

IWC/M17/CPG/02

IWC Voluntary Conservation Reports

IWC Secretariat



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

IWC Voluntary Conservation Reports

Introduction

At its last meeting in October 2016 the Chair of the Conservation Committee noted the need to make Voluntary Conservation Reports as useful as possible, and to record how they are used to measure success. The Committee thus agreed to establish a group to review and develop the report template to align it with the new Conservation Committee Strategic Plan, comprising Australia, Mexico, UK and the Secretariat.

This paper has been prepared by the Secretariat at the request of the Chair and Vice- Chair of the Conservation Committee to inform discussions on potential revisions to the template for Voluntary Conservation Reports.

Background

At its inaugural meeting in 2004 (IWC56) the Conservation Committee considered a proposal by Brazil for the introduction of Voluntary National Reports on cetacean conservation in order to better assess the progress being made by national governments, identify cooperation opportunities and help develop the conservation agenda by gathering and analysing information provided by governments themselves on the status of cetacean conservation and management initiatives they may wish to forward to the IWC. A format for this report was provided (Annex 1). Though this proposal was supported by some Contracting Members, others put forward a view that this issue needed further consideration, and this was subsequently referred for more discussion along with issues concerned with the Terms of Reference and working methods of the Conservation Committee. At the next meeting of the Conservation Committee in 2005 (IWC57), four countries submitted Voluntary National Cetacean Conservation reports as an example of what could be done. It was then proposed that reporting should continue on a voluntary basis, allowing countries keen to do so to report on their progress should their resources allow. At the 2006 meeting of the Conservation Committee (IWC58) 8 countries submitted voluntary conservation reports.

Current status of reporting

Since IWC58 8-10 countries have submitted Voluntary Conservation Reports to each Conservation Committee meeting. There is a high degree of consistency in which countries provide reports in successive years.

Reports are made available as meeting papers on the IWC website. When time has allowed, countries have provided brief verbal reports of their reports and there has been some limited discussion. However, there has been no detailed discussion or analysis of the reports undertaken.

Issues to consider

There are a number of considerations, including several recent developments of relevance to Voluntary Conservation reporting, which the Conservation Committee may wish to take into account in reviewing the reporting template and process including:

Needs of members. The Committee may wish to further consider the needs of members from reporting. Though Voluntary Conservation Reports are made available as Conservation Committee documents, it is not clear if and how they are used beyond this. It would be useful to gain a better understanding of how these reports might benefit and be used by Contracting Governments. This

might include the potential for reporting to contribute to national management of data and information related to cetacean conservation and management; sharing of experience and best practice in implementing IWC recommendations and identifying opportunities for cooperation. Related to this is whether and how more countries can be incentivised to submit these reports.

Reviewing implementation (Joint CC-SC and database of recommendations). IWC Resolution 2014-4 agreed to establish a working group between the Conservation Committee and the Scientific Committee in order to propose a procedure to facilitate the implementation and follow-up of conservation recommendations. IWC 66 considered the work and recommendations of this working group and agreed (*inter alia*) to establish an intersessional group to develop a draft structure and process for populating a web-accessible database of recommendations and outcomes. In taking forward this work, and considering its future role, the joint CC-SC will consider how an ongoing review and analysis of implementation could be undertaken. Relevant to this is how Contracting Member reporting could help to determine whether and how recommendations are being implemented, and reveal barriers to implementation

IWC strategic plan. At IWC66 a strategic plan for the Conservation Committee was agreed. This will be part of a nested approach to strategic planning, consisting of: an outward facing overarching Strategic Plan setting out a clear direction and priorities; thematic strategic plans, articulating more detailed objectives, actions, goals, and timescales; and work programmes, intended to deliver the thematic strategic plans by defining specific deliverables, progress, timings, and resource requirements. As agreed by the Conservation Committee (also at IWC66) it would be useful for Voluntary Conservation reporting to be consistent with the strategic plan.

Timetable and agenda of Conservation Committee meetings. At its last meeting, the Conservation Committee decided to recommend to the Commission an annual Conservation Committee meeting and that, whilst this would have cost and logistical implications, it would allow the Committee additional time to consider in more detail the progress being made intersessionally on key conservation issues.

The Committee might wish to consider whether reporting should be annual or biennial taking into account the timing and regularity of future Conservation Committee meetings and whether more frequent reporting would be too burdensome. A possible alternative is for thematic reports to be requested on specific issues, aligned with those topics anticipated for in-depth review at the Committee's next meeting.

Relationship with Scientific Committee Progress Reports. There are common issues for both Scientific Committee and Conservation Committee reporting processes around participation, need and use. There are some sections of the Voluntary Conservation reports that overlap in context with the SC National Progress Reports and it might be useful to further consider collaboration between the two reporting processes. For example, Voluntary Conservation reports contain information on threats to cetaceans such as ship strikes; and reporting systems used for cetacean injuries and strandings (including references to the ship strikes database). While the Conservation Reports are more descriptive than data based, they may be scope to link these sections to the SC Progress Reports submitted each year, to provide some context around the level of these threats and the number of incidences being reported.

On-line reporting. Since reporting was agreed in 2005, there have been some considerable developments in the IWC and other intergovernmental organisations in on-line reporting and many IGOs now report routinely in this way. The Committee may wish to consider whether this is a suitable means for voluntary conservation reports and how it might link to the development of a

joint CC-SC database of recommendations (as outlined above). In further assessing the benefits of introducing online reporting it would be useful to consider the benefits and any challenges this has presented for the Scientific Committee Progress Reports Portal.

Harmonisation of reporting

It would be useful to consider whether IWC reporting obligations could be streamlined with those required by other Intergovernmental Organisations, for example the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

Next steps:

The Conservation Committee Planning Group is invited to comment on the issues and information raised in this paper including in relation to (1) the overall purpose of reporting and how reports can be used (2) relationship with Scientific Committee Progress Reports (3) development of a revised reporting template (4) the timing of reporting and (5) on-line reporting.

The Conservation Committee Planning Group is invited to identify next steps to develop proposals for the Conservation Committee in 2018.

Annex 1

Template for National Cetacean Conservation Reports

Country:

National Governmental Authority submitting the Report (full contact information)

1. Legal developments (laws, regulations and other regulatory measures related to cetaceans).
2. Information on whalewatching operations (scale, target species/populations and relevant management issues).
3. Current Government programs related to cetacean conservation.
4. Current threats to cetacean conservation and management measures taken/proposed.
5. Reporting systems for cetacean injuries/mortality/strandings.
6. International cooperation activities (includes bilateral or multilateral cooperation, assistance and funding programs and appropriate contact information, and other international activities of the Country submitting the Report).
7. Other (at the discretion of the Authority submitting the Report).