

Eastern South Pacific Southern Right Whale Conservation Management Plan Implementation Strategy 2019-2020

Introduction

With less than 50 mature individuals, eastern South Pacific southern right whale population (*Eubalaena australis*) found off Chile and Peru is one of the most threatened whale populations worldwide.

The eastern South Pacific Southern Right Whales Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was endorsed by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 2012 and in 2016 the governments of Chile and Peru began to successfully work in the Implementation Strategy 2016-2018.

Between 22 and 23 August 2018, the second meeting of the CMP Steering Committee was conducted to review the advances of its priority actions. Important results have been reported, such as the passive acoustic program, the entanglement and stranding training workshop and many other initiatives. Furthermore, a new Implementation Strategy 2019-2020 was agreed and according to IWC Guidelines, additional funding support may be available from IWC for the implementation strategy 2019-2020.

Review of CMP principles and guidelines

According to the new CMP funding guidelines, eligibility for financial support will give priority to participating range states at Group 1 or 2 member states. It also considers that:

- Eligibility for financial support from the Voluntary Conservation Fund is in this CMP case: limited to CMPs generated within the Commission (i.e. by its member states or committees).
- It is primarily for coordination and governance activities. Support for other activities will be considered on a case by case basis.
- Funding to employ a coordinator will be limited to a maximum of four years' total across all phases of the CMP development and implementation process.

Summary of priority actions

In the light of the new information and the progress made on different CMP activities, some key actions were identified during the second coordination meeting that should be address in the short term (2019-2020). Identified priority actions continue to be the same of the implementation strategy 2016-2018 and four additional priority actions previously considered as medium to long term actions, are now considered to be short term under the new implementation strategy.

Therefore, short term priority actions include: conduct coordination meetings among stakeholders (COORD-01); increase survey efforts on possible breeding ground (RES-05); increase effort to collect photo ID and genetic data (RES-02 and RES-03); strengthen capacities on entanglement and stranding response in both countries (PACB-02); increase species identification capacities along the coast of Chile and Peru (PACB-03); provide advice on whale watching regulations for this population (MIT-03); develop strategy to raise citizens' awareness and increase Range States capacities (PACB-01); create a web platform to report sightings (RES-01); prevent entanglements and disentangle whales (MIT-01); adopt alert systems to reduce the risk of collisions (MIT-02) and prevent and fight pollution to the marine environment (MIT-06).

This prioritization doesn't preclude that further work on other priority actions identified are also advanced.

Contributions from Range States and other funding sources in support of all the activities described below are estimated on GBP 213,000.

Coordination meetings among stakeholders (COORD 01)

Guidelines for cetacean CMPs suggest that sufficient funds must be made available for the appointment of a coordinator and the functioning of the Steering Committee.

During the second coordination meeting, it became evident that the successful implementation of the CMP has been possible thanks to the dedicated work of the coordinator, the conduction of regular meetings of the Steering Committee and the wide support received from different organizations for the 2017-2018 period estimated on approximately GBP180,000.

It has been stressed that the implementation of the CMP continues to be at their earlier stages. This point of the implementation process requires strong support from different organizations and commitment from Range States to ensure its long-term continuation and integration to national policies.

Therefore, the highest priority identified for 2019-2020 under the CMP is to continue to conduct annual meetings and contract a part time coordinator for the next two years' period.

Meetings will include representatives of Range States, the CMP coordinator, the Chair of the Scientific Committee or its representative from CMP Sub-Committee, and the Chair of the Conservation Committee or its representative from Standing Working Group on CMPs. They will review, *inter alia*, advances of the CMP and report to IWC Scientific Committee, Conservation Committee and the Commission.

The conduction of coordination meetings in 2019 and 2020 as well as two year of coordinator compensation (40% time) is estimated on GBP 58,800.

Funding from IWC CMP fund is sought exclusively for coordination and meetings of the Steering Committee and is estimated on GBP 46,000. There was some remnant funding from CMP implementation strategy 2016-2018 of about GBP 13,500 and it is expected that these funds could be used to continue the implementation of the CMP during 2019-2020. If this is possible, additional funding needed from IWC CMP fund will be GBP 32,500. Details are given below.

Increase survey effort on possible breeding ground (RES-05)

Another of the highest short-term priorities in the revised CMP is to identify a breeding aggregation area for this population (RES-05). Over the years, most sightings of southern right whales were made on a single day and no breeding area has been identified yet. Until a breeding ground is found, many priority actions can hardly be implemented such as monitoring distribution, abundance and trends.

In 2016 the IWC Scientific Committee decided to support the project "*Acoustic Monitoring of the Eastern South Pacific population of southern right whales, a key to increase the results of the CMP*", with the aim to facilitate the identification of potential breeding areas along the coast of Chile and Peru.

This is the first project to use passive acoustic monitoring for this population in the entire Eastern South Pacific. Two passive acoustics devices will be recording year-round on two different sites. After three to four years, it is expected to cover its entire distribution range. Initial planning phase has been completed and the first hydrophone was successfully deployed off Isla de Chiloe in July 2018. Maintenance is needed every two months.

Currently the passive acoustic monitoring project has received a wide range of support from the IWC Research Fund, the Governments of Chile and Peru, Centro de Conservacion Cetacea, COPAS Sur-Austral from University of Concepcion, Patagonia Environmental Grants from Tides Foundation and Whale and Dolphin Conservation.

During 2019 and 2020, the project will: a) finalize recording of first, second and third location sites; b) start recording at fourth and fifth location sites; c) finalize data analyses of first, second and third location sites and d) start data analyses for fourth and fifth location sites.

In addition, the project considers implementing an educational and capacity building program to create public awareness along the coast off Chile and Peru where the equipment will be deployed. These activities will support the implementation of other priority actions of the CMP related to PACB-01.

Total costs of the project for two years is estimated in GBP 99,500 and most of the funding has already been secured thanks to the support of the IWC Scientific Committee, COPAS Sur- Austral and the Governments of Chile and Peru.

Increase efforts to collect photo ID and genetic data (RES-02 and RES-03) and create a web platform to report sightings (RES-01)

Most of the sightings are just recorded on one day, making it difficult to follow the whales and get photo-identifications and/or biopsy samples. Although efforts have been conducted since 2016 to increase data collection when a sighting is reported, the implementation of these important and key actions have proven to be extremely difficult due to the low population number.

The passive acoustic project will be essential to direct effort where whales aggregate. However, until results are available, the collection of photo-ID and genetic data will continue to be opportunistic.

During the last coordination meeting, it was agreed to develop protocols and permit systems to ensure a rapid response after a sighting is reported. The Steering Committee also agreed to give short-term priority to the development of a Mobile Phone App (RES-01). This action was previously set as medium term priority but due to the delay in receiving sighting reports over the past two years, it was agreed to implement it on 2019-2020. This App will increase real-time reporting of sightings for southern right whales and will also report on stranding and entanglement events.

Finally, the Steering Committee considered developing a training workshop on species photo-identification techniques and biopsy sampling.

Funding for these activities consider field costs (including aerial and/or marine surveys) to take photo-ID and genetic data on, if possible, two sightings per year (usually between three to five sightings are reported each year), as well the development and testing of the App and the training workshop. Total costs for all these actions are estimated on GBP 36,400. The Governments of Chile and Peru will contribute with marine vessels and/or aircraft time.

Strengthen capacities on entanglement and stranding response in both countries (PACB-02)

Unfortunately, from 2014 to 2017, two entangled southern right whales were recorded in Chile and this is considered a very high risk due to its low population number.

Therefore, the Steering Committee identified in 2017 as one of the most critical actions to develop the “*First Bi-National Combined Capacity Building on Cetacean Stranding and Entanglement Response Training under the IWC Conservation Management Plan for Eastern South Pacific Southern Right Whale*”. Thanks to the support of the Government of Peru, the IWC and the Permanent Commission of South Pacific, the workshop will be conducted in November 2018 in Lima, Peru.

Considering that this training will be conducted in 2018, the Steering Committee decided that each country should implement an entanglement and stranding team and conduct annual training workshops at national level. Protocols for rapid response to stranding and entanglement events will be developed. Both Range States will coordinate these actions in order to ensure similar measures are applied on both countries for this population. It was also agreed that the development of the mobile phone App (RES-01) will support the real-time reporting of entanglement and stranding.

No funding is considered in particular for this action for 2019-2020. The development of annual training workshops will be covered directly by the Governments of Chile and Peru.

Increase species identification capacities along the coast of Chile and Peru (PACB-03)

Population range extends thousands of kilometers along Chile and Peru coastline. Therefore sightings are difficult to document. It is extremely important to strengthen public participation in the reporting of sightings.

Thanks to the support of Centro de Conservacion Cetacea, Patagonia Environmental Grants from Tides Foundation and Whale and Dolphin Conservation a poster on the CMP and the species will be designed in 2018. It is expected that at least 3,000 copies will be distributed along the coast of Chile and Peru in 2019-2020 with the support of the Instituto del Mar del Peru, the Direccion General del Territorio Maritimo y de Marina Mercante from the Chilean Navy and the Servicio Nacional de Pesca y Acuicultura de Chile.

Additionally, the Steering Committee agreed to develop a specific chapter on southern right whales to be incorporated in current training courses made to observers from Chile and Peru. It was also considered to distribute material in schools during the Beaches Cleaning Day.

Although, working hours are involved, this action has no direct funding implication for 2019-2020.

Provide advice on whale watching regulations for the species (MIT-03)

Unregulated approaches to mothers and calves may seriously disrupt nursing behavior and could result in negative impacts. These include, among others, displacement of mother-calf pairs and increase of swimming behavior thereby altering the energetic expenditure of the animals. In extreme situations, they may even cause the death of the animals.

The revised CMP identified as a priority action the development and implementation of a contingency plan to afford maximum protection when a sighting is recorded (MIT-03). In Chile, only land-based observation of the species is permitted under national whale watching regulations adopted by the Ministry of Economy in 2012 but there are still some legal aspects that need to be considered in the light of the new information and experiences. In Peru, a working group was established with several governmental institutions to develop whale watching regulations. The Steering Committee considered the CMP an excellent opportunity to standardize measures in both countries to have consistent regulations. Also, the Committee considered that the adoption and enforcement of whale watching regulations in Range States may greatly benefit from the advice of the IWC whale watching working group.

Considering that during 2016-2018, there was no significant advance on this action, the Steering Committee agreed to conduct a workshop on experience exchange about whale watching regulations. It also decided to include in the workshop issues related to permits for scientific research operations on the species since it has been noted that permits to obtain scientific data may delay the implementation of priority actions. The workshop should include participants from governmental institutions of the Range States as well as one representative from the Conservation Committee Whale Watching Working Group and two representatives from other two countries that could share their experience and systems.

The workshop costs are estimated at GBP 12,300 and it was agreed to approach the IWC Whale Watching Working Group to inquire about the possibility to apply for GBP 10,000 from the Voluntary Conservation Fund for projects supporting whale watching.

Develop strategy to raise citizens' awareness and increase Range States capacities (PACB-01)

The Steering Committee considered in 2017 to start the implementation of this short-term action.

A logo and digital banners were developed and during 2019-2020 it was agreed to develop a landing page for the CMP on each governmental institution to be linked to the banners. It was also agreed to continue the outreach of this CMP in the media through news and articles oriented to raise awareness on its importance and it was noted the urgent need to translate the CMP into Spanish.

Social media is a positive tool to educate about the project to a larger audience and will also be used to promote the active involvement of the people in reporting southern right whales sightings.

It was also noted that the Passive Acoustic Monitoring project is also committed to develop educational lectures to children and informative workshops to the community in locations where the project will be implemented.

The Steering Committee also agreed to prepare a letter to distribute to international organizations informing about the CMP and seek possible ways of cooperation.

It was also agreed to develop an educational kit that could include information leaflets, posters, stickers and audiovisual material to distribute to schools, communities, media, etc.

Finally, the Steering Committee agreed to establish the Southern Right Whale National Day in order to increase public awareness and strengthen the permanent commitment of Range States to the conservation of this Critically Endangered population.

The development of the educational kit as well as the translation of the CMP have direct funding implications estimated on GBP 6,000.

Prevent entanglements and disentangle whales (MIT-01) and adopt alert systems to reduce the risk of collisions (MIT-02)

The Steering Committee agreed to include these actions under the 2019-2020 implementation strategy.

In this sense, presentations to the Fishing Management Committees in Chile could be explored in order to start discussing possible mitigation measures. Also, it was proposed to include more in-depth aspects to prevent entanglements on the disentanglement training workshops that will be conducted annually on each country.

It was also agreed to include these threats on the letters to international organizations and to include reporting of these events and the advances made in the CMP reports.

Prevent and fight pollution to marine environment (MIT-06)

The Steering Committee agreed to include these actions under the 2019-2020 implementation strategy.

It was noted that this action was a permanent task for each country and therefore the Governments are in a position to report on this matter too. It was also agreed to report on marine debris, as suggested by the IWC Standing Working Group on CMPs.

Deliverables and Reporting

It is the responsibility of the appointed coordinator and Steering Committee to provide annual progress reports to the IWC about the work undertaken under the CMP, specifically to its Scientific and Conservation Committees. A major review of the work and amendments of the CMP are planned for 2020.

Each coordination meeting will provide a report of the meeting with its outcomes, review process and modification of strategy if applicable. The report will be submitted to the IWC Scientific Committee as well as to the IWC Conservation Committee and to the Commission.

Scientific papers of the passive acoustic monitoring project will be submitted to the Scientific Committee in 2019 and 2020, in accordance to the IWC Scientific Committee procedures.

Media releases and use of social networks are also considered to promote the implementation of the passive acoustics project, training workshops and any opportunistic sighting. It will also help to amplify public awareness on the critical conservation status of this population and the importance of the proper implementation of the CMP.

Budget

The current budget includes only the activities with a direct budget identified that will need to be raised. Other activities conducted, although they require working hours of personnel and/or costs that are assumed directly by Range States are not included. The Coordinator of the CMP will be in charge of raising the necessary funds and submit the applications to the different groups involved.

	2019	2020	TOTAL	IWC CMP Fund	IWC Research Fund	IWC Voluntary Conservation Fund - WW	Range States	Other funding sources
Coordination meetings (two meetings of two days. IWC funds to cover travel and lodging for six to seven people and per diem. Room rental, office material and coffee breaks by Range States and others)	13,400	13,400	26,800	14,000	0	0	8,300	4,500
Compensation for coordinator (one year. 40% time)	16,000	16,000	32,000	32,000	0	0		-
Passive Acoustic Monitoring Project	48,200	51,300	99,500	0	30,500	0	60,000	9,000
Increase effort to collect photo ID and genetic data	10,500	10,500	21,000	0	0	-	12,000	9,000
Development and testing of Mobile Phone App	4,200	4,200	8,400	0	0	-	-	8,400
Training workshop on photo-identification techniques and biopsy sampling		7,000	7,000	0	0	-	2,000	5,000
Workshop on experience exchange on whale watching regulations and scientific permits for the species	12,300	-	12,300	0	0	10,000	2,300	-
Educational Kit	-	5,000	5,000	0	0		2,000	3,000
Translation of CMP	1,000	-	1,000	0	0		1,000	
TOTAL	105,600	107,400	213,000	46,000*	30,500**	10,000	87,600	38,900

*Remaining budget from Implementation Strategy 2016-2018 is estimated about GBP 13,500 and is proposed to be used on the 2019-2020 period.

** IWC Scientific Committee already agreed to support the continuation of the Passive Acoustic Monitoring Project.

Proposed Timeline

	2019												2020											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Coordination meetings																								
Passive Acoustic Monitoring Project																								
Increase effort to collect photo-ID and genetic data																								
Development and testing of Mobile Phone App																								
Training workshop on photo-identification techniques and biopsy sampling																								
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