

# SC/69A/HIM/13

**Sub-committees/working group name: HIM**

**Bycatch Mitigation Initiative – 2023 update on progress**

**Bycatch Coordinator, Iwc Secretariat**



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# **Bycatch Mitigation Initiative – 2023 update on progress**

## ***Bycatch Coordinator, IWC Secretariat***

### **ABSTRACT**

The IWC's Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI) is currently implementing its 2021-2024 workplan. This report updates on the activities progressed under the workplan since April 2022 SC meeting (FAO factsheets and IWC's capsule project on the Common Oceans ABNJ Program - Tuna project, engagement with IOTC and WCPFC, bycatch pilot projects and affiliated projects, capacity building, fundraising), provides information on the appointments of the new chair of the Standing Working Group and Bycatch Coordinator, and details on the review of Expert Panel memberships. The IWC encourages the Scientific Committee, Contracting Governments and observers to nominate candidates to become members of the Expert Panel. The sub-committee is invited to review and provide any feedback to the Bycatch Coordinator and Secretariat. The IWC encourages collaboration with the BMI and with other representatives from SC and CC in addressing the various cetacean bycatch challenges around the world.

### **STANDING WORKING GROUP**

Since March 2017, Stephanie Langerock, Belgium, was the SWG Chair, and Arne Bjørge as vice-chair. Stephanie's mandate finished and she stepped down as the chair at IWC68. A new Chair, Anne-Marie Svododa, Netherlands, was appointed at IWC68. The SWG currently has thirty-four members, from fourteen contracting governments and six accredited observer organisations and staff from the IWC Secretariat, membership to the SWG remains open.

### **BYCATCH COORDINATOR**

The BMI's Bycatch Coordinator was Marguerite Tarzia until February 2022. The IWC Secretariat continued working to cover the essentials necessary to progress BMI work until a replacement for the position was appointed. In June 2022, Cecilia Passadore joined the IWC Secretariat as the new Bycatch Coordinator, and has been taking over the various activities related to this role with the support of the Secretariat, the SWG's chair, the Expert Panel and various stakeholders involved with BMI work.

### **EXPERT PANEL**

The Expert Panel on Bycatch has continued to provide technical advice and guidance to the Bycatch Coordinator and the Standing Working Group on Bycatch. This has included: input to the development of pilot projects; participation in external meetings such as the IOTC/IWC meeting on potential collaboration; presentations at conferences alongside the Bycatch Coordinator; leading the development of material for capacity building; review and feedback on IWC documents and those of external organisations (e.g. FAO factsheets).

The Terms of Reference for the Expert Panel were updated in September 2021 and endorsed in October 2022 at IWC68. The first four-year term of the Expert Panel ended in early 2022. Those members of the Expert Panel who have served for more than 4 years were asked to express their interest and willingness to continue to serve on the panel. Expressions of interest for reappointment are being evaluated, and a call for nominations for new members was opened to fill expertise and geographical representative gaps of the Expert Panel. The Secretariat encourages Contracting Governments, members of the Scientific

Committee and Observers to submit nominations for members of the Expert Panel for the BMI. Particularly, new candidates from (or with work experience in) Central and South America (highly desirable) and the western South Pacific are welcomed; as well as nominees with expertise in fisheries economics, social science and community engagement (highly desirable), cetacean biology and behaviour, cetacean population monitoring and assessment, fisheries science and technology, and fisheries management.

## **BMI WORKPLAN 2021-2024**

The Bycatch Mitigation Initiative's (BMI) four-year Workplan (2021-2024) was endorsed by the Conservation Committee during its October virtual 2020 meeting. BMI's activities relating to the Scientific Committee were discussed and agreed during SC68B and initial progress on pilot project development, external fundraising options, the capacity building programme and progressing collaborative work in the Indian Ocean were discussed at SC68C and SC68D. In October 2022, once the in-person meetings were resumed after the covid-19 pandemic, the SWG presented the progress on the BMI's Workplan (2021-2024) at the Conservation Committee meeting held in Portoroz, Slovenia (see Annex 1 at [CC/68/7.1/01](#)). Then, at IWC68 the four-year BMI's Workplan was adopted.

In 2021-2022 the focus was the development of FAO Technical Factsheets, and finalising the draft of the IWC capsule project agreement with FAO on the Common Oceans ABNJ Program -Tuna project. In 2023-2024, the focus will be to resume the implementation of pilot projects, start implementing the IWC's capsule in the Common Oceans ABNJ Program -Tuna project and organize capacity building trainings as requested. The BMI workplan is now in its third year of implementation. The BMI requests the HIM sub-committee and other SC members to comment and advise on emerging issues and priorities that should be considered when drafting the BMI's 2025-2028 workplan.

### *FAO Technical Guidelines & Factsheets*

FAO signed a Letter of Agreement (LoA) with IWC for the provision of Promotional material for the FAO 'Guidelines to prevent and reduce bycatch of marine mammals in capture fisheries (2021)' ([FAO MM Guidelines](#)). This LoA came into effect on 01 December 2021 and was due to expire on 30 September 2022; however, the duration of the Agreement and delivery of final product was amended to extend to 30 November 2022. The specific purpose of this LoA was the delivery of content (text and illustrations) to produce ~15 FAO Marine Mammal Bycatch Mitigation Factsheets in electronic format, to promote and facilitate implementation of the FAO MM Guidelines, contributing to the collection of FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture online factsheets and knowledge products. Based on a template provided by FAO, text content was drafted for 15 Marine Mammal Bycatch Mitigation Factsheets for FAO consideration. The content for the factsheets were prepared by IWC Secretariat in collaboration with a contracted illustrator. Draft versions of the content were reviewed by the BMI's Expert Panel members and by FAO technical experts through email consultation. On 3 November 2022, an online workshop was organised to present the final draft versions of factsheets content to a group of bycatch mitigation experts to verify quality and ensure that latest information/developments have been incorporated. The purpose of the meeting was to confirm information included in the factsheets was consistent with that provided in the guidelines. This workshop was hosted by IWC and jointly managed with FAO. Prior to the workshop, all Expert Panel members and workshop participants received the updated version of the factsheets for consultation. A total of 16 people participated, including eight panel members, the illustrator, the chair of the BMI's SWG, four representatives of the IWC Secretariat and two from FAO. The agenda of the workshop included an introduction from FAO representatives concerning the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture online factsheets,

and the presentation and in-depth review of the content (text and illustrations) of the factsheets. All suggestions were collated and incorporated into the final version of the factsheets by IWC for final approval by FAO. Finally, FAO produced the online version of twelve “Marine mammal bycatch mitigation” factsheets and an introductory page, which can be accessed [here](#) on the FAO website and will also be available via the [IWC website](#). The factsheets are aimed primarily at fishery managers, fishers and researchers, and can be downloaded, shared and printed by any interested party.

#### *FAO Common Oceans Program – Tuna Project*

Following the final approval of the GEF, the Common Oceans ABNJ Program was due to begin in June 2022; however, the start of the *Tuna Project* and associated capsule projects was delayed. During 2022, the Secretariat worked with the FAO administrators on the final draft for a Letter of Agreement (LoA) to formalize a four-year capsule project with the IWC. This four-year capsule project provides \$320K for the Secretariat. The overall objective of the IWC’s capsule project is to improve understanding and management of cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries in ABNJ and in Exclusive Economic Zones from both the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific Ocean. Specifically, the proposal aims to address the lack of information in relation to cetaceans, cetacean bycatch and fisheries, by undertaking a gap analysis and a spatial bycatch risk assessment at the ocean basin scale. It also aims to address the mitigation of cetacean bycatch by working collaboratively with RFMOs, national governments, experts and the fishing industry to raise awareness of practical solutions. In November 2022, IWC Secretariat participated in a 3-day virtual Inception Workshop for the “Common Oceans Program Tuna Project: Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the ABNJ”. This inception workshop was organized by FAO’s projects leads and all partners involved presented the aims and expected outputs of each capsule project. The LoA between FAO and the IWC was signed on 7 February 2023, and the planning of work activities is underway.

For this project, particularly for the development of ‘ecological risk assessment’ at the scale of ocean basins, the BMI will focus efforts on collating information on cetaceans and cetacean bycatch in the Indian Ocean as well as in the Western Pacific Ocean. Some potential collaborative activities between the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and the IWC (and others) were outlined in Paper SC/68C/ForInfo/109, and the Secretariat continues discussions with the RFMOs to progress this work (see below). The HIM sub-committee is invited to provide any feedback on these initiatives, including on work with the IOTC. Any additional information sources on cetaceans in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific Ocean, which could be useful for abundance estimation, distribution or threat assessment would also be welcome.

#### *Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)*

The IWC Secretariat has formalized engagement with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) in relation to cetacean bycatch following recommendations from the SC and CC (SC1878, SC2095, SC20106, BMI906 and BMI1919). Since 2020, the IWC and IOTC Secretariats have been discussing potential collaborative activities on cetacean bycatch (SC/68C/ForInfo/109, SC/68C/ForInfo/110). To formalize the collaborative work on joint activities, particularly those found in the Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Phase II project, a Cooperation Agreement (CA) was drafted by IWC and IOTC Secretariats (in consultation with FAO). This CA was agreed by the IOTC Commissioners and was addressed at the at IWC68 (FA/68/3/4/3/01). The draft CA was approved by consensus by the 30 parties to IOTC in September 2022 and endorsed at IWC68. The CA between the IWC and IOTC was signed in March 2023.

In December 2021, the IOTC’s Scientific Committee endorsed the development of a proposal for a technical workshop on multi-taxa bycatch mitigation focusing on drift/gillnets, which was previously discussed at the IOTC’s 17<sup>th</sup> Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB) meeting. A multi-taxa

virtual workshop was organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in collaboration with the IOTC from 29 – 31 August 2022. The workshop was attended independent experts, national country scientists, NGOs, IGOs, and civil society organisations from the Indian Ocean and other Oceans. The IWC Secretariat assisted in the organization of the multi-taxa bycatch mitigation workshop, and presented a paper on IWC Focus on cetacean bycatch in the Indian Ocean. The report of the workshop (IOTC-2022-WPEB18-INF11) was presented at the IOTC's 18th WEPB where a number of other recommendations from the workshop were noted (IOTC-2022-WPEB18-R\_rev1).

#### *Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)*

In 2022, the Executive Secretariat and Bycatch Coordinator participated in the SC-18 of WCPFC, and provided comments on the online forum about the document Graphics for Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans (SC18-EB-IP-12), welcomed the paper Review of cetacean diversity, status and threats in the Pacific Islands region 2021 (SC17-EB-IP-13) and welcomed the discussion at WCPFC's SC-18 on the topic of managing deployment, collecting data, and the development of non-entangling and biodegradable FADs (SC18-EB-IP-06, SC18-EB-IP-13). A joint IWC-Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) intervention on these topics was presented by SPREP Executive Secretariat about the above-mentioned documents.

In late 2022, the IWC was granted observer status to participate in Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) meetings.

#### **PILOT PROJECTS**

The Bycatch Coordinator, members of the Bycatch Expert Panel, the Standing Working Group on Bycatch and other collaborators have focused on identifying and developing pilot projects for assessing and addressing bycatch. Seven different countries/locations have been prioritised for pilot project development: Peru, Republic of Congo, Kenya, Pakistan, India, Thailand, Malaysian and Indonesian Borneo. These pilot projects aim to monitor, mitigate, and manage bycatch on small-scale fisheries using gillnets. These projects will be locally led and supported by IWC's BMI. The IWC Secretariat has been reaching out to IWC Commissioners, national governments and national experts to discuss collaboration and project concepts. During 2022, due to the change of coordinator and time-consuming BMI commitments, progress in the implementation of the pilot projects was limited, with the Peru pilot project making the most progress.

*Peru:* At SC68C progress on the development of a pilot project in Peru was reported in SC/68C/HIM/15. After the new Bycatch Coordinator was appointed, discussions with the small working group formed of representatives from different ministries of the Peruvian Government were resumed, included in-person meetings by the IWC Secretariat in Perú and on the sides of IWC68. To initiate the pilot project, an external consultancy was agreed to undertake a synthesis and analysis of existing information (cetacean abundance, fishing effort and practices, bycatch, socio-economic and supply chain information) at two fishing communities in Peru. This will enable the project team the development of a comprehensive strategy for the project (e.g. what approaches or technical mitigation are most appropriate to be trialled or implemented). The BMI's pilot project seed funding will be used to fund this initial activity. The Terms of Reference for the consultancy have been drafted and are being discussed with the Peruvian Government, once agreed a call for tenders will be done.

The focus in 2023 is to resume and continue developing project concepts in other countries, applying for external funding, and beginning some activities with existing 'seed funding'. The BMI encourages and

welcomes the Sub-Committee and any researchers with relevant information to consider sharing this information with the BMI team, and we welcome a discussion on collaboration on individual pilot projects.

## **AFFILIATED PROJECTS**

The BMI continues to explore opportunities to collaborate on existing and new projects focused on bycatch mitigation, particularly in small-scale fisheries and gillnets. Collaboration on projects allows the BMI to learn from projects and export these lessons to pilot projects, or to countries requesting advice on technical approaches. An affiliation also provides access to advice from the Bycatch Expert Panel, and a broader dissemination of results and outreach opportunities. If you would be interested in discussing an affiliation, or collaboration on funding proposals, please contact the Secretariat.

### *CIBBRiNA LIFE*

Since 2021, the IWC Secretariat has been collaborating as a beneficiary partner in the development and fundraising for the proposal “Coordinated Development and Implementation of Best Practice in Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic region” (CIBBRiNA project). The CIBBRiNA project proposal was prepared under the leadership of Anne-Marie SVOBODA (Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, The Netherlands). CIBBRiNA's aim is to work jointly with fishers, scientists, fisheries and environment ministries of thirteen European countries in the Northeast Atlantic, Baltic and Mediterranean Sea to improve knowledge on bycatches in different fisheries, to minimize bycatch of priority ETP species and to work towards science-based assessments of the impacts of bycatches on their populations. This project is a 6-year project with a substantial budget, which will also benefit from the participation of and/or collaboration with international and overseas organisations, including the IWC along with 5 fisheries Advisory Councils, ICES, HELCOM, OSPAR, EAPO and EFCA. As a beneficiary partner in the CIBBRiNA project, the IWC will work on joint solutions for incidental bycatch, as well as bringing experience and experts on this issue via its Expert Panel on Bycatch and the Scientific Committee. In March 2023, the CIBBRiNA proposal was approved by the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) and the Grant Agreement preparations have started, and the project should be able to start in September 2023. Total budget is 12,5M euro, of which between 8,3M and 9,3M euro is eligible for funding from the EC.

### *Marine Mammal Bycatch Risk Assessment in Chile – Lenfest Ocean Program*

The BMI Coordinator and IWC Secretariat, through the participation in virtual meetings and in-person workshops, has been following the progress of the project Marine Mammal Bycatch Risk Assessment in Chile (Lenfest Ocean Program). The Lenfest Ocean Program is sponsoring BMI's Expert Panel member, Dr. Ellen Hines, San Francisco State University, and Dr. Maritza Sepúlveda, Universidad de Valparaíso, to assemble a team of experts to work with representatives from the Chilean government, fisheries agencies and local scientists to assess the risk of marine mammal bycatch in Chilean fisheries. Reports arising from this project will be presented at SC69.

## **CAPACITY BUILDING**

The BMI is establishing its capacity building programme in relation to diverse topics relating to bycatch assessment, monitoring and mitigation. The BMI is keen to explore opportunities for future capacity building workshops, apprenticeships and the development of a 'library' of bycatch mitigation and monitoring equipment.

In 2023, under the BMI capacity building programme, expert panel members and their team will provide training on the Bycatch Risk Assessment toolbox (ByRA) to scientists from the Thai Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, with seven government research stations participating. This ByRA training for Thailand will be delivered as a remote workshop during May 2023. The long-term aim is to build a network of regional ByRA experts to gather data and increase capacity to assess and mitigate bycatch in each location.

## **EXTERNAL FUNDRAISING**

Full implementation of the BMI Work plan (2021-2024) requires external funds. An IWC Secretariat part-time staff member is dedicated to exploring long-term funding options for IWC initiatives, such as the BMI. The Bycatch Coordinator, BMI Expert Panel members and the IWC Secretariat, are actively exploring possible external funding for the development of activities included in the BMI's workplan and other opportunities for addressing bycatch in collaboration with national governments and relevant organisations.

The Bycatch Coordinator will work with the Chair of the Bycatch SWG and the Chair of the VCF fund to consider applications to the VCF funding.

## **COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS ON BYCATCH**

Further details of IWC collaboration with other organisations is included in SC/69A/O/02 and this includes collaborations on bycatc