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Update from the IWC Strandings Initiative

Iwc Secretariat, Chair Of Strandings Expert Panel, Chair Of Strandings Steering Group



**INTERNATIONAL
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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a progress update to the Scientific Committee (SC) from the IWC Strandings Initiative (SI) from May 2022 - April 2023 and details of planned upcoming works.

INTRODUCTION

A paper outlining progress between May 2021-April 2022 was submitted to the Scientific Committee ([SC/68D/E/13](#)) by the Chair of the Strandings Expert Panel (SEP).

Sandro Mazzariol stepped down as Chair of the Strandings Expert Panel in September 2022 and Andrew Brownlow was unanimously voted in as the new Chair for the next two years. The SEP and Strandings Steering Group (SSG) would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank Sandro for all his hard work over the past 5 years and welcome Andrew to the role as Chair.

A progress report was presented to the Whale Killing Methods & Welfare Issues Working Group (WKM&WI) at IWC68 and subsequently the Commission endorsed the following recommendations:

- *note the intersessional progress made by the Strandings Initiative*
- *endorse the new Strategic objectives and SI structure ([SC/68C/E/15](#))*
- *adopt the proposed workplan for 2021-2024 ([SC/68C/E/17](#))*
- *support funding application for in-person SEP workshop in spring 2023*
- *support funding application for Strandings Coordinator salary*
- *supply details of strandings network contact details to the Secretariat*

STRANDINGS EXPERT PANEL

Funding proposals for continuation of funding for Strandings Coordinator to IWC69 ([SC20126](#)) and an in-person SEP workshop in May 2023 were prepared and subsequently presented to WKM&WI at IWC68. Following this, the proposals were endorsed by Commission. The SEP workshop will be taking place in Venice between 8-10 May 2023 with the main aims being to:

- i) Define a strategy to develop and implement the tasks identified within the four-year work plan;
- ii) Allow an exchange of ideas, strategies and resources which could support the IWC SEP, specifically to draw on existing expertise, resources and knowledge.

It is hoped that the workshop will facilitate the Expert Panel to:

- Refine existing and develop the strategy outlined in the [four-year workplan](#), in specific to define and allocate tasks to enable move forward with the delivery of two priority areas:
 - Emergency response
 - Capacity building

- Design a communications strategy for cooperation and collaboration with other IGO initiatives (GSN, OIE, IUCN etc).
- Review and define the mechanism by which the SEP responds to training requests and emergencies.
- Agree the structure and content of a package of support offered to countries requesting advice. Select, collate and synergize materials for emergency responses and training.
- Grow an understanding between members of their respective interests and potential contribution to the Expert Panel.
- Create opportunity and space to learn from each other and share insights; in doing so building appetite to continue being an active member of the Panel.
- Build a shared sense of purpose, securing commitment to operationalise the group as an effective advisory body for stranding responses.

The SEP training subcommittee was re-established in May 2022. A virtual meeting was held to discuss Mauritius training requirements and the shape of future training. The training in Mauritius has been progressing slowly whilst relevant permissions are sought from the Mauritius government. This training has been requested by NGOs following the 2020 mass stranding event of melon-headed whales (*Peponocephala electra*). The development of a package of strandings response training materials for use in IWC training events and for outreach purposes is currently on hold until after the SEP in-person workshop in May 2023 ([SC1917](#)).

Responding to initial strandings training queries or advice for strandings response is ongoing and remote 'real-time' strandings support in response to assistance and advice requests have been provided in the Black Sea, Sri Lanka, Norway, Cambodia, Canada and Mauritius. SEP members have also intervened on cetacean strandings in their respective areas including unusual mortality events, mass strandings, epidemics, live strandings and out of habitat situations.

Funding applications were submitted to both the Darwin Initiative Round 29: Capability & Capacity Project and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund for "Capacity Training to establish Emergency Cetacean Strandings Regional Response Networks". Both applications were for around £200k and aimed to develop a comprehensive training package to help build local capacity and capability in strandings responses in under-resourced and data deficient areas. Unfortunately, the application to the Darwin Initiative was unsuccessful, but an outcome from CEPF is still outstanding.

Funding for the IWC SI is therefore still very limited and full implementation of the workplan remains contingent on sourcing further resources to enable this work.

The SEP has met quarterly via Zoom allowing ongoing knowledge exchange and support within the SEP group. Following SEP quarterly meetings, both the Chair and Strandings Coordinator have verbally updated the SSG on progress during their quarterly meetings.

Early discussions to formalise recording of marine debris in strandings have taken place and the Strandings Coordinator and several members of both SEP and SSG are active members of the marine debris working group. Both the Strandings Coordinator and Chair of SEP are also involved in the ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS marine debris workshop that will be held in April 2023 in Spain and will provide a report back from this via the marine debris working group. ([SC19187](#), [SC19188](#), [SC19189](#), [SC19201](#), [SC19203](#), [SC19205](#), [SC19210](#))

Ongoing scoping of a global strandings database with various regional data holders including CARI'MAM, ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS and the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – also known as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) ([SC20131](#), [SC1887](#)) – has been carried out by the IWC Database Manager. The Strandings

Coordinator and Chair of SEP attended the 'Scoping the development of a European marine strandings database' workshop at the European Cetacean Society conference in April 2023.

Other ongoing work has included updating the strandings network list with up-to-date contact details and updating the IWC Strandings Initiative website with images and biographies of new SEP members.

PLANNED WORK FOR SEP

- Continue to provide quarterly updates on Strandings Initiative to SSG and facilitate quarterly SSG meetings ([SC17414](#), [SC2175](#)).
- Complete annual review of SEP membership.
- Working with the IWC data manager, develop a data management plan for new and existing data available on cetacean strandings and identify key gaps and opportunities to fill knowledge gaps with a view to developing a strandings database ([SC20131](#)).
- Continued scoping of global strandings database with more regional data holders. Development of a proposed data management framework, including data ingestion, database storage, and data access platforms. ([SC20131](#)) - (IWC Database Manager)
- Review training prioritisation matrix and clarify the role and mechanism of the Strandings Initiative input in emergency response whilst utilising the newly appointed regional focal point local contacts. ([SC1916](#))
- With the SEP training subcommittee, finalise the strandings response remote training package in collaboration with the Global Strandings Network, GMAST, IFAW, BDMLR, ASCOBANS and others. This will include protocols, guidelines and beach-friendly materials available. Endorsement by the IWC Scientific Committee will be sought for all validated training aids. ([SC1917](#))
- Completion of remote and in-person training at the request of member countries.
- Report back to SSG and SC on the in-person SI workshop taking place in May 2023 in Venice, Italy.
- Ongoing discussion and collaboration with the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative, Ship Strikes and Entanglements to provide combined training/advice where appropriate including sourcing funding for projects ([SC1920](#), [SC20128](#)).
- Develop a costed version of the Strandings Initiative Plan. It is hoped that this will be achieved at the in-person workshop in spring 2023. ([SC2175](#))

QUESTIONS FOR THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

The SEP requests the SC to note that the IWC SI currently focuses efforts in a relatively limited range of marine strandings responses, mainly provision of help and advice on cetacean strandings following a request to help from a member country. It is highlighted that as there are several marine animal strandings response initiatives operating worldwide which consider other taxa or models for intervention, there is a need to define how the IWC SI can best interact with these groups. We request the SC support a proposal that the SI should continue to explore how it can best operate in collaboration with other strandings response organisations.

1. Would the SC agree that the SI should continue to develop the necessary networks and connections to help support a robust global strandings response programme?
2. Would the SC clarify if there is scope or benefit from, where necessary, having some of the SI operational capacity administered as part of a partner organisation, e.g. the GSN.

STRANDINGS STEERING GROUP

The Strandings Steering Group was re-established after SC68D following a membership review. There are still some nominations to be made for members of observer organisations as well as representatives from the SC ([SC17414](#), [SC2175](#)). The first SSG meeting was held on 15th August 2022 and agenda items included confirmation of approval

of the 4-year work plan for SEP, SSG membership, SEP training update provided by the Strandings Coordinator, SEP in-person workshop proposal and a discussion of fundraising ideas and opportunities. Since then, the SSG has held quarterly meetings following SEP virtual meeting.

PLANNED WORK FOR SSG

- Complete membership review and identify geographical and expertise gaps within Steering Group.
- Recruit relevant new members to the SSG.
- Develop a fundraising strategy for the Strandings Initiative and SEP.