

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

**Update on Cooperation with other Organisations**

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## Update on Cooperation with other Organisations

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## INTRODUCTION

The Commission and the Scientific and Conservation Committees have adopted numerous recommendations over the years for strengthening engagement with other organisations. The IWC Secretariat, in collaboration with members of the SC and CC have been working to carry out these mandates, in addition to exploring newly emerging opportunities. The Secretariat regularly updates Contracting Governments and observers on the relevant activities in other IGOs and these include requests for assistance in preparation for IWC engagement, whether by the Secretariat or member country representatives.

### FAO, COFI AND RFMOS

The IWC Executive Secretary and Coordinator of the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative attended the 35<sup>th</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Committee on Fisheries (COFI) meeting in Rome from September 5-9, 2022. IWC interventions acknowledged the need to address cetacean bycatch, to welcome the recently published Technical Guidelines to Reduce and Prevent Marine Mammal Bycatch in Capture Fisheries, and to promote collaborative opportunities between the FAO, fisheries management organisations and the IWC to advance science and finding workable solutions.

As part of the COFI meeting, the FAO hosts the Regional Secretariats' Network (RSN), which is a group of Executive Secretaries/Directors of Regional Fishery Management Organizations and other Regional Bodies, such as the IWC. The IWC Secretariat's Executive Secretary joined the RSN's meeting in September 2022. This is an excellent opportunity for the IWC to exchange information on Secretariat-level issues and for collaboration on bycatch with Regional Fishery Management Organisations (RFMOs). The IWC Executive Secretary participated in a small group of RSN members preparing comments on the Terms of Reference for the RSN to increase its potential for effective cross-RSN leadership collaboration. These Terms of Reference were adopted at the RSN in September 2022. Other topics included climate change impacts on sustainable fishing and OECM – Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures – a response from the RSN on the call for “30 by 30” from the Global Biodiversity Framework.

The IWC Secretariat was invited to participate in two Regional Fishery Management workshops. The first was in Mozambique on 22- 25 June 2022 and focused on illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing as well as bycatch of protected species in the Indian Ocean region fisheries. It was an excellent opportunity to network with IGOs working in the area that could be interested in participating in the GEF/FAO Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Phase 2 project (described below). The second regional workshop was for the Eastern Central Atlantic Ocean and was held in Accra, Ghana, from 30 November to 2 December 2022. The report of this meeting is just being finalized and is once again focused on addressing IUU fishing, along with other shared interests such as ecosystem approaches to fishery management, including bycatch measures to address protected species. The IWC Secretariat attendance at these meetings is in line with the mandate to address monitoring and mitigation of cetacean bycatch in active and ghost fishing gear. The FAO's Responsible Fishing Operations Workplan references collaboration between the FAO and the BMI.

The IWC Secretariat was contracted by FAO to prepare factsheets that support the implementation of the Technical Guidelines to Reduce and Prevent Marine Mammal Bycatch in Capture Fisheries. The text and illustrations for preparing the online factsheets were developed by the IWC Secretariat in collaboration with an illustrator, then reviewed by the expert panel members of the IWC's BMI and by FAO technical experts. The factsheets can be accessed [here](#) on the FAO website and will also be available via the IWC website. They are aimed primarily at fishery managers, fishers and researchers, and can be downloaded, shared and printed by any interested party.

The IWC Secretariat is also collaborating with the FAO, providing annual statistics on anthropogenic cetacean mortality for their annual publication of fishery data, using information from the IWC Progress

Reports or submitted directly to the IWC. The IWC Secretariat participates in a number of task groups under the Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics, including the ad-hoc task group on reference harmonization standard, the ad-hoc task group on fishing effort concepts and the ad-hoc task group on catch concepts.

### **Common Oceans ABNJ Program Tuna Project**

Working in collaboration with RFMOs, SPREP and other partners, the BMI was granted a fund for a capsule project under the GEF/FAO Common Oceans ABNJ Program Tuna Project (Phase II) development team. The overall project is focused on improving the sustainability of the world's tuna fisheries.

The IWC's proposed capsule aims to assess, monitor and mitigate cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries in two ocean basins, notably the Indian and the western Pacific Oceans. Also, by working collaboratively with t-RFMOs, national governments, experts and the fishing industry, the project will raise awareness of practical solutions available for monitoring, mitigation and implementation. The activities in both ocean basins will include: 1. Assessing cetacean bycatch and data gaps through collaborative, community-based workshops and consultancies and spatial bycatch rapid-risk assessment by gear type; 2. Building regional capacity and awareness on cetacean bycatch and practical solutions through multidisciplinary bycatch reduction teams to promote bycatch reduction locally with the fishing community and broadly with national and multilateral fisheries organisations, and through training workshops on bycatch risk assessment approaches, monitoring, and mitigation/management; 3. Collaboratively developing recommendations to address cetacean bycatch for consideration by multi-lateral environmental and fisheries agreements through national coordination and roundtable meetings (Fisheries and Environment Departments, IWC, FAO COFI and RSN), and through cetacean experts' participation at IOTC and WCPFC scientific meetings. In November 2022, the IWC Executive Secretary and the BMI's Coordinator attended an online induction workshop organized by the GEF/FAO Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Phase II project leads, where the main goals and outputs of the proposal was introduced to all involved partners, and each of them briefly introduced their proposed capsule projects. After this workshop, the draft contract prepared between the Secretariat and the FAO, which is in the form of a Letter of Agreement (LoA), was reviewed and after minor amendments it was signed in February 2023 to formalise the four-year programme of the IWC.

### **IOTC**

The IWC Secretariat has prioritised engagement with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) in relation to cetacean bycatch. Prioritisation of the IOTC was recommended by the IWC Scientific Committee (Recommendation SC1878, SC2095 and SC20106) and by the IWC Conservation Committee (Recommendation BMI906, BMI 1919). The IWC and IOTC Secretariats held a joint meeting in September 2020 to discuss potential collaborative activities on cetacean bycatch (SC/68C/ForInfo/109) and this was briefly presented to the IOTC's 16th Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB) meeting (SC/68C/ForInfo/110).

The WPEB recommended that the collaboration and any formal agreement be submitted to the Scientific Committee before it is presented to the Commission. A Letter of Intent (LoI) was the initial proposal for formalising the collaborative work already underway between the IWC and IOTC; however, a Cooperation Agreement (CA) was subsequently suggested by IOTC parties as a more flexible and expeditious approach that can be used in the near term to undertake collaborative work. The Secretariats of the IWC and IOTC (in consultation with FAO) drafted a CA to formalise collaboration on joint activities, particularly those found in the Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Phase II project. 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.

The IOTC's WPEB has included work on an ecological risk assessment for cetaceans across the region in collaboration with other organisations in their program of work for the coming years. Some funding for this type of assessment has been secured by IWC through the Common Oceans ABNJ Program Tuna Project (Phase II).

### **WCPFC**

In 2022, the Executive Secretariat and Bycatch Coordinator participated in the SC-18 of Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). During WCPFC's SC-18, the IWC 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) as well as the discussions on the topic 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.

### **CIBBRiNA**

The Coordinated Development and Implementation of Best Practices in Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic region — (CIBBRiNA) project was approved in March 2023 by the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE). The Grant Agreement preparations have started and the project should be able to start in September 2023. This project will work to achieve EU cross-border cooperation and fisheries engagement 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. IWC will be one of several international organisations that will be working together with government, academic and non-profit partners to archive these goals. 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.

### **GAMeON**

The Global Alliance for Managing Ocean Noise (GAMeON) is an international collaboration of scientists, managers, policymakers, and industry representatives dedicated to fostering inclusive dialogues that will fuel creative, workable solutions that will transform ocean noise management. IWC Secretariat attended the webinar “Practical Approaches for Reducing Ocean Noise Associated with Seismic Exploration” in November 2022. Several SC members were involved on the Panel. This workshop, the second in a series, focused on the current status and future directions in: (1) technological approaches for reducing noise impacts from seismic exploration (e.g., vibroseis, ‘low noise’ airguns; and (2) operational approaches for reducing noise impacts from seismic (e.g., minimizing airgun array size, reducing survey area, smart scheduling). A third Workshop is due to be held in September 2023 and will focus on reducing noise associated with shipping.

### **CCAMLR**

Scientists at the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) have been in contact with the IWC Secretariat regarding opportunities to enhance scientific collaboration through the Scientific Committee of Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

An intersessional group was established at the meeting of the IWC Scientific Committee (SC68D) in May 2022 following discussion of paper SC/68D/HIM04 which provided details of three entanglements

of humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) in the Antarctic krill trawl fishery in CCAMLR subareas 48.1 and 48.2. The aim of this intersessional group was help to provide further advice on: 1) Understanding the likely causes of trawl bycatch; 2) What factors likely contributed to the incidents (spatial, temporal, operational, behavioural factors of both whales and vessels)?; 3) How should future incidents be investigated and what information should be recorded?; 4) Determining routine data collection to put bycatch incidents into context (e.g. whale sightings, net monitoring devices). The report prepared by this group (CCAMLR WG-IMAF-2022-08; refer to SC69 ForInfo 31) was presented by an IWC's representative (i.e. Nat Kelly) at the meeting of the Working Group on Incidental Mortality Associated with Fishing (CCAMLR IMAF) in Hobart between 10 and 14 October 2022. More information is provided in the Observer report sections in this document.

### **SPAW OF THE CARTAGENA CONVENTION FOR THE WIDER CARIBBEAN**

The Secretariat has continued working with counterparts in Cooperation with Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) on a draft MoU to facilitate collaboration in areas of common interest in cetacean science and stewardship. Areas of common interest and possibly collaboration include small scale fishery bycatch, ship strikes, strandings response, entanglement response training, whale watching and swim-with programmes. In the spirit of (this) cooperation, the Secretariat has participated in several virtual meetings of various SPAW activities, including technical meetings of SPAW-STAC (Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee).

A revised version of the draft MoU has just been received from the SPAW and this will be followed up with a concrete Work Plan for the next year or two. The Secretariat presented the draft MoU to the Bureau and then to the Commission at IWC68, however this was withdrawn.

A meeting was held online on 18 January 2023 between the Biodiversity Project Officer, the IWC Strandings Coordinator and the IWC Data Manager. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Caribbean Marine Megafauna and Anthropogenic Activities (CAMAC) Project and discuss points of collaboration going forward. Areas highlighted for future collaboration include capacity building and knowledge building related to strandings, entanglement and bycatch.

### **CBD AND LIAISON GROUP OF BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS**

As a member of the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions (BLG), the IWC has been invited to participate in various discussions of this group as part of the development of the post 2020 framework for biodiversity and associated targets and indicators. The Secretariat has organised and hosted several BLG virtual meetings and provided interventions on behalf of the BLG at a number of events.

The Secretariat seeks to raise awareness with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other relevant organisations of the scientific and conservation programmes of IWC that are already underway in order to ensure that this work is made available for as broad a range of needs as possible. Given the significant investments made through the SC scientific budget and a range of programmes supported by voluntary funds, ensuring the proper dissemination and use of this information is fundamental to ensuring healthy cetacean stocks, particularly for those threats whose mitigation is not under the purview of IWC.

The Secretariat has compiled the information on potential elements of the post-2020 CBD process in terms of indicators and programmes. These include for example the IWC compilation of population estimates and status as provided on the IWC website, the SC and CC work on the BMI, ship strikes, underwater noise, pollution, and other programmes. The IWC Secretariat also notes the key role of IWC in working with ASW countries to establish whaling quotas.

The Chair of IWC and several members of the Secretariat have participated in various virtual meetings of the CBD, including its Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice

(SBSTTA) and Post-2020 preparatory meetings from fall of 2021 to December 2022. The Executive Secretary attended COP15 at which the new Global Biodiversity Framework was agreed.

The Secretariat continues to engage with this process based primarily on how the IWC's ongoing scientific and stewardship work can contribute to tracking and reaching the Post-2020 goals and targets. The IWC Secretariat is also exploring the possibility of working with the IUCN's Global Species Action Plan and the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (BIP) to facilitate this coordination with the overall CBD process.

When engaging in this process, the Secretariat will continue to highlight issues most directly relevant to healthy cetacean populations. These include key threats to cetaceans and any opportunities for these to be addressed or strengthened in the framework and promoting opportunities to address these threats including through increased cooperation, capacity building, engagement of key sectors (e.g. shipping and fisheries) and data management and reporting. These efforts will highlight opportunities for IWC scientific information to support monitoring of progress in achieving the new framework of targets. IWC68 would bring an opportunity for the Commission to welcome the Post 2020 Framework for Biodiversity and to make any observations on the role of the IWC in delivering relevant objectives in the framework. The Secretariat has raised these issues to the attention of the Contracting Governments prior to the meetings and engaged with some at the CBD at COP15.

## **UN**

The new U.N. High Seas Treaty covers the two-thirds of the ocean that lies outside national boundaries — nearly 50% of the planet's surface. The treaty provides a legal framework for establishing management areas and marine protected areas (MPAs), requiring environmental impact assessments (EIAs), building capacity, and transferring marine technology, and sharing the benefits of the genetic resources of the high seas. On March 22, 2023, the World Ocean Council (WOC) hosted a roundtable discussion on the United Nations High Seas Treaty. The IWC attended the virtual meeting, which discussed the treaty's implications for ocean economic activity, including the important opportunities for ocean industries to proactively engage in ensuring a healthy, productive, well-managed global ocean.

The IWC Secretariat attended the webinar series “Increasing Circularity of Plastics in the Economy” and “Eliminate and restrict hazardous chemicals and intentionally added microplastics” organised by the High Ambition Coalition (HAC). HAC is a group of countries that have taken the initiative to form a coalition following the adoption of resolution 5/14 “End Plastic Pollution: Towards an International Legally Binding Instrument” by the UN Environment Assembly in March 2022. The HAC is Co-Chaired by Norway and Rwanda as announced during UNEA5.2. Both webinar events provided opportunities for Member States and stakeholders to discuss possible options for core obligations and control measures in the plastics treaty to increase the circularity of plastics in the economy and reduce hazardous chemicals and intentionally added microplastics.

## **COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO**

The IWC and ATLAFCO Secretariats signed a MoU on the sidelines of IWC68 in Portoroz. This MoU covers a wide range of collaborative efforts and reflects the cooperation already underway. The Secretariat maintains regular communication with ATLAFCO as a means to ensure effective outreach and increased engagement of the IWC member countries in Africa. For example, ATLAFCO assisted the IWC in identifying scientists who might benefit from financial support through the Voluntary Assistance Fund (VAF) to attend SC69A. The Secretariat continues to collaborate with ATLAFCO for regular updates for the Commissioners in Africa on intersessional activities of the IWC, encourage engagement in the WG-OE process for the governance review, and join meetings of the Scientific and Conservation communities. ATLAFCO hosted a call with the Secretariat to encourage and enhance engagement of African countries in the provision of National Progress Reports. The SC established an

intersessional working group to pursue the design and implementation of capacity building workshops in West Africa focused on at-sea surveys and abundance estimation for cetaceans in the waters off West Africa (SC/68C/ASI/09). A steering Group was established and charged with follow-up work.

## **SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME (SPREP)**

The IWC Secretariat has held a number of meetings with the SPREP Secretariat in relation to work areas of common interest and overlap, including bycatch and whale watching. The IWC BMI is proposing possible collaboration with SPREP and other regional organisations on its capsule project under the Common Oceans ABNJ Program Tuna Project (see FAO section above). Recently, SPREP has published a Review of Cetacean Diversity Status and Threats in the Pacific Island Region, which can be accessed [here](#). SPREP is currently involved in an EU-funded project through its Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP), which includes a multi-taxa bycatch component focused on coastal fisheries. The SPREP Secretariat is also actively engaged in raising awareness on cetacean bycatch in the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

## **CMS AND ITS DAUGHTER AGREEMENTS**

The Secretariat has continued ongoing co-operation with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and its daughter agreements ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS on a wide range of common challenges, including bycatch, strandings, CMPs, ship strikes, ecosystem functioning and whale watching. The IWC has a MoU with the CMS. Each Executive Secretary has visited the headquarters offices of her counterpart to meet with staff and discuss areas of mutual interest. The CMS Executive Secretary visited the IWC headquarters in February 2023 to discuss mutual topics of interest such as bycatch, whale watching, strandings, wildmeat and develop a workplan for both organisations. A joint approach to other UN bodies related to whale watching and sustainable tourism (UNEP, UNWTO) was one proposal arising from this meeting.

In February 2022, both the CC and SC WW groups contributed to the CMS Guidelines for in-water interactions with wildlife. The IWC took part in a webinar in February 2023 where the revised document was discussed. The Secretariat then provided feedback on the new version. The final version of the Recreational In-Water interactions with Aquatic Mammals Guidelines will be presented in October 2023 at the CMS COP14 meeting for adoption.

There is a strong, long-standing collaboration between the IWC and **ACCOBAMS** on many issues including matters related to population assessment, ship strikes, bycatch, whale watching, noise, chemical pollution and CMPs. The need to continue and improve co-operation has continually been underscored and opportunities for further collaboration were recently discussed in a virtual meeting between the IWC and ACCOBAMS Secretariats.

IWC virtually attended the 7th Meeting of the **ASCOBANS** Advisory Committee (AC27) from 28 to 30 September 2022. The Secretariat gave a general update on common topics, the BMI and its capsule project under the GEF/FAO Common Oceans ABNJ Program Tuna Project, as well as on the Strandings Initiative. Following an agreement at AC27 for the establishment of a Working Group to organise a Marine Debris Workshop jointly with ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS, the IWC Secretariat has actively participated in the Working Group and the Strandings Coordinator will be attending the workshop in Galicia, Spain on 15<sup>th</sup> April. The overarching aim of the workshop is to achieve a better understanding of the effects of marine debris on cetaceans, including the relationship between marine debris and fisheries, improving data collection from stranded cetaceans and taking into account the relationship between marine debris and other factors (such as chemical pollution, pathogens, and pharmaceuticals).

In addition, the Strandings Coordinator will attend and participate in two further ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS workshops associated with the ECS conference. These include the “Scoping the development of a European marine strandings database” to identify the possible benefits



and challenges associated with developing and curating a European wide strandings database for the ASCOBANS region, and a workshop focused on bycatch, “Current cetacean bycatch issues in European waters: ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Joint Bycatch Working Group (JBWG) Workshop”.

### **PELAGOS SANCTUARY**

The Pelagos Sanctuary held the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties of the Pelagos Agreement on 15-16 December 2021 and the Ship Strikes Workshop on 17 December 2021. The IWC was invited as virtual observers for both. The Sanctuary has requested entanglement response training for Italy, Monaco and France responders, with a date set for 15-17 May (2023) in Genoa, Italy.

A meeting was held online on 6 February 2023 between the Sanctuary, the Chair of the IWC Working Group on Ship Strikes, the IWC Data Manager and Caterina Fortuna to discuss ongoing work in the Mediterranean region and future points of coordination between the IWC and the Sanctuary in relation to ship strikes. There were three main points of collaboration discussed: (1) the establishment of a regional working group, which could engage with experts and stakeholders to address regionally-specific ship strikes, determine mitigation measures, and develop a protocol for evaluating evidence of a ship strike for alive and dead marine mammals; (2) research on risks to marine mammals through population assessments for the region; and (3) developing a communication strategy to raise awareness of and share data related to ship strikes, which is a main priority for the Sanctuary going forward.

### **NAMMCO**

The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission held its annual Commission meeting virtually 22-25 March 2021. Several members of the IWC Secretariat attended sessions of the meeting. NAMMCO and the IWC share common scientific and programmatic areas of work including cetacean surveys, stock assessments, bycatch and entanglement response. In June 2022, the Secretariats had a meeting to update each other on activities.

The NAMMCO Deputy Secretary was invited to make a presentation to the WKMWI Working of NAMMCO at IWC68 regarding the production of educational safety videos for whaling. In 2023, the IWC Secretariat participated in the NAMMCO’s Management Committees and Scientific Committee meetings.

### **GLOBAL GHOST GEAR INITIATIVE (GGGI)**

At IWC68 the Commission endorsed the signing of a Statement of Support for collaboration with GGGI. This is a long-standing recommendation from the Commission and SC (CO1857, SC19215). Final discussions are underway as to the activities involved with this collaboration.

### **OCEAN GOVERNANCE PROJECT**

IWC has provided input to the information pages on the Marine Mammal Twinning website (<https://marine-mammals.info/the-ocean-governance-project/>) and factsheets on topics of mutual interest. This includes suggestions for additional factsheets and how IWC can provide advice.

In the past year, the IWC secretariat has had ongoing communication with Ocean Governance about IWC programs and the work of the Marine Mammal Twinning Project. IWC secretariat attended the panel organised by the Ocean Governance at the IMPAC5 conference in Vancouver, BC, Canada in February 2023. Ocean Governance also has a newsletter sent out to partners, where IWC contributes news. In March 2023, the newsletter promoted the WW Handbook and the revised General WW principles. Both organisations are looking at whether any of the partners would like to contribute to the WW Handbook as the Secretariat scopes for new content.

IWC will continue to provide input to the development of new factsheets on Climate change, Socio-Economic value of cetaceans and Marine Debris, in addition to updating the existing factsheets

available [online](#). For example, the bycatch factsheet will soon be updated with links to the FAO/IWC developed factsheets on bycatch mitigation techniques.

### **ORCA**

ORCA is a charity that is dedicated to studying and protecting whales, dolphins and porpoises in UK and European waters. The IWC Secretariat held meetings with representatives of ORCA twice, in July 2022 and in January 2023 to discuss possible collaborations regarding sustainable whale watching education activities and monitoring. Future collaborations include possible development of a case study on Orca's Surveyor Network results for the IWC WW Handbook and ORCA's participation in the promotion of the revised Principles for WW and IWC-WW handbook.

### **IORA**

Following the SC recommendations (SC19148, SC2294), the Secretariat has made numerous attempts to re-establish communication with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Given the overlap in topics of interest, the IWC and IORA will look to collaborate on further developing the Indian Ocean region's whale watching industry, monitoring and data recovery of cetacean strandings, sustainable fisheries, and bycatch mitigation.

### **OCEAN PROJECT**

The IWC Data Manager attended the OCEAN Project Workshop on Ship Strikes, 24-26 January 2023, Azores, Portugal. The workshop took place in Horta (Faial, Azores) and was attended by maritime industry and marine mammal experts. The goal of the workshop was to discuss lessons learned and best practices related to prediction and detection technologies for mitigating ship strikes and where to implement these technologies. Additionally, workshop participants discussed how to integrate relevant data into the information ecosystem that will be created under the OCEAN project, which is a multidisciplinary project that focuses on enhancing operator awareness in navigation, reducing the frequency of severe accidents like collision and grounding, mitigating ship-strike risks to marine mammals, and mitigating risks presented by floating obstacles to ships. During the workshop, the IWC Data Manager presented on the IWC Working Group on Ship Strikes (WG-SS) and the corresponding Strategic Plan, highlighting specific populations at risk, as well as identified high risk areas within European waters. The IWC Data Manager will remain updated on the OCEAN Project's work and progress by participating in the OCEAN Project Stakeholders Forum.

### **IFREMER**

The IWC's Executive Secretary attended a two-day workshop entitled 'Potentialities of incentive-based approaches to reduce dolphin bycatch in the Bay of Biscay', hosted by IFREMER Institut Français de Recherche pour l'Exploitation de la Mer (French for 'French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea') in Brest, France, 16-17 March 2023. During this workshop, 25 participants from France, the USA, Ireland and the UK explored economic incentives to reduce bycatch. Background papers and an opening session (including a talk by Vincent Ridoux, France's Head of Delegation to the IWC Scientific Committee) provided an overview of the growing problem and complexity of the dolphin bycatch issue in the Bay of Biscay. Dolphin carcasses are stranding on the beach in increasing numbers, nearly all of them exhibiting signs of entanglement in nets. To some extent, this has become a public issue for the fishing fleet, although it does not seem to be impacting the market for their products, which are consumed primarily within the coastal zone and in urban areas located inland, like Paris. There are several combinations of gear types and target species, and due to lack of reporting requirements as well as observer coverage, the French regulators cannot easily identify the key sources of bycatch mortality.

The EU has been closely following this bycatch issue in France as the country failed to respond to the EU requirements for time/area closures and use of pingers on fishing nets. The government of France faced another round of mandatory measures for their fleet shortly after the workshops when the courts issued a decision following a series of lawsuits. Specifically, the French "Conseil d'Etat" (which serves as the supreme court for administrative justice) ordered on March 20 that the Government act within 6

months to organize time/area closures in the Bay of Biscay to reduce dolphin and porpoise bycatch. The Government has not yet provided a final response to the Conseil d'Etat ruling.

At the workshop, case studies were presented and considered as possible options for addressing the Bay of Biscay bycatch problem. Rewards and penalties were discussed as well, as another form of incentivizing measures. One key concept was the incentivization that comes from a 'credible threat' – which is what this recent Conseil d'Etat decision appears to offer.

## **OBSERVER REPORTS**

### **Report of the 2022 PICES Annual Meeting by Tsutomu Tamura (Japan)**

The North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES) is an inter-governmental organization in which Canada, China, Japan, Korea, Russia and the United States participate. PICES has four committees: the Biological Oceanography Committee (BIO), the Fisheries Science Committee (FIS), the Marine Environmental Quality Committee (MEQ), and the Physical Oceanography and Climate Committee (POC). In addition, it has one technical committee for data exchange (TCODE). PICES has been conducting a research project titled FUTURE (Forecasting and Understanding Trends, Uncertainty and Responses of the North Pacific Ecosystems) since 2008.

PICES meets once a year for its regular meeting and its associated symposia with over 500 participants. Since 1997, PICES has addressed marine birds and marine mammals as relevant ecosystem components in the North Pacific, and has established a special working group to assess the impact of feeding by marine birds and marine mammals upon ecosystems (WG11). There was also a marine birds and marine mammals advisory panel (AP-MBM) under the BIO to examine the relationship between climate change and ecosystem fluctuation in the North Pacific Ocean, and compare the situation with those in other oceanic basins. Since 2016, the AP-MBM is under Section-MBM (S-MBM) under the BIO.

The PICES-2022 meeting was held online between 23 September and 2 October 2022. The S-MBM business meeting was held on 24 September and focused on the ongoing activities such as the S-MBM next five-years project. Four S-MBM members representing Canada, Japan, Korea and USA were present, while those from China and Russia did not attend PICES-2022.

The S-MBM meeting in 2022 reviewed the five-years (2022-2026) project titled “Interaction between MBMs and other ecosystem components and stressors”, and concluded that it will be held some workshops and sessions related to this project between 2023 and 2026.

Below is a brief outline of the most relevant events at the 2022 S-MBM business meeting:

#### *1. S-MBM leadership*

The business meeting of S-MBM was convened by Dr. K. Hattori (National Research and Development Agency, Japan) and Dr. P. O’Hara (Canadian Wildlife Service, Canada). After the meeting, Hattori stepped down as chairman and Dr. M. Kim (Hanyang University, Korea) became the new chairman.

#### *2. Reports from IWC SC*

At the business meeting held on 24 September 2022, Tamura (Institute of Cetacean Research, Japan), as the representative of the IWC-SC, presented the observer report of the 2022 IWC/SC meeting on topics related to the North Pacific (*e.g.* Research Plan for the IWC-POWER cruise).

#### *3. Activity in 2022*

There was one workshop in 2022 PICES.

\*W7 “Anthropogenic stressors, mechanisms and potential impacts on Marine Birds, Mammals, and Sea Turtles” on September 23, 2022 at PICES-2022.

The workshop was divided into Eastern and Western Pacific region-based sessions with presentations and discussions focusing on key threats to marine mammals, sea birds and sea turtles. In total, there were 15 presentations with 8 presentations based on western North Pacific and 7 presentations based on eastern North Pacific in PICES regions. The workshop was held as a hybrid meeting. The summary of this workshop was presented to the PICES BIO committee.

#### *4. Activity plan in 2023*

The five-year project (2022-2026) is titled “Interaction between MBMs and other ecosystem components and stressors”. This includes important sub-themes such as:

- Forecasting changes in forage species and response of top predators.
- Marine birds and marine mammals as ecological indicators and predictors of changing marine ecosystems.
- Changing roles of recovering marine mammals and declining marine birds in ecosystems.

It was proposed one workshop and one session for 2023 PICES as following.

\*Session (2 days); “Anticipated and realized effects of climate change on predatory fish, birds, and mammals of the North Pacific” lead by W Sydeman.

\*Workshop (1day); “Bio-indicators of meso to global scale marine pollution: techniques for integration and standardization” lead by Y Watanuki.

#### *5. Other matters*

The 2023 annual meeting of the PICES will be held at Seattle, USA. The meeting will be held between 23 and 27 October 2023.

## Report from CMS to IWC SC69A by Jenny Renell

The mandates that CMS has for the conservation of cetaceans present clear opportunities for close collaboration and synergies with IWC. This report provides an update on relevant activities undertaken within the framework of CMS since IWC SC68D in 2022. The CMS Secretariat is looking forward to working together with the IWC Secretariat, the Scientific Committee and its sub-groups on these topics, and on the ones that IWC brings to the attention of CMS.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS (COP14) will take place from 23 to 28 October 2023 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. The preceding 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council will discuss COP-documents with scientific components, on 18-21 July 2023. The following items, with mandates from COP13, will be on the agenda.

- Adverse Impacts of Anthropogenic Noise on Cetaceans and Other Migratory Species: The CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Joint Noise Working Group and CMS Scientific Council have reviewed the report on *Best Available Technology (BAT) and Best Environmental Practice (BEP) for Three Noise Sources: Shipping, Seismic Airgun Surveys, and Pile Driving*<sup>1</sup> and the resulting version will be published as a CMS Technical Series to make the information easily accessible to Parties. It was also agreed that CMS SC should assess the need for updating the *CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessment for Marine Noise-generating Activities* and/or its *Technical Support Information* prior to COP14.
- Aquatic Wild Meat: The key focus to date has been on background work necessary for the development of a Wild Meat Action Plan for the Gulf of Guinea for consideration by Range State Parties in the region. The Working Group and Secretariat have also worked closely with the IWC Small Cetacean Sub-committee on this issue.
- Conservation Implications of Animal Culture and Social Complexity: The Expert Working Group on Animal Culture has progressed work on identifying priority species on the CMS Appendices for consideration of animal culture and social learning in a conservation context. A workshop has been organized in two parts: Part 1 set up sub-groups for intersessional work focusing on different taxonomic groups as well as cross-cutting issues such as translocations or human wildlife interactions, and appointed sub-group leaders (October 2022); and Part 2 reviewed results of the work of the sub-groups and agreed the recommendations to be made to the CMS Scientific Council and Parties (April 2023).
- Global Programme of Work for Cetaceans: The CMS Aquatic Mammals Working Group was tasked to undertake a revision of the POW, including a review of the implementation of the POW to date, preparation of a gap analysis and identification of the priorities going forward. There have also been consultations regarding the development of an action plan for cetaceans in the Red Sea region. Further, the second workshop on the role of cetaceans in ecosystem functioning will be co-organised with CMS and IWC on 14-16 November 2023 in Bonn. The first workshop took place in April 2021, and was hosted online by IWC.
- Marine Wildlife Watching: The workstreams on *Recreational In-Water Interactions* and *Sustainable Boat Based Marine Wildlife Watching* have been combined into one, now entitled *Marine Wildlife Watching*. The Secretariat has developed draft guidelines on recreational in-water interactions with CMS-listed species, including cetaceans. The draft guidelines were circulated for consultation, including to IWC, in December 2021. A webinar to present the latest version was done in February 2023. The draft guidelines will be submitted to COP14 for formal consideration. COP has also requested CMS Scientific Council to consider a joint product with

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<sup>1</sup> Published as [UNEP/CMS/COP13/Inf.9](https://www.unep.org/cms/cop13/inf.9)

IWC Scientific Committee, with regards to cetaceans. This request has been flagged to the WW SWG.

- The following items will also be on the CMS COP14 agenda:
  - Bycatch
  - Important Marine Mammal Areas
  - Marine pollution (marine debris, FADs, POPs, nutrient pollution)
  - Single Species Action Plan for the Atlantic humpback dolphin (*Sousa teuszii*)
- Concerted Actions are priority conservation measures, projects, or institutional arrangements undertaken to improve the conservation status of selected CMS Appendix I and Appendix II species or selected groups of Appendix I and Appendix II species. The following ones relating to cetaceans are currently active, and the Secretariat is awaiting reports on their implementation from the proponents:
  - CA 13.5 Concerted Action for the Irrawaddy Dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*)
  - CA 13.6 Concerted Action for the Ganges River Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica gangetica*)
  - CA 13.7 Concerted Action for the Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the Baltic Sea and the Iberian Peninsula
  - CA 12.2 (Rev.COP13) Concerted Action for Sperm Whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) of the Eastern Tropical Pacific
  - CA 12.3 (Rev.COP13) Concerted Action for the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (*Sousa teuszii*)
  - CA 12.4 (Rev.COP13) Concerted Action for the Humpback Whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) of the Arabian Sea.

The report from ASCOBANS can be found under agenda item 4.6.3.

## Report from ACCOBAMS by Susana Salvador, Secrétaire Exécutif

### *Management of the Agreement*

1. As of April 2023, there are 24 State Parties to the Agreement.
2. A proposal for the extension of the ACCOBAMS to cover the Atlantic EEZ of Spain and Portugal was adopted by the MOP4. By April 2023, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Italy, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain and Ukraine deposited their instrument of acceptance with the Depositary.
3. The 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS was held in Malta from 29<sup>th</sup> November to 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2022. The Meeting appointed representatives of Malta (Chair), Bulgaria, Lebanon, Montenegro and Portugal, as Bureau Members for the triennium 2023-2025.
4. The [15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee](#) will be held on May 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> in Tunis, Tunisia.

### *Conservation Actions*

#### a. Improve knowledge about the state of cetaceans

1. On the main objective of improving the knowledge about cetacean population estimates and distribution, the “ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative” (ASI) developed from 2017 to 2022 is a significant achievement for ACCOBAMS, and its importance has been widely recognized for the effective conservation of cetaceans. The ASI provided the means to create the first ever baseline framework to sustain future assessments of cetacean populations trends. ACCOBAMS Parties consider of utmost importance all efforts aiming at sustaining regular monitoring campaigns at a macroregional scale.
2. As ACCOBAMS Parties have acknowledged the crucial need to replicate ASI initiative over time, there has been a thorough reflection on how to turn the ASI into an embedded monitoring program within ACCOBAMS since 2021. Recommendations issued from the ASI technical workshop “Moving from Science to Conservation” (Online, October 2021) inspired the Scientific Committee to formulate a recommendation on regular monitoring efforts in the ACCOBAMS region. This recommendation, alongside with sustainability-related studies conducted during the ASI project, led to the adoption, at the Eighth Meeting of the Parties (MOP8, Malta, 28 November - 2 December 2022), of [Resolution 8.10](#) on the ACCOBAMS Long-Term Monitoring Program (LTMP). Building on the outcomes of the ASI, this LTMP aims at regularly replicating basin-wide monitoring campaigns, responding not only to the regional environmental policy context, but also to the monitoring obligations and needs of the ACCOBAMS Parties.
3. ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.10 reflects the agreement reached at MOP8 in order to prepare for, and to properly finance the next monitoring campaign, requesting the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat, in conjunction with the ASI Steering Committee and other experts, to work on a project proposal for the next synoptic basin-wide survey. Such proposal includes the assistance to ACCOBAMS countries in identifying resources and capacities, both financial and in-kind, and to support the ACCOBAMS Secretariat in identifying external funding in support of the next synoptic basin-wide survey in the ACCOBAMS Area in 2024-2026.
4. On the subject of Conservation Management Plans (CMP), 4 CMPs are in the process of being finalised - Fin whale, Risso's dolphin, Bottlenose dolphin & Common dolphin. An ACCOBAMS experts' workshops on Bottlenose / Common dolphin CMP took place in



Monaco 7-9 March 2022. Scientists involved in the relevant research in the Mediterranean were invited to collaborate on a final draft CMP for Bottlenose dolphin and a final draft CMP for Common dolphin.

5. In relation to strandings, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat organized several trainings on necropsies, following the best practices towards the investigation of causes of death including incidental catches during fishing operations (bycatch) and marine litter ingestion, entanglement, but also impacts caused by noise, ship strikes and infectious diseases – “Best Practices on cetacean post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling resulted from the harmonization process in ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS”.
6. In 2021, a 2-days online marine mammal *post-mortem* investigation webinar was organised using a videoconferencing system (28-29 June 2021). Late September and then late October, online demonstrations on necropsies were held in real time from Liege and Padua, respectively. Until November 2021 online asynchronous lessons were released from both Liege and Padua Universities.
7. In 2022, two face-to-face trainings on marine mammal *postmortem* were organized. The first one in Padova, Italy, 22-24 February 2022; the second in Liege, Belgium, 22-24 March 2022; and the third held online, 12-14 July 2022 (Liege University).
8. The establishment of an ACCOBAMS expert panel on strandings to assist with emergencies and unusual mortality events - Task Force - was agreed by the MOP8 as means to strengthen national stranding networks and a more effective collaboration amongst ACCOBAMS Parties. Moreover, thanks to the collaboration between ACCOBAMS and Liege University, an initiative to implement telenecropsies in Morocco is ongoing in order to better assist experts in case of unusual mortality events.
  - b. Reduce human pressures on cetaceans
9. On the issue of unwanted interactions with fisheries, the most critical matter is the high bycatch rates of harbour porpoise in the Black Sea, which is estimated to be among the highest worldwide according to most recent studies. [Resolution 8.16](#) adopted at MOP8 calls for immediate action by relevant authorities towards applying measures aiming at reducing bycatch rates. An Emergency Task Force of Black Sea is to be convened joining the ACCOBAMS Parties of the Black Sea, the European Commission, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and the Scientific Committee, the GFCM and the Secretariat of the Black Sea Commission, in order to identify and implement the best fishing management measures.
10. In the Mediterranean there is growing concern about the use of illegal driftnets in face of the many entanglement cases of large whales which were reported in recent years. [Resolution 8.9](#) adopted by MOP8 highlights the fact that the different international, regional and national tools which were adopted in order to regulate and control the use of drift nets are based on different definitions of these fishing gears. ACCOBAMS Parties instructed the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, in collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, to continue liaising with relevant regional fisheries management organizations in order to provide a common definition based on the technical characteristics of drift nets that pose a major threat to cetacean, whilst reporting on developments to the Ninth Meeting of Parties, planned for 2025.
11. On anthropogenic noise, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat is involved in a EU-funded project – QUIETSEAS - ”Assisting (sub)regional cooperation for the practical implementation of the MSFD second cycle by providing methods and tools for D11 (underwater noise)”.

12. Workshops with the Joint Noise Working Group were organized in January 2020 and February 2022, respectively, in the framework of QuietMed2 project regarding a proposal for a candidate indicator on impulsive noise in the Mediterranean region, and of QuietSeas project, in order to support the implementation of the TGNoise framework methodology, and the establishment of noise threshold values in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region.
13. ACCOBAMS works in close cooperation with UNEP/MAP on the implementation of IMAF Ecological Objective 11 – Energy including Underwater Noise – and on its two candidate common indicators.
14. With regard to cetacean watching, a study aimed at identifying hotspots of WW activities in the ACCOBAMS area was conducted under the guidance of the Whale Watching Working Group, based on questionnaires circulated to data collection partners in each country. The respective report was presented at MOP8 ([document ACCOBAMS-MOP8/2022/Inf48](#)), while guidelines on the management of cetacean watching activities in the ACCOBAMS Area were endorsed by MOP8 through [Resolution 8.19](#).
15. On marine litter, a study on interaction hotspots between cetaceans and marine litter in the ACCOBAMS Area will be released in 2023.
16. Regarding chemical & biological pollution, a bibliographic review on the impact of chemical pollution on cetaceans and Guidelines on best practices to assess the impact of chemical pollution on cetaceans will be released in 2023.

c. Improve Communication, Awareness and Capacity-Building

17. The ACCOBAMS Communication Strategy adopted by MOP8 is considered decisive to improve ACCOBAMS prominence as an effective cooperation mechanism and as a relevant partner to other organisations, projects and initiatives with common or similar goals and concerns, while strengthening ACCOBAMS visibility and reputation. One of its major objectives is to increase awareness about the role of ACCOBAMS, of its relevance in the global context of marine biodiversity conservation, and on the need to improve the biological status of cetacean populations in its geographical area.

d. Enhance effective conservation of cetacean critical habitats

18. In relation to protected areas for cetaceans, ACCOBAMS is pursuing the identification work of new Cetacean Critical Habitats – CCH - in the ACCOBAMS area, in order to propose appropriate threat-based management or spatial management measures. The identification process is based on the overlapping of areas of interest for marine mammals (IMMAs) and existing anthropogenic pressures posed to the different cetacean species in the ACCOBAMS geographical area.

## Report from ASCOBANS to IWC SC69A by Mark Simmonds

This report provides an update on progress made on activities undertaken within the framework of the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS) since the IWC SC68D in 2022.

### *Meeting and workshops:*

- Second Workshop on Management of MPAs for Small Cetaceans, from 31 May to 2 June 2022 in Helsinki, Finland. The purposes of the workshop, building on the results from the first workshop, were to: (1) Continue to develop and discuss examples of SMART conservation objectives for small cetacean MPAs, including Natura 2000 sites, by refining and adding to the results of the first workshop in order to arrive at a more complete list; and (2) Continue to develop and discuss examples of ambitious and innovative practical conservation measures for small cetacean MPAs, including Natura 2000 sites, building on the results from the first workshop. The aim was for this to lead to a more complete and concrete toolbox of conservation measures for small cetacean MPAs (including Natura 2000 sites), and to also consider the challenges presented by climate change. The report will be posted online once available.
- 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee (AC27), 28-30 September 2022, online. For the meeting, Parties reported on the following pressures and threats to small cetaceans: bycatch, resource depletion, marine debris, surveys and research, and use of stranding records.

The meeting considered a report from the Joint Bycatch Working Group of ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS, and agreed on the following recommendation related to the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise: “Relevant Parties are strongly urged to ensure as a matter of urgency, that their Navy acousticians engage with porpoise acousticians, pinger manufacturers and other relevant experts at a technical level to work on solutions to enable critical porpoise protection measures to be implemented before the population goes extinct” (ASCOBANS/AC27Rec1).

In relation to prey depletion and the ensuing consequences, especially for small cetaceans, the Resource Depletion Working Group report noted a need for further definition of prey depletion, including consideration of prey quality and reference points, which could be done in collaboration with ICES. Regarding strandings, the importance of stranding networks was discussed, and the need for an online strandings data repository was echoed by many participants. A technical workshop was agreed to be organised to take this initiative further.

The Nord Stream gas leak became a topic requiring urgent consideration, and a Working Group was established to synthesize information on impacts and monitoring. The Advisory Committee also decided to establish a Working Group to provide guidance on the best ways to mitigate impacts of rapid increase in recreational speed crafts. Concerns over rapid development of offshore renewable energy construction and its impacts on small cetaceans also arose as an urgent action item, especially in the Baltic region where many countries were rapidly moving towards wind power, some in proximity or even inside of MPAs. A Working Group was established to review the issue. The meeting agreed on 18 Action Points and Recommendations in its Scientific Session. The meeting report is available here.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Common Dolphin Group, 15-16 November 2022, online. The meeting discussed progress in implementation of the *Species Action Plan for the North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin*, and a number of other topics feeding into that progress. Presentations were delivered e.g., on population dynamics, strandings, UK environmental legislation, SCANS-IV, ObSERVE, aerial survey monitoring in France, and updated abundance estimate. Several presentations were given under agenda item ‘Update on any hazardous substances, causes of

mortality, health status, nutritional status, diet or life history analysis'. Recommendations from the meeting are available [online](#).

- 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the North Sea Group, 14-15 February 2023, online. The meeting discussed key priorities, such as the implementation of existing bycatch regulations and investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on harbour porpoises; and heard about e.g. exploration regarding the potential tagging of harbour porpoises in the Dutch North Sea. The meeting also discussed a draft revision of the *Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea*. Priority Recommendations and the meeting report will be made available [online](#) in due course.
- 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Jastarnia Group, 20-22 March 2023, online. The meeting reviewed progress in implementing the *Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises* (Jastarnia Plan) and the *Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat* (WBBK Plan); learned about complementary initiatives, including at HELCOM; was briefed about the EU Action Plan on protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries; and heard about recent research on bird flu in harbour porpoises. The Action Points and the meeting report will be posted [online](#) in due course.

In addition to the ongoing work and the above-mentioned species working groups, Intersessional Working Groups have been established on the following topics:

- Offshore Renewable Energy WG: the group aims to develop a report considering the possible impacts of marine renewable energy and appropriate mitigations. The report would be submitted to AC28.
- Cetacean-friendly MSP: the group aims to elaborate on how to best develop guidelines for cetacean-friendly marine spatial plans. Consultation round is planned to take place during 2023.

#### *Upcoming meetings and workshops:*

- Marine Debris Workshop: New and Emerging Aspects, 15 April 2023, O Grove Galicia, Spain. Jointly organized by ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS.
- Workshop on Scoping the Development of a European Marine Strandings Database, 16 April 2023, O Grove, Galicia, Spain. Organized as part of the ECS Conference.
- Workshop on Current Cetacean Bycatch Issues in European Waters, 17 April 2023, O Grove, Galicia, Spain. Jointly organized by ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS, as part of the ECS Conference.
- Expert workshop to recommend small cetacean conservation objectives in relation to anthropogenic removals, 16-17 May 2023, Bonn, Germany.
- 28<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Advisory Committee (AC28), 26-28 September 2023, venue to be confirmed.
- CMS-IWC Workshop 2 on the Role of Cetaceans in the Ecosystem, 14-16 November 2023, in Bonn, Germany.

## **Report from the 2022 activities in ICES by Tore Haug**

Institute of Marine Research, Tromsø, Norway

### *ICES WGMME*

The ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME) met online during 7–10 February 2022 to address five terms of references (ToR).

Under the first of these, ToR A, new information on cetacean (and seal) population abundance, distribution, population/stock structure, was reviewed, including information on vagrant marine mammal species. This was done to ensure the recording of possible range changes in marine mammal species in the future. For cetaceans, an update was given for the different species, providing for a latest estimate for all species studies. In the group report, particular attention was given to the updating of information from Canadian and US waters, and together with those countries, latest estimates for cetacean species were provided.

Unlike earlier reports, cetacean (and seal) management frameworks in the North Atlantic were discussed under ToR B, where an overview was given including local management frameworks and regional conventions regarding marine mammals. Also, implications of the new US Marine Mammal Protection Act import provisions rule were examined.

ToR C provides an overview of new published information with regards to anthropogenic threats to marine mammal populations following on from the review by WGMME in 2015 and subsequent updates. These are considered under the following headings: cumulative effects, fishery interactions, chemical pollution, marine debris, underwater noise, ship strikes and other physical trauma, tourism, and climate change.

ToR D is a collaboration with ICES WGBIODIV to identify foraging areas and estimate prey consumption by harbour and grey seals and harbour porpoises in the North Sea case study area. WGBIODIV plans to further develop multi-species models in the North Sea including large predators and needs information on diet preference for the different species. Based on WGMME 2021, caveats and limitations that may affect the use of these data are explained and were obtained to pilot sample datasets to illustrate the available data. There is a need for comparative studies to calibrate the estimates derived from these different methods and develop new methods such as the use of DNA. The group expects shifts in the diet of marine top predators and therefore the necessity to ameliorate methods to study this. A workshop on diet studies to be held in association with other relevant bodies in 2023 is suggested to ensure comparable methods are used.

ToR E is in collaboration with ICES WGBYC to contribute to the Roadmap for ICES PETS bycatch advice. This is done by reviewing aspects of marine mammal-fishery interactions which are not fully covered by WGBYC (notably strandings) on marine mammals. The results of the questionnaire held in 2021 were presented, reviewing the benefits and limitations for using strandings to determine bycatch rates, how best procedures can be improved, whilst identifying the need for better reporting of strandings of seals across the region. The group suggests to (i) develop a best-practice manual or framework on marine mammal strandings to inform bycatch assessment. This could be published as a CRR; (ii) to develop a data call and database for such data; and (iii) to organize a workshop or workshops to develop (i) and (ii) above.

### *ICES WGBYC*

The Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) had a hybrid meeting (La Rochelle, France and by correspondence) on 26-30 September 2022.

The Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) was established in 2007 and collates and analyses information from across the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent sea areas (Baltic, Mediterranean and Black Seas) related to the bycatch in commercial fishing operations of protected and sensitive species including marine mammals, seabirds, turtles and sensitive fish species. WGBYC seeks to describe and improve understanding of the likely impacts of fishing activities on affected populations, to inform on the suitability of existing at-sea monitoring programmes for assessing sensitive species bycatch, and to collate information on bycatch mitigation efforts. In 2022, the WGBYC hybrid meeting addressed seven Terms of Reference (ToR).

The group report provides an overview of data collection activities during 2021 including details of reported monitoring and fishing effort data, and bycatch records that were submitted to the WGBYC database in 2022 following a formal data call. Data were requested from 17 of the 20 ICES countries, six EU Mediterranean countries and two EU Black Sea countries. Twenty-four of the 25 contacted countries submitted data.

WGBYC developed a new approach for evaluating and assessing bycatch across the full range of relevant taxa by considering a range of criteria, including data quality, within group expertise and the existence of management/conservation objectives. Preliminary results based on a selection of 35 Ecoregion/species/métier level 4 combinations indicated that just 9 had low monitoring bias and also highlighted that clear conservation objectives are generally lacking for most species and areas. This approach will be further developed by WGBYC to underpin the requirements of the agreement between ICES and DGMARE for the provision of annual advice on by-catch.

WGBYC provided qualitative information for several species/populations of marine mammals, seabirds, turtles and fish, that are currently considered to be at significant risk due to fisheries bycatch, but because of their rarity are not well represented in existing fisheries monitoring datasets. A risk-based approach to highlight monitoring gaps and inform coordinated sampling designs was further developed and provided useful insights into which métiers may be under-sampled by existing at-sea data collection programmes with respect to sensitive species bycatch.

WGBYC prepared tables and plots describing data reporting in 2021, multi-annual bycatch rates and trends in fishing effort, to contribute to the 2022 recurrent and fisheries overviews advice drafting process.

### *ICES ASC*

Because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the 2022 ICES Annual Science Conference (ASC) was held as a hybrid conference 19-22 September 2022 where the physical part was in Dublin, Ireland. The conference included no particular theme session devoted entirely to marine mammals, but also some other sessions were designed with marine mammals included as an integral part. The ASC conference in 2023 will also be a hybrid conference with the physical part allocated to Bilbao, Spain. More information is available at the ICES web site: <https://www.ices.dk/events/asc/2023/Pages/default.aspx>

## **Cooperation with IMO 2022-2023 by Russell Leaper**

The Secretariat and members of the Committee have continued to work with IMO particularly on underwater noise and ship strikes.

### *Underwater noise*

The IMO established a correspondence group in 2022, coordinated by Canada, to work on updating the IMO guidelines on reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life, and identification of next steps. IWC contributed to the correspondence group which submitted its report to the IMO Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Construction (SDC) which had its 9<sup>th</sup> meeting in January 2023. The IWC Secretariat and Leaper participated in the SDC9 meeting which agreed revised guidelines and continued the work of the correspondence group on next steps. This group will report back to SDC 10 in early 2023. IWC is a member of the correspondence group. The revised guidelines will be formally considered for adoption at the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 80) meeting in July 2023.

The IWC Secretariat (Campbell) and Leaper also met with the IMO Secretariat to discuss the IMO GloNoise project. The objective of the project is to establish a global partnership to engage and assist developing countries to raise awareness, build capacity, define baselines and promote international policy dialogue on mitigation of underwater noise from shipping. The specific objective of the GloNoise Partnership is to create a partnership of Lead Pilot Countries (LPCs) and support them, via engagement with IMO, private sector and strategic partners from developed countries, to tackle the major environmental issue of underwater noise pollution from shipping sector. IWC sent a letter of support and will continue to engage with the project.

### *Ship strikes*

France, Monaco, Spain and Italy submitted a paper to MEPC 79 in December 2022 on ‘Designation of a particular sensitive sea area (PSSA) in the North-Western Mediterranean Sea to protect cetaceans from international shipping’ (MEPC79/10). The MEPC supported the proposal and noted that the establishment of the PSSA was justified owing to the concentration of protected marine mammals in this area, and that maritime traffic had been identified by the scientific community as one of the main threats to these populations. The MEPC also suggested that the co-sponsors could be encouraged to share data generated under these efforts with the IWC. The next steps are for the co-sponsors to further develop the proposed associated protective measures and to submit these for consideration at the IMO Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue (NCSR) which meets 10-19 May 2023. The IWC Secretariat and HIM convenor (Leaper) attended the MEPC 79 meeting and had follow up meetings with the co-sponsors to provide advice related to the proposed measures to reduce ship strikes.

## Scientific Committee of Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (2019-2022) by Nat Kelly (Australia)

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### *IWC-SC/SC-CAMLR observers and format of this report*

The last time appointed observer(s) were active between Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC-SC) and the Scientific Committee of CCAMLR (SC-CAMLR) was 2016 (Rohan Currey). Nat Kelly was appointed as IWC-SC's observer to SC-CAMLR during its annual meeting in 2022 ([IWC 2023](#), item 4.5), and was also appointed SC-CAMLR's observer to IWC-SC during its annual meeting in 2022 ([SC-CAMLR 2022](#), para 10.12).

This report summarises the activities of SC-CAMLR likely to be of interest to IWC-SC for the years 2019-2022, and has a similar structure and range of topics to those written by observers to SC-CAMLR in the past. ***There is a request feedback from members of IWC-SC for improvements and additions to the structure and content of this report.*** As outlined in paper Cavanagh et al. (2022), it would be beneficial to both SCs to develop a structure for information exchange reports between SC-CAMLR and IWC-SC, to specifically address topics of common interest. Please refer to Cavanagh et al. (2022) for other recommendations/suggested actions to facilitate more collaboration between IWC-SC and SC-CAMLR (note: Cavanagh et al. 2022 was provided as SC/68D/ForInfo/83).

### *CCAMLR/SC-CAMLR*

CCAMLR meets every year, and its next meeting will be late October/early November 2023, and is always in Hobart, Tasmania. The SC-CAMLR meets every year, also in Hobart, Tasmania, immediately preceding the annual CCAMLR meeting. Detailed information about SC-CAMLR can be found [here](#).

The current Chair of SC-CAMLR is Dirk Welsford (Australia), the Senior Vice-Chair is Fokje Schaafsma (Netherlands) and Junior Vice-Chair is Andrew Lowther (Norway). (Noting that Vice-Chairs do not necessarily move on to become Chairs.) The reports of the annual meetings of the SC-CAMLR can be found on the CCAMLR's website, [including the report of the 2022 SC-CAMLR meeting](#). The previous two meetings of the SC-CAMLR in [2020-2021](#) have been held online, so the associated meeting reports were more summarised compared to the format followed in earlier years.

### *SC-CAMLR Structure*

SC-CAMLR is comprised of several work groups, which are roughly equivalent in relationship to SC-CAMLR as the IWC-SC subcommittees are to IWC-SC. SC-CAMLR reviewed the terms of reference for the Working Groups in 2022 ([SC-CAMLR 2022](#), Annex 11), and see table below for a summary of their purpose.

Working Group	Summary, provides advice on:
WG- Acoustic Survey and Analysis Methods ( <a href="#">ASAM</a> )	hydro-acoustic methods and protocols, including survey design and methods for estimating biomass. Convened annually, hosted by Member.
WG- Statistics, Assessments and Modelling ( <a href="#">SAM</a> )	quantitative methods, including stock assessment methods, modelling, research plans and survey design. Convened annually, hosted by Member.
WG- Ecosystem Monitoring and Management ( <a href="#">EMM</a> )	understanding ecological relationships within krill-centric ecosystems in the context of managing fisheries. Coordinates implementation of the CCAMLR Ecosystem Monitoring Programme (CEMP). Convened annually, hosted by Member.



WG- Fish Stock Assessment ( <u>FSA</u> )	status and management of fish stocks. Convened annually in Hobart, Tasmania.
WG-Incidental Mortality Associated with Fishing ( <u>IMAF</u> )	the level and significance of direct impacts of interactions and incidental mortality of marine mammals and seabirds associated with fishing, including mitigation, reporting. Convened when needed.

News items from 2019-2020

#### *SC-CAMLR Symposium*

In early 2022, SC-CAMLR held an online symposium to discuss its workplan, and to propose long-term priorities and strategies to inform the development of the next five-year strategic plan of the Scientific Committee (2023–2027). A summary of the symposium, including specific reference to the importance of collaboration between IWC-SC and SC-CAMLR, can be found in SC-CAMLR (2022; Annex 4).

#### *Revised krill fishery management approach*

The process of developing the revised krill fishery management strategy has been a major focus of SC-CAMLR over the past few years, since the ‘three component’ approach was endorsed by CCAMLR (CCAMLR-38 (2019), Paragraph 5.17). More details on the revised krill fishery management approach can be found in SC-CAMLR (2022; paragraphs 3.2-3.69) and CCAMLR (2022; paragraphs 4.8-4.21), and summarised for IWC-SC in SC/69A/EMxx.

#### *Collaboration on whale incidental mortality in the krill fishery*

In response to a report of the incidental mortality of juvenile humpback whales in the Antarctic krill trawl fishery in Subareas 48.1 and 48.2, SC-CAMLR reconvened the WG-IMAF and reached out to IWC-SC for to help better understand potential reasons for these bycatch events and to avoid them in the future. An IWC-SC intersessional group on whale entrapment in the krill fishery was formed, and a subsequent report developed, see Leaper et al (2022). This report was reviewed by WG-IMAF in October 2022, which requested further assistance from IWC-SC. See paper SC/69A/HIM/06 for further details.

#### *Krill observer workshop*

A krill observer workshop is planned for July 2023, to be held in Shanghai, China, with the aim to provide a forum for discussion of biological data collection protocols to ensure that data collected are appropriate for the further developments of the revised krill management approach, as well as any other monitoring of the fishery that may be required from observers. The workshop will also include discussion on data collection requirements for marine mammal interactions and sampling (see SC-CAMLR (2022; paragraphs 3.12-3.15) for more details).

#### *CEMP Review*

The CCAMLR Ecosystem Monitoring Programme (CEMP) was established in 1985 with the aim to: a) detect and record significant changes in critical components of the ecosystem, to serve as a basis for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources; and b) to distinguish between changes due to the harvesting of commercial species and changes due to environmental variability, both physical and biological (SC-CAMLR 1985). Discussions around CEMP, including the krill predators considered, and the various parameters measured, is on-going (SC-CAMLR 2002, paragraphs 4.31-4.39). A review of CEMP is planned over the 2023-2024 period, starting with a discussion scheduled at the upcoming WG-EMM meeting in July 2023 (SC-CAMLR 2022, paragraphs 3.40-3.42). The review will explore

how CEMP can inform the revised krill management approach, and will include discussion of cetacean science.

#### *Climate change workshop*

There will be a virtual workshop on the integration of scientific information on climate change and ecosystem interactions throughout CCAMLR's work programme in September 2023 (SC-CAMLR 2022, Annex 10). On a related note, in 2022 SC-CAMLR agreed that climate change should be included in the revision of the Scientific Committee terms of reference for its working groups (SC-CAMLR 2022, paragraph 7.14).

#### *Krill stock hypothesis workshop*

The SCAR Krill Expert Group (SKEG) held a virtual workshop 20-24 March 2023 with the aim of developing a krill stock hypothesis for CCAMLR's Area 48 to augment the revised krill fishery management approach (SC-CAMLR 2022, paragraphs 3.26-3.29); a report is being developed.

#### *Acknowledgements*

Over the past few years, the several people have been working together to both promote and build pathways for collaboration between Scientific Committee of CCAMLR and the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission.

*Rachel Cavanagh* (BAS), *Jen Jackson* (BAS; co-chair of IWC-SC Subcommittee on other Southern Hemisphere whale stocks), *Susie Grant* (BAS), *David Agnew* (Executive Secretary, CCAMLR), *Greg Donovan* (IWC), *Helena Herr* (University of Hamburg; co-chair of IWC-SC Subcommittee on In-depth Assessments), *Rebecca Lent* (Executive Secretary, IWC), *Bettina Meyer* (AWI), *Steve Parker* (Science Manager, CCAMLR), *Elisa Seyboth* (Cape Peninsula University of Cape Town), *Iain Staniland* (Head of Science, IWC), *Dirk Welsford* (AAD; Chair of SC-CAMLR), *Lihini Weragoda* (AAD) and *Alex Zerbini* (NOAA, Chair of IWC-SC).

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## Report on IUCN activities 2022-2023 by Gill Braulik, Gianna Minton, Barbara Taylor, Grant Abel, Frank Cipriano, Simone Panigada and Randall Reeves

IUCN has continued to be directly involved in cetacean research and conservation in several main work streams relevant to the IWC: (i) for the past half-century, activities undertaken under the aegis of the Species Survival Commission's Cetacean Specialist Group [CSG], which notably includes overseeing Red List assessments, (ii) since 2013, the Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, convened jointly under the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas and the Species Survival Commission, and (iii) since 2019 the Integrated Conservation Planning for Cetaceans (ICPC) group within the CSG has been active in initiating projects for some of the most threatened small cetaceans. Note that a fourth work stream involving independent scientific review panels to advise on western gray whale conservation ended in March 2022. Progress on the three ongoing work streams since SC/68D is summarized briefly below. More information can be found on the Cetacean Specialist Group web site ([iucn-csg.org](https://iucn-csg.org)) and the Important Marine Mammal Areas web site (<https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/immas/>).

### *Red List Assessments*

Barbara Taylor serves as the Red List Authority Coordinator for cetaceans, and she is regularly assisted in this work by Gill Braulik and Gianna Minton (Deputy Chairs of the Cetacean Specialist Group), Randall Reeves (CSG Chair) and other members of the Cetacean Red List Authority (for more information on membership see <https://iucn-csg.org/key-positions/>).

### New or updated assessments published in 2022-2023

IUCN published two Red List updates in 2022 – 2022-1 in July and 2022-2 in December. The new cetacean assessments reflected several recent taxonomic changes. Ramari's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon eueu*), a newly recognised species, was assessed as Data Deficient (DD) (Brownell and Pitman 2022) and True's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon mirus*) was reassessed, in the light of revised taxonomy and new information on distribution, but remains listed as Least Concern (LC) (Pitman et al. 2022). Rice's whale (*Balaenoptera ricei*), previously assessed as a Critically Endangered (CR) subpopulation of Bryde's whale (LC), is now assessed as a CR species (Rosel et al. 2022). The Indus River (*Platanista minor*) and Ganges River (*Platanista gangetica*) dolphins, both previously assessed as Endangered (EN) subspecies of the South Asian River dolphin (EN), were assessed as EN species in 2022 (Kelkar et al. 2022, Braulik et al. 2022). Finally, the text of the published vaquita assessment was updated in 2022 to reflect the changing situation and new information for that CR species. In addition to the new species assessments above, new assessments for all Mediterranean cetacean subpopulations were published which include the following threatened assessments: Mediterranean subpopulation of Risso's dolphin (EN), Gulf of Corinth subpopulation of striped dolphins (EN), Mediterranean subpopulation of striped dolphins (LC), Mediterranean subpopulation of fin whales (EN), and the Inner Mediterranean subpopulation of common dolphins (EN).

### Red List status of cetaceans

A new paper on the Red List Status of Cetaceans was accepted for publication in Conservation Biology in March 2023 and will be published shortly (submitted as a For Info doc). The paper summarises the global Red List status and extinction risk for cetaceans. The Abstract of the paper states that: one in four cetacean species (26% of 92 species) is in a threatened category (i.e., CR, EN or Vulnerable [VU]) and 11% are Near Threatened. Ten percent of cetacean species are listed as DD, and it is predicted that two or three of these species belong in a threatened category (CR, EN or VU). The proportion of cetaceans that are threatened has been increasing: 15% in 1991, 19% in 2008, rising to 26% in 2021. The assessed conservation status of 20% of species has worsened between 2008 and 2021, and only three moved into categories of lesser threat. Cetacean species with small geographic ranges were more

likely to be assigned to a threatened category than those with large ranges, and those that occur in freshwater (100% of species) and coastal (60% of species) habitats are under greatest threat. There is a global hotspot of threatened small cetaceans in Southeast Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific, in an area encompassing the Coral Triangle and extending through nearshore waters of the Bay of Bengal, northern Australia and Papua New Guinea and into the coastal waters of China.

Progress on initiative to assess threatened cetacean subpopulations for the Red List

Most cetacean species have very large distributions with multiple subpopulations that are demographically independent, and hence, could face different levels of threat and would be assigned to different listing categories. Global species distributions often span multiple countries with many stakeholders, which makes conservation planning at the species level difficult if not impossible. Therefore, effective conservation planning and action for most cetaceans is at the subpopulation level. Red List assessments have the power to stimulate needed conservation attention and it is therefore beneficial to conduct assessments of a larger number of subspecies and subpopulations than are currently listed. To support the effort of prioritizing subspecies and subpopulations for which assessments are urgently needed, in 2022 the CSG developed its criteria related to the biological and ecological importance of the units that will allow them to be prioritized for assessment (these are available here: <https://iucn-csg.org/red-listing-process/>).

### *Conservation Planning*

Barbara Taylor and Grant Abel co-chair the conservation planning component of the Cetacean Specialist Group and a section of the CSG web site is devoted to planning efforts, which focus on threatened species and populations of small cetaceans (<https://iucn-csg.org/integrated-conservation-planning-for-cetaceans-icpc/>).

Funds have been received to progress conservation objectives for several of the seven focal species of the Integrated Conservation Planning for Cetacean group (ICPC) (see the update submitted to IWC last year: SC/68D/SM/11), including Atlantic humpback dolphins, Indus river dolphins, Lahille's bottlenose dolphins and tucuxis.

An ICPC workshop was held at the Society for Marine Mammalogy Conference, July 30-31 2022 in West Palm Beach Florida, which introduced SMM members to integrated conservation planning and to resources within IUCN available to facilitate conservation planning projects.

ICPC members also organized a workshop in December 2022 on the Human Dimensions of Conservation for Small Cetaceans, sponsored by the Nuremberg Zoo. This workshop examined the role of human behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions in conservation efforts for dolphins and porpoises, reviewed current challenges and opportunities for engaging local communities and stakeholders early in the process of conservation planning. The workshop concluded that incorporating human dimensions considerations into small cetacean conservation efforts means careful attention to the role of human behaviour in causing and mitigating impacts on the animals and their environment, and that successful strategies for improved conservation of dolphins and porpoises will ultimately involve facilitating changes in human behaviour, accomplished with the help of specialists in associated disciplines.

### *Important Marine Mammal Areas*

Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara and Erich Hoyt continue to co-chair ongoing efforts of the Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force (MMPA TF) to identify Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) (see [marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-atlas](http://marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-atlas) for map). A summary of the IMMA programme and process was published in March 2022 (Tetley et al. 2022 - <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2022.841789>). The total number of IMMAs worldwide is now 209, with 30 candidate IMMAs and 152 Areas of Interest. IMMAs have now been identified in close to two-thirds of the world's oceans.

Progress with identification of Important Marine Mammal Areas through dedicated regional workshops:

The eighth IMMA workshop (Southeast Temperate and Tropical Pacific Ocean Region) took place in person (and with a small number of remote participants) in San José, Costa Rica, from 6 to 10 June 2022. The workshop led to the identification of 36 new IMMAs now published on the e-Atlas. More details and the final report are available here: <https://bit.ly/3XriNpm>.

The ninth IMMA workshop covering the Southwest Atlantic Ocean Region took place in person, with partial online attendance, in Praia do Forte, Brazil, in December 2022, and 36 candidate IMMAs are currently being reviewed for consideration as IMMAs. Results of the workshop will be reviewed and validated during 2023 and will be published on the e-Atlas in July 2023.

A further workshop that will identify candidate IMMAs in the Northeast Atlantic Ocean Region is planned in Hamburg, Germany, in May 2023. Effort is ongoing to secure funds to assess the Northwest Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico and wider Caribbean Regions, for a joint IMMA workshop in 2024.

Progress with the use of IMMAs to identify high-risk areas where human threats, such as ship strikes, should be mitigated:

IMMAs are being used by Vanguard Technologies as part of their digital ship security and planning services, and the locations of IMMAs and details on the key species that occur in them, are transmitted to ship captains worldwide.

France, Italy, Monaco and Spain have developed and supported the process for the designation of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) at a scale that includes the North-West Mediterranean Sea, Slope and Canyon IMMA, plus the eastern portion of the Pelagos Sanctuary and the Spanish Migration Corridor (SPAMI), to take into account whale population movements and distribution. Although this was not driven primarily by the IMMA its presence was key in supporting the process. The proposal was accepted 'in principle' by the IMO in December 2022 and vessel-strike mitigation tools (e.g., speed reduction and routing measures) will be proposed as part of Associated Protective Measures within the PSSA. More information on ship strikes and fin whales in the Mediterranean Sea can be found in Sèbe et al. (2023).

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