Environment Report (SOCER)[1]	Rose	Report	ALL	4,000	4,000	8,000	18
66	Workshop on vessel strike risk and mitigation for South African waters	Bouchard	Workshop	HIM, SAN, E	6,000		6,000	19
71	Cetacean bycatch risk in the western Indian Ocean	Collins	Research	HIM, SAN, CMP	15,000		15,000	20
55	Outreach to facilitate an increase in opportunistic photo-IDs and to encourage safe whale viewing by tourist ships	Olson	Research	SH, PH, HIM	4,000		4,000	21
49	Genomic diversity and population identity of Eastern South Pacific southern right whales	Carroll	Research	CMP, SH, SDDNA	7,567	3,783	11,350	22
60	Developing an open-access annotated library of offshore southern right whale sounds for testing and training automated detectors	Shaganbu	Database	SH	20,000		20,000	23
80	Workshop on small cetaceans of the South Pacific Islands: Towards integrated assessment and collaborative conservation research *	Trujillo	Workshop	SM	10,000		10,000	24
Total					**331,149**	**211,504**	**542,653**	

[1]While the SOCER is directly related to an older Resolution, the Committee considers it lower priority to its current work than the projects ranked higher.
*The Convenor of SM agreed that the sole workshop proposed to advance the work of the SM priority topic could be ranked at the bottom of this Table as there are sufficient funds in the SCVF to support this work.

23.4 Proposed budget for 2027-28 developed under the Committee's guidelines

The Committee proposes a biennial research programme for 2027-28 (Table 7), listed in order of priority as per its mandate from the Commission. A rigorous process of scoring and ranking was applied to ensure fair evaluation of each proposal. The project considered the most important to the Committee's work is ranked as 1, with other projects, including modelling, workshops, databasing and research, listed in descending order of importance from 2 to 24. The Committee draws attention to the large amount of matching funds and in-kind support that Committee members, Invited Participants (IPs) and others contribute to the priority work of the IWC. In 2018, the SC Leadership Team estimated matched contributions to be approximately £600,000 per annum. Those contributions are from Contracting Governments, NGOs, non-member governments, individuals and others, and include travel, salary, computing and field work support and provision.

Rank 1: Invited Participants

IPs are a vital component of the Committee and contribute in many ways, including as sub-committee and Working Group Convenors and Co-Convenors, as well as rapporteurs, subject area experts and key participants of intersessional work plans. The work of the Commission benefits significantly from IP expertise and participation across all aspects of the Committee's work.

Rank 2: Secure legacy in computing and modelling II (SC/70/RP/32)

Continuing a plan to ensure the continuity of expertise and knowledge within the SC is critical to maintaining the IWC's core work of assessing the status of whale stocks and providing advice through its management procedures. During the intersessional period, the Steering Group focused on establishing connections with emerging researchers in marine mammal population modelling and related quantitative fields. Three early-to mid-career experts were recruited: Two participated directly in key November 2025 workshops and their contributions materially benefited ASI and the Gray whale Implementation Review. Rand has taken on a leadership role in the upcoming North Atlantic humpback whale assessment. The Steering Group also identified a promising structural model - the CCAMLR scholarship - for potential adaptation as a long-term mentoring and capacity-building initiative. The project is progressing well and has already delivered tangible benefits to multiple SC sub-committees.

Rank 3: Joint IWC-NAMMCO workshops on population structure of common minke and fin whales in the North Atlantic (SC/70/RP/69)

This workshop responds to a recommendation from IST to begin an emergency IR for NA common minke whales in 2028, with a view to completion in 2030 in order to provide advice on strike limits to the Commission. Population structure uncertainty is a key driver of outcomes in the IWC AWMP and related frameworks (RMP, NAMMCO applications). Evidence has been presented that whale distributions have been changing, particularly off Greenland, that could affect current management advice *inter alia* for common minke whales - an emergency IR is thus needed for NA common minke whales.

Rank 4: 2028 pre-meeting of the SAS Steering Group (SAS-SG) (SC/70/RP/62)

The proposed workshop comprises an in-person pre-meeting prior to the 2028 SC meeting for the SAS-SG. The proposed work (reviewing and recommending endorsement of abundance estimates, as requested by SC Convenors) is essential to completing the SC and Commission's primary objectives related to stock conservation and management. The proposed pre-meeting directly addresses SC23118, which makes note of the severe negative impact on SAS should the pre-meeting not occur, and how this would will in turn severely impact the other Committee subgroups that rely on its work.

Rank 5: Technical meetings of the IWC Scientific Committee Modelling Group: advancing priority stock assessments in line with SC recommendations (2026/27 and 2027/28) (SC/70/RP/42)

The proposal addresses recommendations relating to In Depth Assessments and ISTs, and SOSI, including SC17466. The Committee reiterates the importance of the Implementation Review and assessment process to its ability to provide robust management advice with respect to the effects of human activities on cetaceans, especially but not limited to direct removals. Two technical meetings will convene core assessment modellers to advance priority stock assessments in direct response to SC recommendations. Technical hurdles that link key assessments such as the North Atlantic humpback whales and the North Pacific humpback whales will be addressed. Interim assessment outputs for presentation and feedback at SC71 or relevant pre-SC workshops will also be developed, with assessment output structures aligned with SOSI requirements to ensure future compatibility.

Rank 6: 2027 intersessional workshop for SAS Steering Group (SAS-SG) (SC/70/RP/61)

The intersessional workshop of the SAS-SG and relevant experts will replicate the highly successful workshop held in Cambridge in 2025. The proposed work (reviewing and recommending endorsement of abundance estimates, as requested by SC Convenors) is essential to completing the SC and Commission's primary objectives related to stock conservation and management, including aboriginal subsistence whaling management. At SC70, SAS-SG has already identified considerable likely work that could be completed during the workshop, including abundance estimates for North Pacific humpback whales (at least 4 more papers to support the current IA assessment), North Atlantic humpback whales (to support a

pending IA assessment, plus 2 already in revision after SAS review), Hector's and Maui dolphins (already requested by SM), Southern Ocean fin whales (in revision after SAS review requested by SH), Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas bowhead whales (anticipated by ASW/IST), beluga whales (already requested by SM), Southern Hemisphere blue whales (request pending), alongside a variety of other likely species and stocks

Rank 7: Eastern North Pacific gray whale: update and enhancement of the assessment with catastrophic events and management scenarios (SC/70/RP/44)

The Committee reiterates the importance of the long time series of eastern North Pacific gray whales to support the provision of subsistence whaling management advice developed by ASW and IST, and strongly recommends that continued, annual surveys of eastern North Pacific gray whales be funded, conducted, and reported to the Committee. The project will finalise the development and testing of management scenarios relevant to subsistence and Aboriginal hunts, including the Makah Management Plan, based on SC70 feedback, validate the updated model and code through independent review to ensure robustness. It will also generate SoSi-compatible outputs to support ongoing stock status evaluation and prepare a comprehensive draft assessment report for SC71 review.

Rank 8: Western North Pacific minke whale assessment model documentation (SC/70/RP/45)

The Committee is engaged in an IA of WNP common minke whales (IA-NPMi) and has recognised the need to develop guides for modellers to apply programmes relating to the AWMP and RMP. An updated model was developed and presented at SC70, receiving endorsement pending finalisation of remaining trials and projections. However, the model's complexity requires additional time to ensure full reproducibility, transparency, documentation and ease of future use. This proposal seeks to complete the post-endorsement finalisation phase, including code cleaning, documentation, validation, and the creation of user-friendly resources such as cheat sheets and a GitHub repository. The work aligns with SC priorities to ensure assessments are not only scientifically sound but also accessible and maintainable by the broader modelling community.

Rank 9: IWC-POWER cruise in 2027 and 2028 including associated workshop/meetings and processing (SC/70/RP/46)

The IWC POWER programme provides data relevant to a range of Sub-Committees. The main focus of the work is to provide data and abundance estimates for priority species in the North Pacific region to the SAS, NH and IA groups. The biopsy samples are relevant to SDDNA and the photographic data to PH. These provide, inter alia, essential data on stock structure, migratory linkages and demographics. The work of these groups underpin the work of other sub-committees including EM and IST. Marine Debris observations and oceanographic measurements are also useful to the E and EM groups. The 2026 cruise plan has already been endorsed by the Committee and a Steering Group established to finalise details and if necessary develop a backup plan. The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Workshop will be run by the IWC-POWER Steering Group and will focus on completing the analyses resulting from phase I and the next steps for the medium-term strategy, phase II, to be discussed at SC71. The 2027 and 2028 cruise plans will also be developed at the TAG Workshop. The 2027 survey is currently planned to occur almost entirely in the US EEZ where all biopsy sampling will take place under the Marine Mammal Laboratory permit.

Rank 10: Proposal for a Workshop on South and Central American CMPs in 2027 (SC/70/RP/22)

The IWC established CMPs to create a structured approach for nations within the habitat range of at- risk cetacean populations to cooperate alongside relevant stakeholders in safeguarding and recovering these populations. CMP actions are dynamic and evolve as new information is available. Therefore, these actions require periodic review and update. The workshop would advance the work of three CMPs including the Guiana dolphin, South American river dolphin and the Franciscana and will advance standing items on the SC agenda related to CMPs of species that occur in Latin American countries.

Rank 11: North Pacific humpback whale comprehensive assessment model: finalisation and validation (SC/70/RP/43)

The Committee is undertaking a Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific humpback whales. This project will finalise the Comprehensive Assessment model based on the Punt and Liu framework, incorporating feedback from SC70. Feedback from the 2025 IA workshop identified necessary refinements to model structure, data, and uncertainty treatment. This proposal seeks to implement SC70 agreed changes, validate the model, and finalise SoSi outputs in time for SC review and potential management application.

Rank 12: IWC Strandings Initiative: Strandings Coordinator role funding (SC/70/RP/58)

The Strandings Coordinator has primary responsibility for SI involvement in the E sub-committee, preparing the annual Strandings Initiative progress report and coordinating SEP input into the subcommittee agenda. The role directly advances SC recommendations relating to pollution, marine debris, climate change and cetacean disease surveillance through the SEP work plan and capacity building programme. The Coordinator works closely with the IWC Data Manager, the SEP Databases subgroup and partner bodies (ASCOBANS and ICES) to progress the global cetacean strandings database, with development to be showcased at SC71. Without dedicated coordination, the work plan cannot be delivered. This proposal supports the SC-aligned share of the role for two years.

Rank 13: Progressing the development and use of the IWC Vessel Strike Database, coordination of and support for other work within the IWC Vessel Strikes Programme (SC/70/RP/51)

This project aims to develop the IWC ship strikes database and ensure comprehensive reporting of ship strike incidents through: (1) systematic outreach to data providers; (2) review and provision of data; (3) promoting access to the database; (4) increasing use of the database; and (5) outreach to other organisations. The funding covers an appropriate portion of the costs of the Data Manager who oversees the submission of national data into the global IWC effort. This proposal requests continued funding for the IWC Vessel Strikes Data Manager position for 2027-28, building on work undertaken since the position was established in 2021. This request would cover an appropriate portion of the costs of the Data Manager position, whose wide-ranging work across data management, stakeholder engagement and scientific coordination accounts for the substantial majority of their time.

Rank 14: Improving assessment of Chile and Australia/Timor Leste blue whales using bi-lateral photo-ID modelling and providing first abundance estimates for Sri Lanka (SC/70/RP/65)

The SHBWC is an international collaborative effort to facilitate cross-regional comparison of Southern Hemisphere blue whale photo-ID catalogues. To date more than 2,500 individual blue whale photo-IDs have been contributed to the SHBWC from researchers and groups working on areas off Antarctica, Chile, Peru, Ecuador-Galapagos, Eastern Tropical Pacific, Australia, Timor Leste, New Zealand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Madagascar. At SC70 priorities have been agreed to improve Australia/Timor Leste as well as Chile abundance estimates, and to start with Sri Lanka datasets. The work will focus on: (1) reconciliation of catalogue from new IDs for Australia; (2) match and photo-quality code new IDs from Australia/Timor Leste, Chile; and Sri Lanka; and (3) assess with new available datasets the abundance estimates for these three populations.

Rank 15: Review of data available for potential future assessment of sperm whales in the eastern North Pacific (SC/70/RP/75)

Recognising it has been over 20 years since Committee attempted to address the status of a sperm whale population, and recognising that it has been a sufficiently important issue to merit the attention of IA and NH sub-committees at SC65B, SC66B, SC69B and SC70, the proposal will convene a 3-day in-person workshop of international experts to compile and discuss available data and identify data gaps. Gathering relevant data for a possible future assessment will improve understanding of population abundance, structure, and movements of the species. Efforts to assess the impact of historical whaling, the role of sperm whales in oceanic ecosystems alongside the current conservation status of stocks will all benefit from this information.

Rank 16: Multi-ocean pre-assessment of southern right whale demographic parameters (SC/70/RP/57)

Recognising the regional variability of climate change effects in the Southern Ocean, which leads to diverse impacts on SRW foraging grounds, strongly implies varying effects on the demographics of individual SRW populations. To untangle these differences and the underlying climatic and oceanographic conditions, consolidated photo-ID datasets and a common framework are paramount. In this regard, this proposal forms a critical part of the IWC-SORP Theme 6 which investigates the effects of climate variability on SRW population demographics and health. Most importantly, this multi-ocean collaborative project utilises 50+ years of data from SH wintering grounds to inform IWC-SH subcommittee priority species assessment for SRWs, and key priority areas for IWC-SORP. Aside from SH, this project is relevant for various subcommittees of the IWC SC including CMP, ASI, PH and E.

Rank 17: Reproductive dynamics of southern right whales at Península Valdés: linking demographic variability to population trajectories under climate variability (SC/70/ RP/52)

SRWs are observed annually along the coasts of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay belong to the Southwest Atlantic (SWA) population. This project will update key reproductive parameters of southern right whales at Península Valdés using the longest continuous photo-identification dataset available for the species (1971-2021). The study addresses a key gap in circumpolar comparisons and incorporates region-specific ecological processes affecting reproductive success and calf survival. Scenario-based projections will also be developed to explore how changes in reproduction may influence population trajectories under different environmental conditions and calf mortality rates. Considering the wide-ranging movement of southern right whales along the coastline between different calving grounds in the region, the data generated would make an essential contribution to the ongoing assessment of southern right whales.

Rank 18: Production of annual State of the Cetacean Environment Report (SOCER) (SC/70/RP/70)

The SOCER is appended to Committee reports and is also available on the IWC website as standalone documents. The SOCER is produced in response to several Commission Resolutions, including 1997-7 and 1998-5, directing the Committee to provide regular updates on environmental matters that affect cetaceans. Resolution 2000-7 welcomed the concept of SOCER and requested the annual submission of the report. The SOCER summarises key peer-reviewed papers and published articles, from five regions, in a 2-3-year cycle. Two five-year compendia have already been produced and sent to contracting governments as a circular.

Rank 19: Workshop on vessel strike risk and mitigation for South African waters (SC/70/RP/66)
The Ship Strikes Strategic Plan 2022-32 identifies the Port of Cape Town as a priority high-risk area requiring a dedicated risk assessment as a prerequisite for developing area-specific mitigation strategies. The workshop seeks to develop appropriate mitigation measures for South African waters. Following the completion of the preliminary risk assessment submitted at SC70 (SC/70/HIM/01), this proposal represents a natural next step, moving from analysis to stakeholder engagement. The workshop will bring together approximately 25-30 stakeholders including scientists, industry representatives, port authorities and government agencies. Funding covers Secretariat coordination and participation of the Vessel Strikes Data Manager and two Expert Panel members.

Rank 20: Cetacean bycatch risk in the western Indian Ocean (SC/70/RP/71)
At SC69B, the Scientific Committee supported earlier bycatch risk work but called for better data on fishing effort and cetacean distribution. This project will integrate multiple data sources to improve understanding of overlap between fisheries and cetaceans to produce a revised spatial bycatch risk assessment for the western Indian Ocean (WIO) and the Arabian Sean and would establish a methodology and baseline that could be extended to the wider Indian Ocean basin. The work would identify priority risk areas and key data gaps and provide clear recommendations and a transferable approach for broader regional use.

Rank 21: Outreach to facilitate an increase in opportunistic photo-IDs and to encourage safe whale viewing by tourist ships (SC/70/RP/55)
Expanding the collection of ID photos from platforms of opportunity was specifically encouraged at SC69B. The addition of photo-ID data to existing catalogues of southern right whales, blue whales, and humpback whales furthers the goals of the SH sub-committee toward population assessments increasing the understanding of whale movement in the Southern Hemisphere and linkages between feeding and breeding areas. A 1-2-page guide will be developed and distributed to vessels working in high whale-density areas in the sub-Antarctic and Antarctic regions. This new resource will be uploaded to the IWC Whale Watching Handbook and distributed directly and extensively through previously established industry networks.

Rank 22: Genomic diversity and population identity of Eastern South Pacific southern right whales (SC/70/RP/49)
Assessment of genetic population structure of southern right whale (SRW) is critical for ongoing data gathering for stock assessment for the species. Genomic diversity is also reflective of adaptive potential, particularly critical in small and vulnerable populations like Eastern South Pacific SRW and informative for CMP. The project will use whole genome sequencing of up to 9 ESP SRW to evaluate the population's genetic distinctiveness and diversity in comparison to Indo-Pacific and South Atlantic reference datasets, in the context of a recent change in sightings patterns.

Rank 23: Developing an open-access annotated library of offshore southern right whale sounds for testing and training automated detectors (SC/70/RP/60)
The aim of this project is to develop and test a new, annotated training dataset and an automated detection system for southern right whale calls, to allow for efficient, timely and cost-effective analysis of vast quantities of passive acoustic monitoring data available for southern right whales. The database will focus on long-term circumpolar, Southern Hemisphere passive acoustic recordings. Focusing on this subset of recordings will help address knowledge gaps about the foraging behaviour of southern right whales, particularly on their putative offshore and high latitude feeding grounds. This detection system will be applicable to broad-scale, passive acoustic studies, will increase understanding of spatial and temporal patterns of southern right whale acoustics south of 40°S and contribute to the ongoing regional assessment of this species.

Rank 24: Workshop on Small Cetaceans of the South Pacific Islands: Towards Integrated Assessment and Collaborative Conservation Research (SC/70/RP/80)
Building on three workshops that mapped knowledge gaps, identified threats and established a regional network spanning scientists from the Pacific region, fisheries observers' programmes, regional fisheries management organisations, and representatives of local communities. This project delivers the next phase of the IWC multi-year South Pacific Islands small cetacean assessment. The 2027 Auckland workshop will bring together the regional network of scientists, fisheries observers, RFMOs, and regional stakeholders established across the 2024-2026 workshops, strengthening those collaborative relationships to deliver the first integrated assessment outputs of the South Pacific Islands review and sustain the SM Subcommittee's long-term conservation programme.

SC/70/RP/81, Indian Ocean Sanctuary (IOS) Review Report, will be integrated into IP budgeting for SC71.

24. COMMITTEE PRIORITIES FOR THE BIENNIUM 2027-28 AND INITIAL AGENDA FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Each sub-committee developed its priorities and a biennial work plan for 2027-28. These work plans will be used by the Chair, Vice-Chair and Vice-Chair Elect to develop a draft agenda for the next Committee meeting. A full list of work plans and intersessional groups can be found in Annex W.

25. WORKING METHODS OF THE COMMITTEE

25.1 Updates on Rules of Procedure and Handbook of the Scientific Committee

The Committee reviewed its Rules of Procedure. A number of inaccuracies were identified, primarily related to the Committee's change to biennial meetings (SC/70/O/30). The Committee requests the Commission considers these changes at IWC70.

The Secretariat updated the Committee on updates on the Scientific Committee Handbook. It notes that amendments approved by the Commission at SC69 have been incorporated and that the Handbook is now available on the IWC website (*https://iwc.int/management-and-conservation/scientific-committee/scientific-committee-handbook*). It reminds the Committee that the Handbook is a living document and will be updated as needed, although substantive changes would need to be approved by the Commission.

25.2 Communications Initiative and matters related to reporting to the Commission

The Communications Initiative aims to summarise the work of the Committee in a non-technical format. The primary audience is Commissioners, although this format is also useful for the media and general public.

There are three components to the Communications Initiative: (1) a Summary of Activities booklet; (2) an in-person science hub at the Commission plenary; and (3) a presentation to plenary. All three components were used for the first time at IWC68. They were well-received and will be updated for IWC70.

Convenors are asked to review relevant material in the Summary of Activities Booklet (2022-24) (*https://archive.iwc.int/pages/view.php?ref=22476&k=*) and provide updated text or new topics and imagery for the 2024-26 booklet, using the form circulated to Convenors and available to download here: *https://iwc.int/document_3843*. The aim is to update each of the existing sections, retaining flexibility to replace/restructure where the Committee wishes to highlight important new issues and case studies.

Information on our processes and workflows will be retained as repetition of key information is important to effective communication, especially in a forum like the IWC where there is regular turnover of participants.

The Committee thanks Double and Wilson for their work on the Communications Initiative.

25.3 Science Liaison Group

At IWC69, the Commission established the Science Liaison Group (SLG) to strengthen communication between the Commission and the SC. The SLG was established to facilitate clear, two-way communication, enabling the Commission's priorities to be more explicitly conveyed to the SC and better reflected in scientific work planning and prioritisation.

SC/70/O/21 outlines the SLG's agreed Terms of Reference, membership and intersessional work, and reports on progress against tasks assigned by the Commission. These include consideration of a potential Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific fin whales, how Commission priorities can be better absorbed within the Research Fund, and identification of the SC's key priorities and challenges.

In collaboration with the SC Chairs and Secretariat, the SLG has developed draft recommendations aimed at improving clarity of Commission direction, prioritisation of research, and management of intersessional work. The Group will incorporate feedback from SC70 and submit a report to IWC70 setting out progress to-date and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and coherence of Commission-SC interactions.

25.4 Capacity building and succession plan for the Scientific Committee

The Committee received a progress update on the project Securing Legacy in Computing and Modelling. During the intersessional period, the Steering Group identified and engaged three early- to mid-career quantitative scientists with strong backgrounds in population modelling and marine mammal science. After initial contact to ascertain their availability and interest in the work of the SC, three individuals - Rand, Stewart and Privitera-Johnson - agreed to participate in the Committee's work. Rand and Stewart attended the November 2025 ASI and IST/IA workshops, where their contributions were considered highly valuable, particularly to the SAS (formerly ASI) sub-committee and the Gray Whale Implementation Review. Rand was subsequently invited to lead the modelling for the forthcoming North Atlantic humpback whale In-depth Assessment, with Punt providing mentorship. The scientists participated in SC70, both in person and online. The potential for developing a longer-term capacity-building scheme was highlighted, inspired by the successful CCAMLR Scholarship Programme, to support the recruitment and mentoring of quantitative scientists, possibly funded through voluntary or earmarked contributions.

The long-term sustainability of quantitative modelling capacity within the SC is a topic of concern for the Committee, with broad agreement that the current situation is not sustainable and requires structural solutions.

The Committee **welcomes** progress on the project and expressed appreciation to Katara for her work, including bringing in skilled contributors to support IST modelling. Continued and expanded recruitment is considered essential, and a further funding proposal has been submitted (Item 23). The Committee **thanks** Punt for his critical contribution to advancing this project.

A fundamental tension exists between the complexity and value of the modelling work - much of it undertaken by researchers in their own time - and the lack of remuneration or career incentives to attract and retain the necessary expertise. The Commission must better recognise the value of this work, the risks associated with insufficient support, and the resources required to ensure continuity.

Previous Secretariat roles and consultancy arrangements have proven to be unsustainable. Longer-term career pathways may offer a more viable approach, including part-time consultancy arrangements that allow individuals to remain engaged alongside other roles. Contributing to IWC modelling work carries reputational and career value, which could be better leveraged in recruitment. Greater emphasis on engaging mid-career scientists is suggested, given their potential for stability and longer-term commitment.

The importance of identifying and engaging the limited number of research groups with the capacity to support IST work was highlighted, with the suggestion that such groups could integrate IWC activities into their funded research programmes. Legacy and succession planning should be considered across all sub-committees, not only modelling.

At IWC69, £12,000 was allocated from the SC Research Fund to expand the position of Statistics Officer to a full-time position, aiming to address the essential modernisation of code and data structures, securing the long-term viability of these critical assets. This also helps mitigate the risks of critical knowledge being held by a single person. The post has now been successfully filled, and the Committee **welcomes** Immerz. To maintain progress during the recruitment process, additional hours of existing statistics staff time were used to advance work on the catch database. Given the complexity of the IWC data systems and the steep learning curve required to manage them effectively, a long-term or permanent appointment would maximise the benefits of this investment, ensuring continuity, institutional knowledge retention, and the sustained advancement of key data infrastructure.

25.5 Update on data availability requests and consideration of potential updates/clarifications

The Data Availability Group (DAG) oversees the data request procedures outlined in the IWC Data Availability Agreement (DAA) and the Scientific Handbook. The rules for data availability, summary lists of the available data, protocols for data access, agreement forms and contact points can be found on the IWC website. There have been no DAA-related requests in the last two years, nor any changes to the DAA.

25.6 Joint Conservation Committee-Scientific Committee Working Group

Resolution 2014-4 established this Working Group to facilitate the implementation and follow-up of conservation recommendations. The group last met virtually in May 2024 (see document CC/69/05/01). The meeting considered topics of mutual interest and, in particular, a proposed process for determining priorities for conservation issues that is currently in development. The group will meet on 19 May 2026.

25.7 Election of Officers

Since the change to a two-year term cycle, this was the final year of office for the Chair (Porter) and the Vice-Chair (Lang). In accordance with its Rules of Procedure, following IWC70, the Vice-Chair will automatically become the new Chair and Nelson the new Vice-Chair. Given the endorsement of the Vice-Chair Elect position at IWC69, the Committee proposes Vermeulen.

The Committee thanks Porter for her tireless work noting her enthusiasm and unique Scottish perspective. Vermeulen was congratulated on her nomination.

25.8 Any other matters

During SC69B and the intersessional period, a number of new processes were introduced to facilitate the new biennial schedule, such as changes to the structure and timeline of the SC Leadership Team's roles. The Committee **agrees** to establish an ICG to consult widely among SC members in order to review the experience of the new biennial cycle thus far and suggest potential changes for the SC to consider at SC71.

The ICG's proposed ToR are contained in SC/70/O/32, noting that this new ICG will not restrict the SC Chair from exercising their powers, as set out in the RoP.

26. PUBLICATIONS

The *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management* (JCRM) is the IWC's open-access and peer-reviewed scientific journal. JCRM is run by the Secretariat with support from members of the Committee who act as associate or section editors.

Established at SC50, the purpose of JCRM is to support and, where possible, enhance the Committee's work. The Secretariat and Editorial Board remain committed to reducing publication times and increasing the number of primary papers published in JCRM. Following SC70, delegates are strongly encouraged to support these efforts by submitting primary papers for publication in JCRM and/or, where appropriate, acting as reviewers.

Since SC69B, JCRM has published over 40 papers across a range of annual and special volumes, generating over 70,000 interactions in total, comprising abstract views and file downloads.

Since SC69B, and in addition to its annual volumes, JCRM has published two Special Issues:

(1) The Southern Ocean Whale Ecosystem Research (SOWER) Special Issue
(2) Cetacean Tagging: Advances & Insights

Both Special Issues are closed to new submissions and will be concluded by the end of 2026.

Following the success of the Cetacean Tagging Special Issue, the IWC's Strandings Coordinator requested that JCRM explore the idea of a Special Issue focused on strandings, with editorial support and expertise to be drawn from the Strandings Expert Panel. The Editorial Board supported this proposal, and submissions criteria will therefore be developed ahead of IWC70. In the meantime, delegates are welcome to contact the Secretariat to express initial interest.

The Committee thanks the Editorial Board for the time and expertise that they have freely given to JCRM during the intersessional period. The Committee also thanks the Secretariat for their efforts to facilitate this work.

The Committee notes that JCRM is a critical function of its work and an important means of presenting this work to the wider world. In particular, the Committee praises the success of the Tagging Special Issue and welcomes the proposed Special Issue on strandings.

The Committee also praises the global reach of JCRM and recognises that the support given to non-native English authors is unique and extremely valuable.

27. ADOPTION OF REPORT

The Committee adopted this report on 9 May 2026. The Chair thanked all participants for their time and expertise. The Chair voiced special thanks to the Vice-Chair, Vice-Chair-Elect, Convenors and Rapporteurs for their support and hard work throughout the meeting. The Secretariat staff were thanked for their tireless efforts to make the meeting a success.

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Annex A

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Annex B

Agenda[1]

1. Introductory items
   - 1.1 Chair's welcome and opening remarks
   - 1.2 Remembrances
   - 1.3 Appointment of rapporteurs
   - 1.4 Meeting procedures and schedule
   - 1.5 Establishment of sub-committees and working groups

2. Adoption of Agenda

3. Review of available data, documents and reports
   - 3.1 Documents submitted
   - 3.2 National Progress Reports on research
   - 3.3 Data collection, storage and manipulation
   - 3.4 Guidance for the format of recommendations and discussion of Recommendations Database
   - 3.5 Review of Commission resolutions from 2024
   - 3.6 Report on advice requested by the Government of Mexico, related to threats to cetaceans in the Gulf of California
   - 3.7 Progress on using satellite imagery to inform the work of the Scientific Committee

4. Cooperation with other organisations
   - 4.1 Summary of Secretariat co-operation with other organisations
   - 4.2 African States Bordering the Atlantic Ocean (ATLAFCO)
   - 4.3 Arctic Council [no official observer but report welcome]
   - 4.4 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) [Secretariat]
   - 4.5 Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)
   - 4.6 Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS)
     - 4.6.1 Conference of Parties
     - 4.6.2 Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS)
     - 4.6.3 Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS)
     - 4.6.4 Co-ordination between Scientific Council and the IWC's SC
   - 4.7 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES)
     - 4.7.1 Co-ordination between CITES and the IWC's SC
   - 4.8 Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)
   - 4.9 Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs)
     - 4.9.1 Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)
     - 4.9.2 Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)
   - 4.10 International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)
   - 4.11 International Maritime Organisation (IMO)
   - 4.12 International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
     - 4.12.1 IUCN Red List status of cetaceans
     - 4.12.2 IUCN Task Force on Marine Mammal Protected Areas
     - 4.12.3 Co-ordination between IUCN and the IWC's SC

[1]The designations employed and the presentation of material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the IWC concerning the legal status of any territories or geographical areas.

4.13 North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO)
4.14 North Pacific Marine Science Organisation (PICES)
4.15 Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) of the Cartagena Convention for the Wider Caribbean
4.16 Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) [Secretariat]
4.17 Other

5. General assessment and modelling issues
   5.1 Progress on previous recommendations
   5.2 Biennial work plan

6. AWMP and RMP Implementation-related matters
   6.1 Completion of the gray whale Implementation Review
      6.1.1 Summary of intersessional workshop
      6.1.2 Summary of work completed after the intersessional workshop
      6.1.3 Review of trial results
      6.1.4 Conclusions with respect to the use of the existing SLA
   6.2 Provision of advice using agreed SLAs
      6.2.1 Eastern Canada/West Greenland bowhead whales
         6.2.1.1 New information if any
         6.2.1.2 Provision of updated advice if required
      6.2.2 Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas bowhead whales
         6.2.2.1 New information if any
         6.2.2.2 Provision of updated advice if required
      6.2.3 North Pacific gray whales
         6.2.3.1 New information from the Implementation Review
         6.2.3.2 Provision of updated advice if required
      6.2.4 Common minke whale stocks off East Greenland
         6.2.4.1 New information if any
         6.2.4.2 Provision of updated advice if required
      6.2.5 Common minke whale stocks off West Greenland
         6.2.5.1 New information if any
         6.2.5.2 Provision of updated advice if required
      6.2.6 Fin whales off West Greenland
         6.2.6.1 New information if any
         6.2.6.2 Provision of updated advice if required
      6.2.7 Humpback whales off West Greenland
         6.2.7.1 New information if any
         6.2.7.2 Provision of updated advice if required
   6.3 Progress on previous recommendations
   6.4 Budget requests – two and four years
   6.5 Biennial and long-term work plan
      6.5.1 Planning for forthcoming Implementation Reviews
      6.5.2 Consider progress on the North Atlantic humpback whale in-depth assessment
      6.5.3 Code validation
      6.5.4 Working processes
      6.5.5 Work plan

7. Stocks subject to Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling
   7.1 New information and progress on recommendations
      7.1.1 Eastern Canada/West Greenland bowhead whales
      7.1.2 Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas bowhead whales
      7.1.3 North Pacific gray whales

- 7.1.4 Common minke whale stocks off East Greenland
- 7.1.5 Common minke whale stocks off West Greenland
- 7.1.6 Fin whales off West Greenland
- 7.1.7 Humpback whales off West Greenland
- 7.1.8 Humpback whales off St. Vincent and The Grenadines
- 7.2 Progress of previous recommendations
- 7.3 Biennial work plan

8. Whale stocks not subject to directed takes by Contracting Governments
   - 8.1 Comprehensive or In-depth Assessments
     - 8.1.1 Comprehensive Assessment of North Pacific humpback whales
     - 8.1.2 In-depth Assessment of western North Pacific common minke whales
     - 8.1.3 In-depth Assessment of Antarctic blue whales
     - 8.1.4 Biennial work plan
   - 8.2 Potential new assessments: progress on previous recommendations and prioritised work plan
     - 8.2.1 Non-Antarctic blue whales in the Southern Hemisphere (including NIO populations)
     - 8.2.2 Southern Hemisphere right whales not the subject of CMPs
     - 8.2.3 Fin whales
     - 8.2.4 North Pacific blue whales
     - 8.2.5 North Atlantic right whales
     - 8.2.6 Rice's whales
     - 8.2.7 North Atlantic humpback whales
     - 8.2.8 Biennial work plan
   - 8.3 New information (if provided) for other northern stocks
     - 8.3.1 North Atlantic sei whales
     - 8.3.2 North Atlantic minke whales
     - 8.3.3 North Atlantic Bryde's whales
     - 8.3.4 North Atlantic fin whales
     - 8.3.5 Spitsbergen bowhead whales
     - 8.3.6 North Pacific right whales
     - 8.3.7 North Pacific sperm whales
     - 8.3.8 Unusual mortality events affecting northern stocks
     - 8.3.9 Biennial work plan
   - 8.4 New information (if provided) for other Southern stocks
   - 8.5 Progress on previous recommendations
   - 8.6 Biennial work plan

9. Stocks that are or have been suggested to be the subject of Conservation Management Plans
   - 9.1 Stocks with existing CMPs: new information and progress with previous recommendations
     - 9.1.1 Workshop on South American cetaceans CMPs
     - 9.1.2 Review of workshop report
     - 9.1.3 North Pacific gray whales
     - 9.1.4 Riverine populations of Irrawaddy dolphins
   - 9.2 Progress with identified priorities
     - 9.2.1 Humpback whales in the northern Indian Ocean including the Arabian Sea
     - 9.2.2 Central American humpback whales
     - 9.2.3 Mediterranean species/populations
       - 9.2.3.1 Mediterranean fin whales
       - 9.2.3.2 Mediterranean sperm whales
       - 9.2.3.3 Other Mediterranean species
   - 9.3 Clarification of CC-SC roles
   - 9.4 Progress on previous recommendations
   - 9.5 Biennial work plan

10. Stock definition and DNA testing
    - 10.1 Provide advice to other sub-groups on population structure for requested stocks
        - 10.1.1 North Pacific gray whales
        - 10.1.2 Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas bowhead whales
        - 10.1.3 Western North Pacific common minke whales
        - 10.1.4 Other stocks
    - 10.2 DNA registers
    - 10.3 DNA data quality and genetic analysis guidelines (including checklist)
    - 10.4 Recommendations on the avoidance of sample depletion
    - 10.5 Review terminology used for stock structure related terms used within the IWC
    - 10.6 New genetic approaches (if submitted) for use by the Scientific Committee in addition to stock structure issues
    - 10.7 Progress on previous recommendations
    - 10.8 Biennial work plan

11. Stock abundance and status
    - 11.1 Review of abundance estimates
        - 11.1.1 Abundance estimates
        - 11.1.2 Review process
    - 11.2 IWC Table of Agreed Abundance Estimates and the abundance page on the IWC website
        - 11.2.1 Updates to IWC Table completed or proposed intersessionally
        - 11.2.2 Updates to IWC webpages on abundance completed or proposed intersessionally
        - 11.2.3 Other related progress by the Secretariat
    - 11.3 Methodological issues
        - 11.3.1 Mark-recapture abundance estimation and diagnostic methods
        - 11.3.2 Estimation of franciscana abundance from passive acoustic monitoring
    - 11.4 Provide advice to the Commission on the status of stocks
        - 11.4.1 Status of Stocks Initiative (SOSI) intersessional progress
        - 11.4.2 Review of proposed new SOSI content
        - 11.4.3 Revisions to existing content
        - 11.4.4 SOSI workplan
    - 11.5 Progress on previous recommendations
        - 11.5.1 Document consolidating procedures for the review of abundance estimates
        - 11.5.2 Correction factors
    - 11.6 Biennial work plan
        - 11.6.1 Future SAS and/or SAS-SG workshops
        - 11.6.2 Budget
        - 11.6.3 Recommendations database
        - 11.6.4 Work plan and correspondence groups

12. Bycatch and entanglements
    - 12.1 IWC's Bycatch Mitigation Initiative
    - 12.2 Collaboration on bycatch mitigation with IGOs (including FAO, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, CCAMLR and others)
    - 12.3 Review new methods and estimates of bycatch and entanglement rates, risks and mortality
    - 12.4 Reporting of bycatch and entanglements (both small and large cetaceans) including National Progress Reports
    - 12.5 Review mitigation measures for preventing bycatch and entanglement
    - 12.6 Progress on previous recommendations
    - 12.7 Work plan

13. Vessel strikes
    - 13.1 Review new methods and estimates of rates of vessel strikes, risk of vessel strikes and mortality (including review progress on vessel strike database)
    - 13.2 Mitigation of vessel strikes in high-risk areas
        - 13.2.1 Review progress towards assessing and mitigating vessel strikes in previously identified high risk areas
        - 13.2.2 Review new research relevant to mitigation
    - 13.3 Co-operation with IMO Secretariat and relevant IMO committees
    - 13.4 Progress on previous recommendations
    - 13.5 Work plan

14. Environmental concerns
    - 14.1 Environmental Concerns and stocks subject to Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling
    - 14.2 Chemical pollution
        - 14.2.1 Review intersessional work on Pollution 2030
        - 14.2.2 New information on pollution
    - 14.3 Diseases of concern
        - 14.3.1 Review progress in intersessional work on emerging diseases
        - 14.3.2 Other information
    - 14.4 Strandings and mortality events
        - 14.4.1 Review progress of steering committee for the IWC's Strandings Initiative
        - 14.4.2 New information on unusual mortality events
        - 14.4.3 Other information
    - 14.5 Climate change
        - 14.5.1 Review progress in intersessional work on climate change
        - 14.5.2 Review new information
    - 14.6 Anthropogenic underwater noise
        - 14.6.1 Review progress from intersessional work on impacts to cetaceans from underwater noise
        - 14.6.2 Review new information
    - 14.7 Marine debris
        - 14.7.1 Review progress on recommendations on marine debris
        - 14.7.2 Review new information
    - 14.8 Habitat alteration as anthropogenic impact on cetaceans
        - 14.8.1 Review progress in intersessional work on impacts on cetaceans of deep-sea mining
        - 14.8.2 Review new information
    - 14.9 SOCER [Resolution]
    - 14.10 Impacts of Plastics on Cetaceans [Resolution]
    - 14.11 Progress on previous recommendations
    - 14.12 Biennial work plan

15. Ecosystem modelling
    - 15.1 Workshop on the Role of Cetaceans in Ecosystem Functioning: Gap Analysis
        - 15.1.1 Review new and updated information
        - 15.1.2 Work plan
    - 15.2 Ecosystem modelling in the Antarctic Ocean
        - 15.2.1 Review progress on evaluation of krill distribution and abundance
        - 15.2.2 Cooperation with CCAMLR
    - 15.3 Modelling of competition among whales and relationships between whales and prey
    - 15.4 Standing topics
        - 15.4.1 Progress on multi-species distribution models (MSDMs)
        - 15.4.2 Progress on considering effects of long-term environmental variability on whale populations
    - 15.5 Progress on previous recommendations
    - 15.6 Biennial work plan

16. Small cetaceans
    - 16.1 Small cetaceans of the South Pacific
    - 16.2 Update on previous priority topics
        - 16.2.1 Hector and Maui dolphin
        - 16.2.2 Iberian killer whale
        - 16.2.3 Vaquita
        - 16.2.4 Atlantic humpback dolphin
        - 16.2.5 Indian Ocean humpback dolphin
        - 16.2.6 Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin
        - 16.2.7 Yangtze finless porpoise
        - 16.2.8 Beaked whales
        - 16.2.9 Tursiops Taxonomy
        - 16.2.10 Bycatch of coastal cetacean species and increased trade in fish products
        - 16.2.11 Harbour porpoise
        - 16.2.12 Beluga whales
    - 16.3 Retrospective recommendation review
        - 16.3.1 Review of recommendations prior to SC69
    - 16.4 Review direct takes and live captures of small cetaceans
        - 16.4.1 Direct takes
        - 16.4.2 Live captures
    - 16.5 The role of small cetaceans in ecosystem modelling
    - 16.6 Status of the voluntary fund for small cetacean conservation research
        - 16.6.1 Fund status
        - 16.6.2 Update on funded projects
    - 16.7 Progress on previous recommendations
    - 16.8 Biennial work plan

17. Whale watching
    - 17.1 Assess the impacts of whale watching and swim-with-whale operations on cetaceans
    - 17.2 Progress with regional reviews of whale watching
    - 17.3 Collaborative work within the IWC
        - 17.3.1 Communication with the Conservation Committee's Standing Working Group on Whale Watching
        - 17.3.2 Collaboration with other SC sub-groups on platforms of opportunity and citizen science
    - 17.4 Progress on previous recommendations
    - 17.5 Biennial work plan

18. Whale sanctuaries
    - 18.1 Southern Ocean Sanctuary
        - 18.1.1 Review of information received via the SOS review portal
        - 18.1.2 Receive report from the Sanctuary Review Criteria Intersessional Correspondence Group
        - 18.1.3 Other information related to the Southern Ocean Sanctuary
    - 18.2 Indian Ocean Sanctuary
        - 18.2.1 Commission guidance about the Indian Ocean Sanctuary
        - 18.2.2 A rationale for reviewing the Indian Ocean Sanctuary
    - 18.3 Progress on previous recommendations
    - 18.4 South Atlantic Sanctuary proposal
        - 18.4.1 Receive a status review on the South Atlantic Sanctuary proposal
    - 18.5 Any other Sanctuary-related matters
    - 18.6 Biennial work plan

19. Extinction Alert

20. IWC List of Recognised Species

21. IWC databases and catalogues
    - 21.1 Guidelines for IWC catalogues and photo-ID databases
    - 21.2 Progress with existing or proposed new catalogues
        - 21.2.1 Right whale photo catalogues
        - 21.2.2 Happywhale database
        - 21.2.3 Flukebook
        - 21.2.4 Southern Hemisphere Blue Whale Catalogue (SHBWC)
        - 21.2.5 Antarctic Blue Whale Catalogue (ABWC)
        - 21.2.6 Gray whale photo catalogues
        - 21.2.7 Rice's whale photo catalogues
        - 21.2.8 Humpback whale photo catalogues
        - 21.2.9 Fin whale photo catalogues
    - 21.3 Progress with existing IWC databases
        - 21.3.1 Summary of IWC databases and current priorities
        - 21.3.2 IWC National Progress Reports
        - 21.3.3 Review database procedures, evaluate integration and consolidation of existing databases, and define rules for accessing data
    - 21.4 Potential future IWC databases
        - 21.4.1 IWC database proposal pro forma
        - 21.4.2 New proposals for IWC databases
    - 21.5 Biennial work plan

22. Multinational research programmes and national surveys
    - 22.1 Surveys that include IWC funding and/or support, including IWC-POWER and IWC-SORP
    - 22.2 Surveys that seek IWC funding and/or request IWC oversight
    - 22.3 Surveys that seek advice from the Committee regarding survey or analysis methods
    - 22.4 Other survey reports and plans
    - 22.5 Biennial work plan

23. Scientific Committee budget
    - 23.1 Report from the Budgetary Steering Group
    - 23.2 Status of funded research, workshop proposals, data processing and computing needs
    - 23.3 Fund reallocations and contingencies for the Research Fund, Voluntary Fund for Small Cetaceans and SORP Voluntary Fund
    - 23.4 Proposed budget for 2027-2028 developed under the Committee's guidelines

24. Committee priorities for the biennium 2027-28 and initial agenda for future meetings

25. Working methods of the Committee
    - 25.1 Updates on Rules of Procedure and Handbook of the Scientific Committee
    - 25.2 Communications Initiative and matters related to reporting to the Commission
    - 25.3 Science Liaison Group
    - 25.4 Capacity building and succession plan for the Scientific Committee
    - 25.5 Update on data availability requests and consideration of potential updates/clarifications
    - 25.6 Joint Conservation Committee-Scientific Committee Working Group
    - 25.7 Election of officers
    - 25.8 Any other matters

26. Publications

27. Adoption of Report

Annex C

List of Documents[1]

SC/70/ASW/

01. Citta, J.J., Stimmelmayr, R., Frantz, R., Anashugak, P., De Sousa, L., Von Duyke, A., Sformo, T. and Person, B. Subsistence harvest of bowhead whales (*Balaena mysticetus*) by Alaskan Natives during 2024. 11pp.
02. Citta, J.J., Stimmelmayr, R., Frantz, R., Anashugak, P., Ahmaogak, J., Von Duyke, A., Sformo, T. and Wilford, C.R. Subsistence harvest of bowhead whales (*Balaena mysticetus*) by Alaskan Natives during 2025. 11pp.
03. Lang, A., Brownell, J., R.L., Crance, J., Murase, H. and Matsuoka, K. Summary and future utility of data collected on gray whales during the 2024 and 2025 IWC POWER research cruises. 10pp.
04. Citta, J.J., Givens, G.H., Von Duyke, A., Adams, B., Stafford, K.M., Pepper, B.E., Salisbury, D., Rahman, A., Ponirakis, D., Furtado, H.S.C., Eagen, S., Tolkova, I., Klinck, H., Bouffaut, L., Phelps, J.T., Olnes, J., Wilford, C.R. and Sformo, T.L. Update on the 2025 ice-based abundance survey of Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort bowhead whales near Point Barrow, Alaska. 22pp.
05. Scordino, J.J., Calambokidis, J., Gisborne, B., Jacobsen, J., Mahoney, P., McCutcheon, J., Pérez, A., Sandiland, D. and Strong, C. Evaluation of an alternative approach to data collection for PCFG abundance estimates: preliminary results. 10pp.
06. Loginova, O.A., Belokobylskiy, I.F. and Spiridonov, S.E. The cestode *Priapocephalus eschrichtii*, a parasite of the gray whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*). 3pp.
07. **Rev1.** Bizikov, V.A., Litovka, D.I., Sidorov, L.K., Belokobylsky, I.F. and Deviatkin, V.I. Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling in the Russian Federation during 2025. 4pp.
08. **Rev1.** Bizikov, V.A., Litovka, D.I., Sidorov, L.K., Belokobylsky, I.F. and Deviatkin, V.I. Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling in the Russian Federation during 2024. 4pp.
09. Loginova, O.A., Belokobylsky, I.F. and Spiridonov, S.E. A study of the haplotype diversity of *Cyamus ceti* (Amphipoda), ectoparasite of the gray whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*). 2pp.
10. Belokobylsky, I.F. and Chakilev, M.V. Feeding indicators of gray whales in the Mechigmen Bay. 3pp.
11. Stimmelmayr, R., Citta, J.J., Givens, G.H., Von Duyke, A., Person, B.T., Sformo, T., Wilford, C.R., de Sousa, L. and Frantz, R. 2024-2025 Health reports for the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas bowhead whales - preliminary findings. 26pp.
12. Litovka, D.I., Klyuchnikova, P.S., Riabov, A.A., Semenikhin, A.V., Naidenko, S.V., Mezentseva, V. and Kozlov, V. Gray whales toxicology researches off Chukotka and rescuing entangled humpback and killer whales off Kamchatka and Kola Peninsulas (Russia), 2024-2025. 3pp.
13. Belokobylsky, I.F., Sidorov, L.K. and Popov, P.A. Gray whale number estimate in Mechigmen Bay in 2025. 1pp.

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01. Cassani, C., Zerbini, A., Vermeulen, E. and Rojas-Bracho, L. Clarification of Roles, responsibilities, and interactions between the Scientific Committee, CMP Sub-Committee and the Conservation Committee Standing Working Group. 7pp.
02. **Rev1.** Arabian Sea Whale Network, IWC Secretariat, IWC Scientific Committee, IWC Conservation Committee, Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species and Coalition of Stakeholders. Proposal for endorsement of the joint IWC-CMS regional Conservation Management Plan for the Arabian Sea humpback whale. 6pp.
03. **Rev1.** Arabian Sea Whale Network, IWC Secretariat, IWC Scientific Committee, IWC Conservation Committee, Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species and Coalition of Stakeholders. A Conservation Management Plan for Arabian Sea humpback whales. 45pp.
04. Nakamura, G., Yamada, C., Katsumata, T., Matsuoka, K. and Kato, H. Status Report of Conservation and Research on the western North Pacific Gray Whales in Japan, May 2024 - April 2026. 8pp.
05. Sarrouf Willson, M., Willson, A. and Minton, G. Concrete steps towards an Arabian Sea Humpback Whale Management Plan - final report. 43pp.

[1]The designations employed and the presentation of material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the IWC concerning the legal status of any territories or geographical areas.

06. Kolesnikovas, C.K.M., Rodrigues, T.C.S., Ferreira, E.C., Reis, R.A., Nesello, D.J.T., Milanesi, C., Zampieri Costa, L.A., Meurer, R., Gomez, F., Smith, C., Meegan, J., Barratclough, A., Benvenuto, A., Rodrigues, A., Leandro, B., Salbany, A., Neto, M.P., Sweeney, J., Smith, C. and Von Fersen, L. First long-term rehabilitation of a Franciscana dolphin (*Pontoporia blainvillei*) calf: clinical management and conservation implications. 15pp.
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10. Rev1. Urbán R., J., Viloria-Gómora, L., Martínez-Aguilar., S., Lobo-Barrera, R., Julio-Romero, Y. and Swartz, S.L. 2025-2026 Gray whale winter season in Laguna San Ignacio and Bahia Magdalena lagoon complex, B.C.S., México. 16pp.
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03. Rev1. Young, K.F., Webber, T., Lomas, A.C., de Jong, C., Longden, S., Rossi, M., Gordon, J., Saalmann, F., Oakes, G., Johnston, P. and Santillo, D. Northern bottlenose whales (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*) in the designated deep seabed mining area of the Nordic Seas. 24pp.
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08. Rev1. Stimmelmayr, R., West, K., IJsseldijk, L.L., Uhart, M., Kolesnikovas, C., CKM, Brownlow, A., Deaville, R., Sierra Pulpillo, E.M., Fernandez Rodriguez, A., Kyunglee, L., Domit, C., Sacristan, C., Hernandez, G., Groch, K., Colegrove, K., Delaney, M., Grigg, M., Davidson, N., Holms, P., Costa Silva, S.C., Clarke, T., Tajima, Y., Mazzariol, S., Wilken, S., Gulland, F. and Rowles, T. Progress report IWC 2026 IWC SC. Intersessional Correspondence Group on CDOC (Cetacean Diseases of Concern). 28pp.
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10. Dixon, A., Dolman, S.J., Dixon, C., McLellan, F. and Simmonds, M. An update on progress towards a Global Plastics Treaty. 5pp.
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13. Hunter, E.C., Eisfeld-Pierantonio, S.M., Godley, B.J., Merrill, G.B. and Nelms, S.E. Appraisal of plastic-cetacean interaction data to enable a global risk assessment (IWC tender). Supplementary material in Excel file. 26pp.
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16. Rev1. IWC Secretariat, Chair of Strandings Expert Panel and Chair of Strandings Steering Group. Update from the Strandings Initiative. 23pp.
17. Francisco, G.B., Iurk, V., Glienke, C., Ale, E., Gusmao, J.B., Bracarense, A.P.L., Aranha, L. and Domit, C. Current knowledge on zoonotic diseases in the Guiana dolphin *Sotalia guianensis*. 11pp.
18. Anthropogenic Underwater Noise Intersessional Correspondence Group. Review of Underwater Noise work undertaken in other International Organisations, April 2026. 14pp.

19. No paper.
20. Young, K.F., Lomas, A.C., Webber, T., Rossi, M., Gordon, J., Østvold, O., de Jong, S., Saalmann, F., Oakes, G., Johnston, P. and Santillo, D. Passive acoustic survey for cetaceans in a designated deep sea mining area, Nordic Seas, summer 2024-2025. 30pp.
21. Fernández, A. Impact of anti-submarine acoustic activities on beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*). Technical report. 10pp.

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01. Pallin, L.J., Johnson, C.M., Reisinger, R.R. and Friedlaender, A.S. Near real-time monitoring of Southern Hemisphere whale population health and connectivity: Integrating physiology, movement ecology, and body condition to inform ecosystem-based management. 7pp.
02. Mestre, J., Trathan, P.N., Durban, J.W., Friedlaender, A.S., Hutchinson, A., Joyce, T.W., Rogers, A. and Reisinger, R.R. Spatiotemporal overlap of minke and humpback whales with krill fishing vessels in the Western Antarctic Peninsula. 33pp.
03. Galletti Vernazzani, B. and CC Working Group on Cetacean and Ecosystem Functioning. Update from the Conservation Committee Working Group on Cetaceans and Ecosystem Functioning – March 2026. 3pp.
04. Hernández-Blanco, M., Pearson, H., Rodríguez-Fonseca, J., Costanza, R. and Gandra, F. The contribution of whales in supporting marine ecosystem services (IWC Tender). 139pp.
05. Hill, S.L. and Kelly, N. High-level strategic objectives for ecosystem modelling. 19pp.
06. Johannessen, E.D., Murase, H., Miller, B., Ahonen, H. and Kelly, N. Initial thoughts on guidelines for cetacean data collection and analysis to inform CCAMLR ecosystem-based management: population abundance, krill consumption, and spatial and seasonal distribution. 34pp.

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02. **Rev1.** Cha, B.J., Kim, H.Y., Jung, J.M., Park, M.S. and Choi, K.S. Study on bycatch reduction devices in Korean fisheries. 2pp.
03. **Rev1.** Sucunza, F., Barth, A., Berggren, P., Danilewicz, D., Dolman, S., von Fersen, L., Larre, G.G., Ott, P.H. and Tregenza, N. Monitoring and mitigation of dolphin bycatch in a small-scale gillnet fishery in southern Brazil: evaluating the effectiveness of upcycled plastic bottles. 12pp.
04. Gahm, M., Long, K., Alger, B., Barrows, K., Galvez, B., Goebel, J., Henniger, H., Khan, C., Matzen, E., Milliken, H., Shervanick, K., La Ferr, A. and Caldwell, L. U.S. efforts to develop on-demand fishing gear technology: 2024-2026 updates. 12pp.
05. Okyere, I., Agyekumwaa, E., Obeng Chuku, E., Mawuko Atsiatorme, E., Kesse Mireku, K., Ofori-Danson, P., Sefah Debrah, J., Worlanyo Aheto, D., Mevutah, D. and Mullié, W.C. Second update on cetacean landings in artisanal fisheries along the coast of Ghana: April 2024 - January 2026. 6pp.
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08. Heng, C., Arnett, R.E., Tubbs, S., Berggren, P., Tha, O. and Ann, K. Trialling a low-cost solution to Irrawaddy dolphin bycatch in coastal Cambodia. 5pp.
09. Calderan, S., Brownlow, A., De Noia, M., Leaper, R., MacLennan, E., McAndrew, D. and Philp, B. Implementation of negatively buoyant groundline in Scottish creel (pot/trap) fisheries: a progress report. 8pp.
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11. Virgili, A., Lelong, E., Hines, E., Leaper, R. and Bouchard, A. IWC Guidance for organisers of offshore racing events to minimise risk of collisions with cetaceans. 13pp.
12. Leaper, R., Bouchard, A., Hines, E., Virgill, A. and Willson, A. Suggestions for standardised methods for assessing co-operation/compliance with speed restriction zones. 6pp.
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14. No paper.
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16. Leaper, R., Babey, L., Calderan, S., Collins, M., Martin, S. and Jackson, J. Whale observations around the sub-Antarctic island at 54°15'S, 36°45'W and assessment of ship strike risks following the implementation of a 10 knot voluntary speed limit since 2022. 11pp.
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18. Peltier, H., Authier, M., Dabin, W., Dars, C., Demaret, F., Meheust, E., Van Canneyt, O., Wund, S. and Spitz, J. Assessment of strandings and bycatch during the closure of high-risk fishing gears in the Bay of Biscay (NE Atlantic) during winter 2025. 20pp.
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26. Mansur, E.F., Grant, M., Fisher, S., Schubert, D.J. and Smith, B.D. Review of progress on regulating international trade in high-value fish maws to reduce extinction risk of small cetaceans and other marine megafauna due to bycatch. 11pp.
27. **Rev2.** IWC Secretariat - Statistics and Modelling. Catches reported for the 2025 season. 2pp.
28. **Rev5.** IWC Secretariat. Update on Cooperation with Other Organisations. 32pp.
29. Clarke, P. and Cubaynes, H.C. 'Using Satellites to Study Whales'. Report of the Intersessional Correspondence Group (ICG), 2024-2026. 29pp.
30. IWC Secretariat. Rules of Procedure – proposed changes related to the SC. 4pp.
31. IWC Secretariat. Proposal to establish an IWC-SC Steering Group on Cooperation with CCAMLR. 4pp.
32. Suydam, R., Donovan, G., Zerbini, A., Palka, D., Biuw, M., Lang, A., Herr, H. and Givens, G. Proposed ICG to review move to biennial meetings. 2pp.

REPORTS FROM INTERSESSIONAL WORKSHOPS

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01. Report of the Special Meeting of the Abundance Steering Group, September 6, 2025, virtual meeting. 51pp.
02. Report of the Workshop for the Sub-committee on Abundance Estimates, Status of Stocks, and International Cruises, 16-17 November 2025, Cambridge, UK. 25pp.
03. Report of the Workshop on Collaborative Solutions for Reducing Vessel Strikes: Uniting Insights from Science, Industry and Policy, 14-16 January 2026, London, UK. 24pp.
04. Report of the Workshop to Advance the In-Depth Assessment of North Atlantic Humpback Whales, 17-19 March 2026, Provincetown, Massachusetts, USA. 25pp.
05. Report of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Meeting on Planning for Phase II of the IWC-POWER Programme, 7-8 December 2025, Taiji, Japan. 91pp.
06. Report of the IWC-POWER Planning Meeting for the 2026 Cruise, 9 December 2025, Taiji, Japan. 19pp.
07. Report on the Joint IWC/SPREP 'Bycatch Mitigation Opportunities in the Western Pacific Ocean' Workshop, 25-26 February 2026, Nadi, Fiji. 28pp.
08. Report of Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Meeting on Planning for Phase II of the IWC-POWER Programme, 5-7 November 2024, Tokyo, Japan. 47pp.
09. Report of the IWC-POWER Planning Meeting for the 2025 Cruise, 7 November 2024, Tokyo, Japan. 16pp.
10. Report of the Society of Marine Mammalogy Conference Workshop: Tools for a Global Network of Strandings Responders, 9 November 2024, Perth, Western Australia. 26pp.
11. Report of the 2025 IWC Workshop on Conservation and Management Plans for South American Cetaceans, 30 June-5 July 2025, Santos, Brazil. 122pp.
12. Report of the In-Depth Assessment Workshop, 16-25 November 2025, Cambridge, UK. 12pp.
13. Report of the 2026 Pre-Meeting of the Sub-Committee on Stock Abundance and Status Steering Group (SAS-SG). 36pp.
14. Report of the Workshop on Implementation Simulation Trials, November 2025, Cambridge, UK.

RESEARCH PROPOSALS

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32. Katara, I., Privitera-Johnon, K., Punt, A.E., Liu, O., Rand, Z. and Stewart, J. Securing legacy in computing and modelling legacy II. 6pp.
42. Rev1. Katara, I., de Moor, C.L., Punt, A.E., Wilberg, M., Rand, Z. and Stewart, J. Technical meetings of the IWC Scientific Committee Modelling Group: Advancing priority stock assessments in line with SC Recommendations (2026/27 and 2027/28). 5pp.
43. Punt, A., Liu, O., Privitera-Johnon, K., Katara, I. and Rand, Z. North Pacific Humpback Whale Comprehensive Assessment Model: finalisation and validation. 4pp.
44. Rev1. Punt, A., de Moor, C.L., Stewart, J., Wilberg, M., Allison, C. and Privitera-Johnon, K. Eastern North Pacific gray whale: Update and enhancement of the assessment with catastrophic events and management scenarios. 5pp.
45. de Moor, C.L., Allison, C. and Katara, I. Western North Pacific minke whale assessment model documentation. 4pp.
46. Palka, D., Donovan, G., Brownell, R.L., Jr., Crance, J. and Matsuoka, K. IWC-POWER cruise in 2027 and 2028 including associated workshop/meetings and processing. 6pp.
49. Carroll, E. and Galletti Vernazzani, B. Genomic diversity and population identity of Eastern South Pacific southern right whales. 7pp.
51. Bouchard, A. Progressing the development and use of the IWC Vessel Strikes Database, coordination of and support for other work within the IWC Vessel Strikes Programme. 9pp.
52. Agrelo, M., Maron, C., Sironi, M., Vilches, F., Orce, A. and Munoz Moreda, C. Reproductive dynamics of southern right whales at Península Valdés: linking demographic variability to population trajectories under climate variability. 7pp.
54. Saad, M. and Olson, P. Assessing and mitigating cetacean bycatch and whale-watching impacts in Kenya's coastal waters through integrated monitoring and community-based interventions. 7pp.
55. Olson, P., Babey, L. and Minton, G. Outreach to facilitate an increase in opportunistic photo-IDs and to encourage safe whale viewing by tourist ships. 5pp.
57. Butterworth, D., Brandão, A., Ross-Gillespie, A., Vermeulen, E. and Charlton, C. Multi-ocean assessment of southern right whale demographic parameters. 7pp.
58. Neave-Webb, E. IWC Strandings Initiative: Strandings Coordinator role funding. 8pp.
59. Oviedo, L. Establishing an ecological baseline for a data-deficient inshore population of Guiana dolphins (*Sotalia guianensis*) in the Southern Caribbean Upwelling System IMMA, Venezuela. 7pp.
60. Shabangu, F., Miller, B. and Schall, E. Developing an open-access annotated library of offshore southern right whale sounds for testing and training automated detectors. 6pp.
61. Givens, G.H. and New, L. 2027 Intersessional Workshop for SAS Steering Group (SAS-SG). 5pp.
62. Givens, G.H. and New, L. 2028 Pre-meeting of the SAS Steering Group (SAS-SG). 5pp.
65. Galletti Vernazzani, B., Fewster, R.M., Wong-Toi, A. and Salgado Kent, C. Improving assessment of Chile and Australia/Timor Leste blue whales using bi-lateral photo-ID modelling and providing first abundance estimates for Sri Lanka. 8pp.
66. Bouchard, A., Vermeulen, E. and Seakamela, M.S. Workshop on vessel strike risk and mitigation for South African waters. 6pp.
67. Zerbini, A. and Vermeulen, E. Proposal for a Workshop on South and Central American CMPs in 2027. 5pp.
69. Tiedemann, R., Donovan, G. and Wilberg, M. Joint IWC–NAMMCO Workshop on population structure of common minke and fin whales in the North Atlantic. 5pp.
70. Rose, N. and Parsons, E.C.M. State of the Cetacean Environment Report. 4pp.
71. Collins, T., Strindberg, S. and Ischa, I. Cetacean bycatch risk in the western Indian Ocean. 6pp.
72. Miranda, D.H. and Urriola, K. Distinct isotopic niches and habitat use in inshore bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) from two Costa Rican Pacific embayments: implications for health, exposure to stressors, and One Health. 6pp.
74. Chauca, J. Strengthening capacities for the monitoring and response to stranded cetaceans on the Peruvian coast. 4pp.
75. Mesnick, S., Brownell, R.L., Jr., Cipriano, F., Butterworth, D., Cooke, J. and Cholewiak, D. Review of data available for potential future assessment of sperm whales in the Eastern North Pacific. 5pp.
79. Esteves Ponte, M.A. Demography and habitat use of Bryde's whales (*Balaenoptera edeni*) in a data-deficient upwelling system (Cabo Codera, southern Caribbean IMMA, Venezuela). 6pp.
80. Trujillo, F., Carroll, E., Constantine, R. and Baird, K. Workshop on Small Cetaceans of the South Pacific Islands: Towards Integrated Sssessment and Collaborative Conservation Research. 6pp.
81. Parsons, E.C.M. Indian Ocean Sanctuary (IOS) Review. 5pp.

PAPERS FOR INFORMATION

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