

Outreach and Advocacy – An opportunity to enhance the conservation and management impact of International Whaling Committee advice?

Submitted by the Vice Chair of the Conservation Committee

1. Issue

- 1.1 The IWC, through its Conservation and Scientific Committees, provides a significant and important body of advice. However, the biennial meeting cycle has created challenges for the Commission in reacting to particularly urgent or emerging issues, making it difficult to take swift and decisive action.
- 1.2 It is also clear from a number of high profile cases, such as the vaquita, that the advice of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies is not always acted upon.
- 1.3 There are steps that the IWC could take (and is already taking) to improve its reach and impact by way of effective communication and dissemination of its advice. However, when situations become urgent, or indeed when our experience tells us that we need to act early to prevent the situation from escalating, a more tailored and focussed strategy of outreach and advocacy, coupled with clear intersessional governance processes, may be an effective means of influencing outcomes.
- 1.4 This paper provides an initial consideration of this issue, with the aim of stimulating further discussion and debate on whether a new intersessional process and outreach and advocacy role should be considered for the IWC.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Conservation Committee is invited to discuss and advise on the initial considerations contained within this paper. In particular to:
 - a. Advise whether there is merit in enhancing the advocacy and outreach role of the IWC on conservation matters, such as through the establishment of Ambassador type roles and/or facilitation of diplomatic missions.
 - b. Propose the Commission develops an intersessional process to allow for subsidiary bodies to transmit urgent concerns and proposals for external action during the intersessional period.
 - c. Recommend what, if any, the next steps should be e.g. should anything be trialled intersessionally post IWC67? Should this be included as part of the governance review process? Does this require a separate, more substantial proposal and discussion at IWC68?
 - d. Advise what governance and oversight arrangements would be appropriate if greater advocacy and outreach efforts are considered appropriate e.g. what would be the role of the Bureau, Conservation/Scientific Committee, Commission?
 - e. Advise on the need for a more detailed Communication Strategy in support of delivering the Conservation Committees Strategic Plan, incorporating aspects of advocacy and outreach.
 - f. Recommend that the Secretariat be tasked with developing a trial handling plan for an issue requiring a greater level of tailored and urgent action, working closely with the Conservation Committee Chair to identify an appropriate test case(s) and to draft

guidance that includes criteria for deciding when an issue warrants such an approach and how prioritisation across different issues should be handled.

3. Discussion

- 3.1. Outreach. Advocacy. Diplomacy. Influence. All important aspects of securing positive change and favourable conservation outcomes for cetaceans. But what role should, or could, the IWC play in this? Should the IWC take a more proactive role in influencing decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions? And if so, how can it do this without compromising its status and being viewed as a lobbying and campaigning organisation? What more can the IWC do to broaden awareness and enhance the impact of its external messaging?
- 3.2. There is increasing focus within the IWC on how to improve the external effectiveness of its conservation advice and how to best respond to emerging and urgent conservation issues. This has been brought into sharper focus with the loss of the baiji and the continued decline towards extinction of the vaquita, despite regular concerns being raised by the IWC. The move to biennial meetings of the Commission has also introduced challenges in how swiftly the organisation can react.
- 3.3. Work is underway within the joint Conservation/Scientific Committee Working Group to assess the effectiveness of the IWC's conservation advice through the development of a Recommendations database and review process. It is expected that this will reveal a number of areas where barriers have prevented effective implementation of IWC advice.
- 3.4. There are many communication and dissemination tools that can be used to improve the effectiveness and reach of IWC conservation advice, such as through the website, workshops, newsletters, and social media. These are integral components of the IWC's communication strategy and should be considered the primary means of relaying conservation advice.
- 3.5. However, targeting decision makers and leaders sometimes requires a different approach compared to other audiences such as the general public. Furthermore, there will be times when typical communication and dissemination strategies have proved ineffective or the problem has become extremely urgent. It is then that other novel approaches or more tailored and coordinated programmes of advocacy and outreach could help deliver change and enhance the IWC's global influence.

4. Possible options for enhanced advocacy and outreach by the IWC.

- 4.1. Advocacy is defined as - *an activity by an individual or group which aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions*'. Outreach is defined as *'an effort to bring services or information to people where they live or spend time'*.
- 4.2. There are many conceivable ways for the IWC to engage in advocacy and outreach. This could range from a more passive approach, relying on the Secretariat and Parties to play an ambassadorial role by promoting the work of the IWC in other forums, through to tailored programmes intended to effect change both on the ground and at the highest political levels.
- 4.3. And the IWC is already doing this in some areas. For example, through the disentanglement programme which clearly fulfils an important advocacy and outreach role, even if this was not its originally intended purpose. And also the Small Cetacean Task Team Initiative which has demonstrated the possibility of delivering swift action (including

between Commission meetings) in addressing an urgent conservation concern for the Franciscana. This approach is now being expanded to the South Asian River Dolphins.

- 4.4. But **there is much more that the IWC could do to adopt a greater advocacy and outreach role in its working practices** and much that can be learnt in this regard from other international bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and CITES.
- 4.5. Since 1953 the UN has had in place a 'Goodwill Ambassador' programme, resulting in hundreds of high profile individuals being appointed to raise the profile of its work across a wide range of topics. These have included ambassadors for climate change, biodiversity, and gender equality. Goodwill ambassadors make widely publicized visits to the world's most troubled locales, and make appeals on behalf of their people.
- 4.6. The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) has also established a successful ambassador programme with clearly defined selection criteria and terms of reference which could be helpfully drawn upon¹.
- 4.7. The UN system also allows for the creation of 'Special Envoys'. In 2017 the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres appointed a Special Envoy for the Ocean. This post is responsible for leading the UN's advocacy and public outreach efforts inside and outside of the UN system, and working with civil society, the scientific community, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders, to coalesce and encourage their activities in support of the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.
- 4.8. The use of diplomatic or foreign missions is also something adopted by other IGO's including the UN and CITES. These involve a delegation of representatives from interested countries, international inter-governmental organisations, and civil society organisations visiting a state to represent an agreed view officially. Their focus can vary from applying high-level diplomatic pressure through to technical delegations intended to deliver practical support on the ground (or anything in between).
- 4.9. Such an approach was proposed during the 2017 Scientific Committee with regards vaquita. However, organising such a mission is complex and political and concerns that it fell outside the remit of the Scientific Committee to agree and organise meant it was not possible to progress without greater involvement and oversight from the Commission.
- 4.10. The use of either Ambassador type roles or diplomatic missions has the potential to significantly enhance the reach, impact, and reputation of the IWC. However, they are not without risk. Care would be needed to avoid the IWC becoming viewed as a lobbying or campaigning organisation and in order to protect its reputation for providing independent advice and recommendations based on sound scientific evidence and the judgment of scientists and decision makers. Such efforts are also not without potential budget implications.
- 4.11. **Should greater advocacy and outreach efforts be considered beneficial to the IWC, and in particular in progressing the conservation agenda, further advice is needed from the Conservation Committee to the Commission on how this should be taken forward** e.g. could something be trialled intersessionally immediately after IWC67? Should this be considered as part of the governance review process? Would a separate, more detailed proposal and discussion at IWC68 be more appropriate (or a combination of all three)?

¹ <https://www.cms.int/en/page/what-cms-ambassador>

5. The wider context

- 5.1. The use of advocacy and outreach to deliver positive change should not be viewed in isolation, but as part of the tool box for delivering an effective communications strategy that ensures the right messages reach the right audiences in the right way.
- 5.2. With this in mind, it may be beneficial for **the Conservation Committee to consider carefully the need for a more tailored Communication Strategy to support delivery of its Strategic Plan, including elements of advocacy and outreach.** Such a document could set out the overarching principles, aims, and techniques for ensuring effective communication of the work and advice of the Conservation Committee. This would also provide valuable guidance and steer to the Secretariat in its outreach efforts, alongside providing a clear framework for deciding when a specific issue of concern triggers a more bespoke and targeted approach and how it would be escalated. Some work has already been undertaken by the Secretariat to develop a strategy for improving its communications capability and so such an approach would align well with these efforts².
- 5.3. **Where issues are identified that require a greater, more urgent, or more focussed level of communication and outreach, specific handling plans could be developed to sit underneath the Communications Strategy by the Secretariat in conjunction with key interested Parties.** These would capture specific activities such as the targeted development and dissemination of material and information, the organisation of events and meetings, the joining up of efforts such as letters to Ministers and press releases, and in supporting any specific advocacy role/activities.
- 5.4. The development of a handling plan specifically tailored to a particular issue would also help ensure more responsive, coherent, and effective communications. For example, it could help provide a clearer link to more pressing social and economic issues, such as the importance of species for livelihoods and poverty alleviation, something that is not always clearly understood (reflected by the fact that the media often treat endangered species as purely a conservation issue).
- 5.5. A specific handling plan would provide a more detailed consideration of how to target communications and outreach efforts for maximum impact, including by clarifying the actions to be taken through:
 - a. The IWC website in conjunction with other IGO's and observer organisations (such as issue-specific pages).
 - b. Secretariat outreach to Parties through notifications raising awareness of IWC advice and Recommendations and calling for Parties to act.
 - c. Secretariat outreach to secretariats of other international agreements to seek opportunities for greater collaboration on the dissemination of messages, such as the arrangement of side events during meetings.
 - d. Stakeholder mapping to help identify and connect with important stakeholders.
 - e. Identification of an Ambassador/envoy and/or establishment of diplomatic missions (or initiation of a process to do so) and role specification, expectations, actions etc..
 - f. The identification of primary Contracting Governments that are prepared to adopt an ocean diplomacy role, delivering key messages and highlighting political opportunities for influence and advocacy.

² IWC/65/F&A05 and IWC/66/F&A05

- g. In country outreach workshops to help identify possible practical solutions/barriers and empower focal points and “Ambassadors” of the IWC message.
 - h. The development of tool-kits containing all the information on the problem, such as the scientific advice, action underway, what more is needed, support options, presentations, images and fact sheets for the press.
 - i. The development of effective and clear messages and inclusion of review points for language to ensure messaging remains tailored for the intended audience - balancing the need for fact-based intellectual appeal with establishing an emotional and aesthetic connection (important for ambassador and diplomatic missions).
 - j. The greater use of international and national press, such as social media (twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc.).
 - k. The translation of key advice/Resolutions/Recommendations into other languages.
 - l. The creation of partnerships with other organisations, civil society, industry, in order to deliver joined up messaging and utilise the strengths of different actors.
 - m. The funding of policy analysis and research to support practical action.
 - n. The monitoring and evaluation of communication and outreach efforts to determine successes and barriers in order to shape lessons learnt and ongoing improvements in techniques.
- 5.6. With this in mind, **the Secretariat should be tasked with developing a trial handling plan and guidance for their drafting and delivery, including outlining criteria for deciding when an issue warrants such an approach and how prioritisation across different issues should be handled.**

6. Governance

- 6.1. All of the above would require the development of a clear governance structure. The need to act swiftly to tackle emerging concerns or issues can be significantly hindered by the need to wait for a biennial Commission meeting so a clear intersessional process for urgent cases allowing the Commission appropriate oversight of any proposed external action is essential.
- 6.2. Such a process would facilitate the transmission of urgent advice and recommendations to the Commission (or an appropriate body tasked with an oversight role) during the intersessional period. Clear procedures, guidance, and expectations would help to mitigate some of the risks associated with acting externally, with the Bureau potentially providing a governance role. Alternatively substantive proposals for external action could be sent to the Commission or Sub-Committee as appropriate to ensure oversight and approval. The development of issue specific handling plans (as outlined above) may also help support this by ensuring clear and tailored messages and a coordinated and transparent approach for their delivery.
- 6.3. **A clearly defined intersessional process for transmitting urgent advice and proposals for external action should be developed by the Commission**