

Urgent issues and actions:

A brief report from the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Conservation and Scientific Committees

to the Special Meeting of the Commission- September 2021

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The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the IWC Conservation (CC) and Scientific Committees (SC) respectfully request the attention of the Commission on a small number of issues where action is required before the next in-person Commission meeting at the end of 2022.

All around the world, species, subspecies and populations of cetaceans face significant threats. The situation for several is urgent as they may become extinct in the near future without appropriate action. At this time, the IUCN lists 4 cetacean species as 'Critically Endangered', 11 as 'Endangered', 7 as 'Vulnerable' and 10 as 'Near Threatened'. While primarily concerned with assessments of species, the IUCN has also listed 18 subspecies or subpopulations as 'Critically Endangered', 11 as 'Endangered', 9 as 'Vulnerable' and 10 as 'Near Threatened' (Annex 1). Examples of some species/populations most at risk include: Rice's whale, vaquita, North Atlantic right whale and, the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise

The 21st century poses many anthropogenic threats to cetaceans including – in no particular order - climate change, ship strikes, underwater noise, chemical pollution, bycatch and habitat degradation and loss. The Commission has supported research and mitigation programmes on each of these threats. The CC and the SC thank the Commission for this support and offer assurance that, despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, both Committees have maintained focus and momentum on the most urgent cetacean conservation work.

This work includes Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) for the western North Pacific gray whale, the western South Atlantic southern right whale, the eastern South Pacific southern right whale and the franciscana (the first CMP for a small cetacean species). Two more CMPs have been recommended by the SC: river dolphins from the Amazon, Orinoco and Tocantins-Araguaia (proponents Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru) and the Central America Humpback Whale Population (proponents Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and the United States of America). The former has been endorsed by both Committees and the latter is being reviewed by the Standing Working Group on Conservation Management Plans of the CC. Both CMPs will need the endorsement of the Commission.

Other active and urgent engagement includes the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative which is making significant progress on pilot projects, capacity building and other issues related to cetacean incidental mortality in fishing gear. A workshop on the effects of climate change on cetaceans is planned for October 2021 and workshops addressing anthropogenic underwater noise, reviewing the status of selected species/populations, and assessing progress of CMP actions are in preparation. In addition, the IWC Small Cetacean Task Teams are actively engaged in research and mitigation, annual reports of the State of Cetacean Environment Report (SOCER) have been produced, and the Whale Watching Handbook has been updated. Details of these and all recent activities are included in the reports of the two Committees.

The CC and the SC wish to take the opportunity of your Special Meeting to provide this brief update and call on the continued support of IWC members. The global pandemic has created unprecedented

circumstances including a four-year period between in-person Commission meetings. The Committees have worked together to overcome or work around the difficulties the pandemic presents. We have created a short list of work where progress will now be delayed without intersessional endorsement from the Commission.

We would appreciate the opportunity to provide this update to the virtual Special Meeting of the Commission, and we would be very grateful for your endorsement of the initiatives listed below, which are judged by both the CC and the SC to be priorities.

- 1) Conservation Management Plan proposals for:
 - o river dolphins from the Amazon, Orinoco and Tocantins-Araguaia, and
 - o the Central America Humpback Whale Population;
- 2) ToR for the joint CC/SC working group
- 3) Adoption of the workplans for the SC and CC.

Annex 1.

The categories of cetacean species, subspecies and subpopulations assessed for the IUCN Red List in the 2021-1 edition of the Red List.

(Source: IUCN list – as last updated March 2021 <https://iucn-csg.org/>)

Category	Species	Subspecies	Subpopulations	Total
Critically Endangered	4	4	14	22
Endangered	11	4	7	22
Vulnerable	7	4	5	16
Near Threatened	10	0	0	10
Least Concern	49	0	0	49
Data Deficient	9	0	2	11
Total	90	12	28	130