

SC/67B/WW/09

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Update on the Modelling and Assessment  
of Whalewatching Impacts (MAWI)  
Steering Group

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INTERNATIONAL  
WHALING COMMISSION

# **Update on the Modelling and Assessment of Whale Watching Impacts (MAWI) Steering Group**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The objective of the intersessional working group on the modelling and assessment of whale watching impacts (MAWI) is to define the specific research questions and hypotheses that will most benefit our understanding of the impact of whale watching, identify those locations that would be most suitable and amenable for targeted studies addressing these questions and assess the current modelling tools available to analyse the data collected as part of relevant field studies. MAWI was formed in 2013 and has made some progress from that point, summarising currently available modelling tools and holding a symposium and focus group at the International Marine Conservation Congress (IMCC) in 2014, the results of which presented to the whale watching subcommittee in 2015. In 2016, the steering group applied to the IWC for funding to hold a workshop on the key research questions for assessing the impacts of whale watching. The IWC funded the proposed workshop, although the original timetable for activities and outputs had to be pushed back to spring 2018.

## **DEVELOPMENTS**

In April 2018 a working on identifying the key research questions for the modelling and assessment of whale watching impacts was held in La Spezia, Italy in conjunction with the 32<sup>nd</sup> European Cetacean Society meeting. The goal of the workshop was to bring together researchers, policy makers, industry and other stakeholders to achieve the following outcomes:

- Identify the potential impacts of whalewatching that are of greatest concern globally
- Define the key research questions required to understand the potential impacts of whalewatching
- Determine which data currently being collected can be used to answer the defined research questions, and which data would be useful to collect for this objective.
- Identify whether, and where, there is the current capacity to actively address the defined research questions and which areas of particular operational concern

- Foster collaboration between researchers, policy makers, industry and other stakeholders
- Communicate the results of the workshop beyond the scientific community to foster understanding and gain support for the proposed scientific research

At IWC 67a, the MAWI intersessional committee, with the help of the whale watching sub-committee, had identified 15 potential invitees for the workshop. These individuals, along with others identified in the interim, were invited to attend the workshop in January 2018. This resulted in the following list of attendees (in alphabetical order):

Lars Bejder, Mariano Coscarella, Jens Currie, Michael Lück, Sara Mesiti, Leslie New (Chair), Enrico Pirotta, Marianne Rasmussen, Naomi Rose (rapporteur), Carol Scarpaci, Valeria Senigaglia, Karen Stockin, Kelly Waples

In addition, a member of the MAWI intersessional group, A. Mel Cosentino, attended in the role of observer.

The results of the workshop have been compiled into a full report, which has been submitted to the IWC and is available to be discussed in more detail. However, key recommendations included: 1) the use of a holistic approach incorporating both social and natural sciences and taking into account socio-political and socioeconomic factors, to better understand whale watching impacts, 2) the development of a Strategic Framework or Decision Tree, which would be a series of linked decisions to aid users in the prioritisation of research and policy choices, 3) the development of toolkits and resources, so global stakeholders can ideally be directed to a single location (a 'repository'), where these resources can be accessed, and 4) the standardization of data collection.

In addition, while the workshop achieved the majority of its goals and objectives, some topics, such as the type of data needed to address the identified research questions, were not covered in depth. As a result, the participants did recommend a third workshop to be more specifically focused on identification of specific research locations and the needed links between modelling, study design and data collection. There was general consensus that this workshop would need a different cross-section of individuals, depending more heavily on researchers, whereas a goal of the current workshop was to foster collaboration between researchers, policy makers, industry and other stakeholders.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

The intersessional working group would welcome the advice and suggestions of the sub-committee regarding the implementations of the recommendations from the workshop, particularly regarding those areas where the IWC could potentially play an active role, such as in the hosting of a repository of information or the organizing

of a third workshop. In addition, in previous sub-committee meetings, the Arabian Sea was identified as an area of particular concern, and the lack of representation from Africa was highlighted as a significant omission in the MAWI initiative. The intersession group would welcome any further insights the sub-committee may have, especially as to how the results of the current workshop could be used to address these issues.