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Whale Watching Strategic Plan (2018-2024)

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INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

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Introduction

Whale watching is a globally recognised use of cetacean resources and since 1955 has been an activity of growing economic importance. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) has considered the issue since 1975.

Over that time, the Commission has provided an increasing focus for the sector, considering at various meetings the scientific, legal, socioeconomic or educational aspects of whale watching. The IWC adopted its first resolution on whale watching (Rep. int. Whal. Commn 44:33-4) in 1993 at IWC45, and the following year, at IWC46, a further resolution (Rep. int. Whal. Commn 45:49-50) requested advice from the Scientific Committee on whale watching (the development of guidelines), and established, through a review of all aspects relating to the sector, what has in practice now become an ongoing programme of work. A standing Whale Watching Sub-Committee was set up under the Scientific Committee (Rep. int. Whal. Commn 50) in 1998 and while it has since addressed a range of matters concerning the sector, its work has had a strong focus on better identifying and assessing, and increasing understanding of, the potential impacts of whale watching on cetaceans.

The Issue

In response to the recent rapid growth of the sector, its anticipated future expansion and the recognised need to promote best practice management to realise associated environmental, social and economic benefits, the Commission further addressed whale watching in 2008 (IWC60).

Considering that a responsible (i.e. environmentally, economically and socially sustainable) industry required the integration of good science and information, appropriate management regimes and good governance, the Conservation Committee established an Intersessional Correspondence Group to consider the issue further and identify future directions (IWC/60/Rep 5). The Working Group on Whale watching was subsequently established to take forward the recommendations from the report of that Intersessional Correspondence Group (IWC/61/CC9). This report recognised the opportunity presented to build on the momentum that had been generated in relation to whale watching. It noted the importance of whale watching as a valuable economic opportunity that, whilst still in the early stages of development in many countries, required cooperation and information sharing to encourage responsible development, consistent with international best practice.

It was agreed that responsible development of the whale-watching sector would benefit from a strategic approach, commencing with a five-year strategic plan. A Draft Strategic Plan 2010-2015 was prepared by the Working Group on Whale watching (IWC/62/CC8) and recommended that a workshop be held to undertake an assessment of what tools and information communities needed, and the most effective way to deliver this support, through engagement with scientific,

Comment [RW1]: From 2011-2016 plan. Will need to be updated with most recent and relevant information.

Comment [RW2]: From 2011-2016 plan. Will need to be updated with most recent and relevant information.

management and conservation experts, industry, governments and interested communities. A Whale Watching Workshop was held in Puerto Madryn, Patagonia, Argentina in November 2010. Thirteen countries attended the Workshop and its conclusions (Report of the IWC workshop on Whale watching – refer Circular Communication IWC . ALL .163) provide the basis for the further development of the five-year strategic plan. Three key elements were identified: research and assessment; management; and capacity building and development. The Workshop considered that these elements would assist countries in building responsible whale watching industries.

The Workshop recommended that the Working Group consider, as one of the primary methods for achieving the objectives of the Strategic Plan, the development of a web-based Handbook would provide advice on governance, capacity building, monitoring, compliance, business, community and education/training/ communication. The Workshop also stressed the importance of coordinating the whale watching work of the Conservation and Scientific Committees. The Workshop Report is available on the IWC website.

Legal and International Framework

Comment [RW3]: Keep from 2011-2016 plan.

Article V(1)(a) of the International Convention on the Regulation of Whaling provides that the Commission may adopt measures with respect to the conservation of whale resources.

While the IWC has an important advisory role in facilitating the development of responsible whale watching, management responsibility for adoption and use of any tools or products under the Strategic Plan lies with national governments or their subsidiaries .

Local issues require local solutions – there are many different types of whale watching, and there is no universal prescription of what comprises best practice, or as yet a scientific basis to define it unequivocally. The Strategic Plan is intended to provide direction to the efforts of the IWC and its adoption does not change the responsibilities of Contracting Parties.

Involvement in the actions of the Strategic Plan is on a voluntary basis and is intended to complement other national or international legislation, frameworks or plans that support the conservation and responsible non-lethal use of cetaceans.

Scope and Structure

Comment [RW4]: Keep from 2011-2016 plan?

The Strategic Plan sets out objectives and actions designed to facilitate development of the sector by Contracting Parties in a manner that is responsible and consistent with international best practice. Success will be measured by considering both outputs - the timely development and delivery of products and tools under the Strategic Plan; and outcomes - uptake and adoption of best practice by Contracting Parties. The Strategic Plan will be subject to iterative review and ongoing adjustment in line with the principles of adaptive management.

Vision

Comment [RW5]: Keep from 2011-2016 plan?

Whale watching in harmony with healthy whale populations – communities, regions and countries realising the benefits of responsible whale watching.

In seeking to promote best practice management of whale watching the principle outcome should be to further the effective long-term conservation of cetacean populations. As such, the whale watching industry and national governments (or their subsidiaries) have clear responsibilities, as resource users, to both conduct and manage whale watching in ways that do not compromise the fitness of individual cetaceans, their populations or their habitats.

Objectives

Comment [RW6]: New revised section

In order to achieve this vision, an adaptive management framework is critical. Three objectives have been identified as the key components of such a framework. The newly developed digital Whale Watching Handbook (Handbook), the Subcommittee on Whale Watching, and the Standing Working Group on Whale Watching will be important mechanisms through which these objectives can be achieved.

The Strategic Plan identifies a suite of short-, medium-, and long-term actions associated with each objective. Short-term actions are taken to be those which can be delivered within two years of the adoption of the Strategic Plan, with medium-term actions delivered over five years.

Two long-term actions are identified in this iteration of the Strategic Plan:

- (1) Continued development of the digital Handbook, and
- (2) Development of an integrated research plan.

Communities and regions will have culturally, socially and economically-specific requirements for the development and/or expansion of whale watching industries. Research is likely to increasingly identify both species- and population-specific mitigation measures. As such, all identified actions should be read as requiring the accommodation of this diversity in any outcomes or products they generate.

Additionally, within two years of commencing work on the actions outlined below, this Working Group aims to undertake a comprehensive review of outputs to allow activities to be refocused, if required.

Objective 1 - Information Sharing

Identify methods to facilitate cooperation and information/expertise-sharing between Contracting Parties and others to support the development of a responsible whale-watching sector, including the provision of benefits to local communities. The newly developed digital Whale Watching Handbook (Handbook), the Subcommittee on Whale Watching, and the Standing Working Group on Whale Watching will be important mechanisms through which information sharing can be achieved.

Action 1.1 – Use the Standing Working Group on Whale Watching and the Subcommittee on Whale Watching to continue to improve industry and public access to data, information and research results.

Action 1.2 - Identify and facilitate opportunities for the transfer (or development where a gap has been identified) of best possible practice approaches to meet identified capacity building needs.

Action 1.3 - In conjunction with relevant international bodies, facilitate access to guidance for Contracting Parties and others on creating enabling environments for whale watching operations to market and run their businesses responsibly.

Action 1.4 - Continue to develop training and education tools for industry practitioners so that they can:

- Understand and improve cetacean and visitor safety;
- Improve whale watching practices; and
- Enhance visitor understanding and experiences.

Objective 2 - Research and Data Collection

Continue to develop the necessary principles and tools to assist in ensuring that whale watching does not significantly adversely impact on the behaviours and fitness of individual cetaceans or populations, or on their habitats.

Action 2.1 - Develop an integrated research program (a form of long term experiment) to better understand the potential impacts of whale watching on the demographic parameters of cetacean populations. Seek to:

- Demonstrate a causal relationship between whale watching exposure and the survival and vital rates of exposed cetacean individuals;
- Understand the mechanisms involved in causal effects, if they exist, in order to define a framework for improved management; and
- Establish standard methodologies for the conduct of assessments.

Action 2.2 - Collate, review and update ‘operator’ data collection systems and associated templates to ensure they are scientifically useful and data can be used in future research/ analytical studies.

[Actions 2.x]

Objective 3 - Capacity Building and International Collaboration

Support the development of a responsible whale watching sector and the provision of benefits to local communities.

Comment [RW7]: Request that the WW Subcommittee provide their input, based on priority research and data collection needs.

Comment [RW8]: Request that the WW Subcommittee provide their input, based on priority research and resources available.

Action 3.1 - Identify, on a regional basis, specific capacity building and development needs. In particular, those (or including those) providing long-term benefits for the livelihood of local communities.

Action 3.2 - Identify and list funding and development organisations able to offer assistance relevant to the establishment and maintenance of whale watching operations at varying scales.

Action 3.3 - In conjunction with relevant international bodies, continue to develop guidance and training tools that address occupational health and safety aspects of whale watching operations.

Action 3.4 - Develop advice on cost-effective monitoring and compliance regimes and alternative strategies to promote environmentally responsible whale watching.

Action 3.5 - Identify key partners and priority organizations who might contribute to the vision and objectives/goals

Implementation

Comment [RW9]: Request a dialogue between the Secretariat, the WW Subcommittee, and the SWG on WW to be very detailed in identifying:
Resources,
Lead personnel,
Supporting personnel, and
Specific timelines for the above actions and/or objectives.