Development of a web-accessible database of IWC recommendations

IWC Secretariat

INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

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Submitted by the IWC Secretariat and the Chairs of the Conservation Committee and Scientific
Committee
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1. Background

At its 2015 meeting, the Joint Conservation Committee and Scientific Committee Working Group
(Joint CC/SC WG) agreed that an intersessional group would undertake a collation and analysis of
conservation-relevant recommendations from the Scientific Committee and organise these
recommendations into key issues/areas highlighting those that feature regularly.

As a result of intersessional work undertaken by this Group, a compilation and analysis of Scientific
Committee recommendations of direct relevance to the Conservation Committee 2013-2016 was
submitted to IWC as document IWC/66/CC25. The recommendations in the paper were endorsed
by the Conservation Committee and the Commission. This included the following:

> *In order to improve the accessibility, effectiveness and reach of IWC Recommendations, and
> provide a more effective means of assessing progress with implementing Recommendations and
> analysing the broader work of the IWC, it is recommended that the Commission: Establishes an
> intersessional group to develop a draft structure and process for populating a web-accessible
> database of recommendations (and outcomes), not necessarily limited to conservation
> Recommendations or Recommendations of the Scientific Committee, taking into account initial
> considerations presented in Annex 2 of this document.*

In response to this recommendation, the Commission established an intersessional Group and
Argentina, Australia, Belgium, UK, the Chair of the Conservation Committee and the Secretariat all
agreed to serve on this group. The intersessional Group was convened by email in March 2017.

The Joint CC/SC Working Group is invited to:

1) Identify a Chair for the intersessional database group that has been tasked with overseeing
   the development of a draft structure and process for populating a web-accessible database

2) Provide comments on the issues raised in this paper, in particular relating to the scope of
   the database; the data fields; the process for data compilation; and the budgetary
   requirements.

3) Consider a proposal to hold a meeting, ideally before the next joint CC/SC Working Group
   meeting, to develop a draft structure and process for populating the database with a focus
   on conservation-related recommendations. The Working Group is invited to agree the
   Terms of Reference of the meeting (suggestions below), to nominate experts to participate,
   and to provide comments on how the meeting might be funded.

2. Key issues for development of a database of IWC recommendations

2.2 Scope of database

As per its Terms of Reference, the Joint CC/SC WG focuses on conservation-related recommendations of the Scientific Committee. However, the issues raised by the Working Group, relating to communication and implementation of recommendations, are equally relevant to the work of the wider Commission. In recognition of this, the recommendation endorsed by the Commission states that the web-accessible database of recommendations (and outcomes) should not necessarily be limited to conservation recommendations or recommendations of the Scientific Committee.

With this in mind, the database can be established in such a way that data fields and processes to populate it are relevant to all recommendations, potentially including Resolutions of the Commission, of the Commission and its subgroups. In this context, the conservation-recommendations can serve as a useful test for the establishment of the database and the process to populate it.

As noted above, the broader focus of the database is beyond the scope of both the Conservation Committee and the Scientific Committee, and the Terms of Reference of the Joint Working Group, and further discussion will be needed on how these wider aspects can be taken forward. Document IWC/M17/CCSC/02 and its associated agenda item, will provide opportunity for discussion of this issue.

2.3 Database Fields

The database will enable the IWC to manage and communicate recommendations, to facilitate implementation, to track progress, and to understand barriers to implementation and emerging issues. The structure of the database, and the fields it contains, will need to enable effective searching and retrieval of recommendations (e.g. by species, range states, thematic area) and to facilitate assessment of and reporting implementation. In addition, as noted above, the fields and categories can be developed to ensure they are consistent with any work across the wider Commission recommendations. The Working Group is therefore requested to keep these aspects in mind, while still retaining the focus on conservation-related recommendations.

Illustrative examples of fields for possible inclusion in the database are provided in Table 1. These are based on IWC/66/CC25, which was compiled through intersessional correspondence and previous meetings of the Joint CC/SC Working Group.

The Working Group is invited to discuss the data fields in Table 1, suggest revisions and propose additional fields.

Table 1. Examples of data fields for possible inclusion in a database. Each recommendation would be included with the information below, with multiple categories assigned to some recommendations where appropriate.

Data fields in database	Notes	Format
Recommendation data		
Year		Standardised fields
Committee name		Standardised fields
Workshop name (if relevant)		Standardised fields
Conservation theme [or Commission theme]	Building on list in IWC/66/CC25	Standardised fields
Context	Includes background information, where it is not standalone	Free text

Data fields in database	Notes	Format
Category of action	Building on list in IWC/66/CC25	Standardised fields
Initial action		Free text
Aimed at	Building on list in IWC/66/CC25	Standardised fields
Reference	Where to find e.g. section of committee report	Free text
Target completion date		Standardised fields
Implementation information		
Actions taken	Summary of actions to date. This would need to be date stamped.	Free text
Status of implementation	Categories such as Not started, Underway, Complete. This would need to be date stamped.	Standardised fields
Linked to previous Recommendation	Example 1: a Recommendation may suggest further work which is completed and leads onto a subsequent Recommendation. Example 2: a Recommendation is repeated in multiple years	
Superseded by		

2.4 Process for data compilation

The Working Group will need to agree a process for entering and validating data. Key questions include:

Who will undertake the initial compilation of recommendations data?
Every two years, the Commission endorses a series of recommendations, including those made by its committees and subcommittees. After each Commission meeting, the Secretariat should be asked to extract, categorise and enter to the database all recommendations that have been endorsed. A similar exercise (for IWC66 recommendations) has recently been undertaken by its Secretariat for its internal work planning. The Working Group may wish to consider whether or how this data entry process would be overseen by the Commission through its subgroups.

How will recommendations be identified i.e. what is the definition of a recommendation?
The Commission takes decisions through Resolutions; through endorsing recommendations from its subgroups; and on the basis of other discussions at its biennial Commission meeting. It is suggested that recommendations will be identified on the basis of words such as 'recommended', 'endorsed', 'agreed'. In addition, the Working Group is asked to consider whether Resolutions (e.g. operative clauses) could be included in the database as recommendations.

The Scientific Committee is already undertaking work to standardise language used in recommendations, and the joint CC-SC Working Group has an action to develop guidance on this, which can then be shared to the wider Commission.

It is proposed that a template for recommendations be agreed, which will align with the relevant fields within the database. This will maximise the efficiency of the data entry process. Document IWC/M17/CCSC/02 and its associated agenda item provides opportunity for further discussion on this meeting.

How will data on implementation of recommendations be compiled and checked?
The Working Group will need to agree on how it will identify the status of implementation of recommendations in order to input to the database. For example,

governments/committees/Secretariat could be asked periodically to report on steps taken to implement recommendations, with a Steering Group overseeing the process. This could be undertaken on an annual or biennial basis. The Working Group could also consider how existing IWC reporting processes could contribute, for example, Voluntary Conservation Reports.

The Working Group is invited to propose a) a process to identify when a recommendation is complete and b) ensure a sign-off/validation process (e.g. by a Steering Group) to confirm recommendations are complete.

How would progress with implementation be reviewed and how frequently?
Once the database contains data on implementation of recommendations, a process to *review* progress with implementation (using the outputs from the database) is needed. Proposals on this are included in IWC/M17/CCSC/02.

2.5 Database structure and accessibility

The back-end structure of the database will be based on user needs, data fields agreed by the working group and integration with existing IWC resources. The front-end would be publicly accessible from the IWC website, where users can search and download data. The user interface should be designed with intuitive search functionality, various data download options, and access to previous analyses of implementation.

Consideration will be given to lessons learned through other online databases, including the Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel, and recommendations tracking system of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other Intergovernmental Organisations.

The Secretariat, including through its IT officer, can provide advice as appropriate.

2.6 Database costs

The development of database will be a substantial undertaking and will require additional funding to be taken forward. This will include a number of up-front, one-off costs to develop the database and initially populate it, and ongoing costs for its population and maintenance as follows:

- Development of back-end database structure
- Development of front end user interface
- Initial extraction and categorisation of all recommendations (backdated to an agreed point)
- Ongoing extraction and categorisation of recommendations
- Ongoing web maintenance

The Secretariat has some capacity to support the development of the database and for ongoing population of the database. However, additional resource would be needed, particularly for the database development and initial population of data. The Working Group could request that the Secretariat develop an estimated budget and work plan for the development of the database, taking into account existing capacity. This would facilitate discussions on how this could be funded.

3. Proposed database meeting
The development of the database, including the list of fields, categories to be used, process for population of the database etc will require further discussion by the Working Group, Secretariat and other stakeholders. It is proposed that a small meeting is held, ideally before the next joint CC/SC Working Group meeting, to develop a draft structure and process for populating the database taking into account the considerations above.

The Terms of Reference of the meeting could include:
- To agree a list of data fields and associated categories for the database, taking into account the potential development of a template of language to be used in recommendations noted above.
- To propose a process for data compilation including who will undertake the initial compilation of recommendations data and how will recommendations be identified i.e. what is the definition of a recommendation
- To propose a process on compiling and checking data on implementation of recommendations
- To make suggestions on a a process to systematically review implementation of recommendations
- To develop a budget and work plan for the database

Meeting participants would be database experts with an understanding of IWC processes. They could be drawn from the intersessional group to develop the database structure and also experts nominated by the Working Group. It is proposed that the meeting is small with up to five experts invited. The Working Group is asked to identify experts that could participate in the meeting.

It is proposed the workshop be held in Cambridge to enable relevant Secretariat staff to participate, including the IT officer.

The budget for a two day workshop in Cambridge is likely to be between £5,000-£10,000 depending on where the participants are from. Once the meeting participants have been agreed, the Secretariat will prepare a budget.

Options for funding the workshop could include intersessional voluntary funding (if available), with the agreement of the relevant Steering Group, or a proposal to the SC Research Fund in 2018. The Working Group is invited to make any other suggestions on how this could be funded.

The meeting participants could report in to the existing intersessional group for development of the database who would develop a proposal to for discussion at the 2018 Joint CC/SC Working Group meeting.

4. Action required

The Working Group is invited to:

1) Identify a Chair for the intersessional database group tasked with overseeing the development of a draft structure and process for populating a web-accessible database

2) Make comments on the issues raised in this paper, in particular relating to the scope of the database; the data fields; the process for data compilation; and the budgetary requirements.

3) Consider a proposal to hold a small meeting, ideally before the next joint CC/SC Working Group meeting, to develop a draft structure and process for populating the database taking into account the considerations above. The meeting would focus on conservation-related recommendations of the Scientific Committee, but take into consideration the need for future expansion of the scope of the database.

   The Working Group is invited to agree the Terms of Reference of the meeting (see suggestions in 3), to nominate experts that could participate in the meeting, and to provide comments on how the meeting might be funded.