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Sub-committees/working group name:

Report of the Status of Stocks Initiative Steering Group for the 2022-2023 Intersessional Period

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Report of the Status of Stocks Initiative Steering Group for the 2022-2023 Intersessional Period

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The Status of Stocks Initiative (SOSI) Steering Group was established to oversee the SOSI project, ensuring consistency and communication among the relevant Intersessional Correspondence Groups (ICGs). Additional terms of reference include: (i) determining the priority order in which species will be considered for SOSI, (ii) receiving and reviewing draft material from other ICGs, soliciting external review if necessary, and seeking SC approval of final material, and (iii) organizing creation of the SOSI website. The SOSI Steering Group currently comprises: Givens (convenor), Staniland (co-convenor), Fortuna, New, Punt, Tandy, Wilson, Zerbini.

Here we report on intersessional progress of the Steering Group and other relevant ICGs. Some tentative examples for the draft SOSI webpages can be found at https://iwc.int/html_731 and the links at the bottom of that page. Specifically, replace “731” with the following to directly access other pages: “712” for the summary table of status ‘thermometer’ plots; “713” and “714” for two options showing detailed status results; and “717” for a background methodology document. Full discussion of draft content and webpages is provided by SC/69A/ASI/06.

It is the goal of the Steering Group to publish the first SOSI web pages ‘live’ for the public shortly after SC69B. To achieve that, all difficult decisions about design, modeling, and content will need to be agreed now at SC69A, with final approval of additional verbiage and minor issues settled next year.

SOSI Steering Group:

The Steering Group received broad and diverse input on SOSI priority stocks, including from an ad hoc meeting of experts at a Copenhagen IST meeting, the IWC/IUCN coordination group, members of other SOSI ICGs and other SC members. Consideration was given to: diversity of cases, presence (or absence) of sophisticated SC assessment models, presence (or absence) of high quality data for the stock, urgency of conservation concerns, relevance for AWMP or RMP, and other factors. The Steering Group prioritized three types of populations: small critically endangered stocks that don’t require complex assessment, stocks that have undergone RMP/AWMP assessment that require simple updating, and more complex situations where different modelling approaches have been used. It was felt that these would provide a range of challenges to the groups that are tasked with conducting and summarizing SC assessments and developing the SOSI webpages.

The following list of priority cases was therefore established (with dates indicating when SOSI work was initiated): **eastern North Pacific gray whales** (underway since 2019), **North Atlantic minke whales** (underway since 2019), **Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas bowhead whales** (underway since 2021), **western North Pacific Bryde’s whales** (new), **vaquitas** (new), **eastern North Pacific right whales** (new), **Okhotsk Sea bowhead whales** (new), and **Southern Hemisphere humpback whales** (new). Two additional priority cases will be added if sufficient past SC work on them can be identified: western North Pacific right whales and eastern North Atlantic right whales.

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SOSI Model-based Assessment Group:

This ICG is tasked with specifying, conducting, and generating summary results for model-based SC assessments for SOSI populations. This year, the Content ICG (below) was finalizing many reporting specifications, so it was not yet necessary to ask the Model Assessment ICG to do much computing. However, Punt undertook a revision to the eastern North Pacific Gray whale modeling software, which will be used to compute the final SOSI results for that population. The revisions account for the latest information on population counts of gray whales, including for the PCFG, and unexplained mortality events. See SC/69A/IST/01.

Also, Butterworth researched the status of SC assessment modeling for Southern Hemisphere humpback whales, as the associated software is older and may involve some complexities since there are several different stocks analysed, some individually modeled and others interacting in multi-stock models. Stock substructure also presented challenges for assessment modeling. Much of this is explained in SC/69A/ForInfo/16, which Butterworth will review for ASI at this meeting. Significant software for this project was developed by Holloway, Ross-Gillespie, and Jackson, for various stocks, and it may not be possible to compile or execute some software in an up-to-date computing environment.

SOSI Group on Language, Terminology, and Content Development:

This group, led by Cipriano, was very active intersessionally. The Content ICG is charged with finalizing choices for terminology, labels, summary statistics, and similar aspects of how SOSI assessment results are presented. The group also is tasked with developing the draft website content, and implementing this in test web pages. The recommendations of the Content ICG are given in SC/69A/ASI/06. That document explains much of the reasoning behind the draft design for SOSI webpages, which are available at the links listed above.

IWC/IUCN Coordination Group:

Although this ICG was established by the SC for general purposes, it is highly relevant to ASI as the SOSI project is developed, to ensure that SOSI and the IUCN Red List are distinct, yet consistent and complementary. The Content ICG consulted with the IWC/IUCN ICG during the year to develop language about IUCN and IWC assessments. See SC/69A/ASI/06.

Extinction Initiative

Reports produced by the SC's Extinction Initiative may provide useful draft material for SOSI regarding highly endangered stocks, especially when data are scarce and/or there is no other formal SC stock assessment. The Content ICG and the Steering Group have begun considering this question in consultation with leaders of the Extinction Initiative.