

SC/69A/WW/05/Rev1

Sub-committees/working group name:

A whale watching communications strategy – a discussion document

E.C.M. Parsons, A. Scarlett, N.A Rose, C. Smith et al.



**INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION**

Papers submitted to the IWC are produced to advance discussions within that meeting; they may be preliminary or exploratory.

It is important that if you wish to cite this paper outside the context of an IWC meeting, you notify the author at least six weeks before it is cited to ensure that it has not been superseded or found to contain errors.

A whale watching communications strategy – a discussion document¹

Audiences

A communications plan should aim at targeting one or more stakeholder audiences. The audience targeted is very much dependent upon messages to be transmitted and the communication goals and actions. The priority stakeholders for whale watching should include:

- Whale watching industry
- Whale watching naturalists (often have a scientific background)
- Potential tourists
- Tourism professionals (e.g. tourist boards, package tour companies)
- Tourism guidebook producers
- Tourism service providers (accommodation, restaurants, travel)
- Coastal communities hosting whale watching
- Policy makers (national and local)
- UN entities and intergovernmental organizations
- Donors and foundations
- Media and journalists (especially for relevant niche markets e.g. wildlife and travel magazines)
- Local and indigenous knowledge holders
- General public
- The next generation (children, students at all levels, early career scientists)

Communication Activities

Webpages

Searches on the internet are the main way in which humans gain information today. Google (which accounts for 98% of search engine traffic) conducts 5.6 billion searches for inputted terms per day or 63,000 searches per second. Therefore, having a webpage is an important platform for sharing information.

However, simply having a website does not necessarily mean the information contained in that website will be transmitted to key audiences. Ninety percent of the public click on the first website that appears on their search and a poorly designed, or infrequently used website will quickly plummet down the search rankings for a topic. The look and design of a website also plays a major role in how the public perceives the information contained within. Seventy-five percent of website users admit to making judgements on an organization's credibility based on the look and design of their website.² Moreover, 38% of people will stop engaging with a website if the content or layout are unattractive and, furthermore, 39% will stop engaging with a website if the website takes too long to load. Thus, website design is a very important consideration.

¹ Prepared by Absolutely Smashing Events and Consulting llc

² <https://www.graffiti9.com/blog/website-importance-stats/>

Unfortunately, “if you will build it, they will come” is not true when it comes to building websites. The main way to gain significant traffic is to actively promote the website (perhaps on social media or in other communications) and to produce regular content that contains key terms and phrases that interested people would input into a search engine.

The IWC manages two websites with content on whale watching: The [Whalewatching Handbook](#) and the general [IWC website](#). The IT team has put major effort into promoting the whale watching handbook such that searches for “whale watching handbook” immediately takes searchers to IWC material.

A similar exercise for the general IWC website is far more difficult, technically because it covers many topics in addition to whale watching, and politically because different member governments would prioritize different topics. Work is already being undertaken to promote content on both websites and ‘drive’ audiences between them and from social media (particularly Twitter) and other communications material such as the IWC News Bulletin and relevant third parties.

There is certainly more that can be done to promote the IWC website and the SC Whale Watching Communications Strategy seeks to enhance and improve this work and increase audiences by establishing a regular flow of new/updated content on whale watching research/developments (and indeed on other issues that may be newsworthy).

In addition to the content currently on the IWC website, search term analysis should continue to be used to identify areas of whale science and management that the public is interested in. These search terms should then be used to develop accessible “factsheets” with quotes from IWC experts on the latest scientific understanding about issues.

Wikipedia

Wikipedia averages more than 18 billion page views per month, making it one of the most visited websites in the world. There are Wikipedia sites in 300 different languages, with some 46 million articles accessed by 1.4 billion unique devices every single month.³ Although, there are concerns that Wikipedia can be edited by almost anyone, the accuracy of articles is actually quite high,⁴ especially when compared to other sources of information on the internet. Importantly, Wikipedia is frequently used as a source of information by the general public, and especially students. Even in academia, Wikipedia is often the first stop for information for everyone from an undergraduate to a senior professor and, although it is not advisable to use Wikipedia as a sole source of information on any topic, it is a good starting place when conducting research.

The Wikipedia page for whale watching (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whale_watching) features near the top of Google searches on whale watching. The page is relatively detailed and the IWC is mentioned, but coverage of whale watching is rather selective. For example, Massachusetts features heavily, whereas the UK is virtually absent. Also, materials on the science behind whale watching impacts and management are lacking.

Wikipedia’s editing rules ban organisations from supplying content about themselves. This is to prevent Wikipedia from being used for PR purposes, but it has led to a Wikipedia-editing industry that is difficult to penetrate without dedicated resources. The controversial nature of whaling and vested interests adds another layer of complexity, with different sides in the whaling debate monopolizing

³ https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/wikipedia-explained-what-it-trustworthy-how-work-wikimedia-2030-a8213446.html

⁴ An estimated 80% accuracy, compared to 90-95% for actual encyclopedias.

editing of pages that relate to the IWC. The Secretariat has made several attempts to add content, with initial efforts focused on non-controversial pages and text (e.g., dates/places of Commission meetings) and even this content was removed by other editors. Editing may be easier for the whale watching topic page.

Considerable effort is required to successfully incorporate edits and some maintenance and monitoring will be required for the Wikipedia whale watching pages; however, this may be minimal once an initial posting of information has been completed. The SC WW Comms Strategy could add immense value to promotional efforts if resources could be found to edit Wikipedia pages on whale watching.

Social media

In terms of communication with various sectors of the public, a major avenue is social media. As of January 2023, there were 4.76 billion social media users around the world, equating to 59.4 percent of the total global population.⁵ Social media user numbers have over the past year, with 137 million new users, a 3% annual growth rate. The average social media user spends 15% of their waking lives on social media.

In term of potential audience, YouTube and Facebook have the most impact with 2.5 and 2.9 billion users respectively.⁶ (Table 1; Figure 1, Figure 2). Producing attractive video content for YouTube is more technically difficult, more time consuming and more expensive than Facebook, meaning that Facebook is arguably a more efficient platform to share content. Moreover, content can be actively shared to interest groups (e.g., conservation, marine biology and cetacean interest groups) on Facebook to expand audiences.

However, for specific audiences, other platforms might be strategic. For example, Instagram (2 billion users) and TikTok (1.1 billion users) are popular with younger members of the US⁷, whereas LinkedIn is popular with professionals and would be a good platform to connect with business, industry, and NGOs. Recent research by PEW Trusts found that approximately 10% of people now get their news from TikTok, with over a quarter of those under 30 getting their news from this source.⁸

Other platforms are also becoming popular. For example, Whatsapp (2 billion users) was found to be the favorite social media platform for users in one study (followed by Instagram and Facebook) with Wechat (1.3 billion users) deemed the fourth favourite platform.⁹

Whale research often generates spectacular images and videos – these could be used on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to engage audiences that the IWC would not normally reach. In addition, photographs of diverse, young cetacean scientists in the field may help to engage younger and more diverse audiences to engage with IWC content, as well as potentially help promote and inspire a new generation of cetacean scientists and managers. LinkedIn might be more appropriate for engaging with those in maritime industries, ocean technology or business.

⁵ <https://datareportal.com/social-media-users>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/>.

⁸ <https://www.theverge.com/2022/10/24/23420679/tiktok-pew-study-us-adult-news-consumption-survey-facebook-twitter>.

⁹ <https://datareportal.com/social-media-users>.

Table 1. Demographic details on the proportion of the US Population using different types of social media

	US Users	User gender	User ages	Urban vs Rural	Education	Income
Facebook	183 million	75% of women 63% of men	51% of 13–17 yrs 76% of 18–24 yrs 84% of 25–30 yrs 79% of 30–49 yrs 68% of 50–64 yrs 46% of 65+ yrs	73% of those in urban area 69% of those in suburban area 66% of those in rural area	61% of those with high school education or < 75% of those with some college 74% of those with > college	69% of those earning < \$30k 72% of those earning \$30k–74,999 74% of those earning > \$75k
Instagram	116 million	43% of women 31% of men	72% of 13–17 yrs 75% of 18–24 yrs 57% of 25–30 yrs 47% of 30–49 yrs 23% of 50–64 yrs 8% of 65+ yrs	33% of those in urban area 37% of those in suburban area 43% of those in rural area	33% of those with high school education or < 37% of those with some college 43% of those with > college	35% of those earning < \$30k 39% of those earning \$30k–74,999 42% of those earning > \$75k
Twitter	68.7 million	24% of women 21% of men	32% of 13–17 yrs 44% of 18–24 yrs 31% of 25–30 yrs 26% of 30–49 yrs 17% of 50–64 yrs 7% of 65+ yrs	26% of those in urban area 22% of those in suburban area 13% of those in rural area	13% of those with high school education or < 24% of those with some college 32% of those with > college	20% of those earning < \$30k 20% of those earning \$30k–74,999 32% of those earning > \$75k
LinkedIn	160 million	24% of women 29% of men	17% of 18–24 yrs 44% of 25–30 yrs 37% of 30–49 yrs 24% of 50–64 yrs 11% of 65+ yrs	73% of those in urban area 69% of those in suburban area 66% of those in rural area	9% of those with high school education or < 26% of those with some college 51% of those with > college	69% of those earning < \$30k 72% of those earning \$30k–74,999 74% of those earning > \$75k
Snapchat	97.55 million	24% of women 24% of men	69% of 13–17 yrs 73% of 18–24 yrs 47% of 25–30 yrs 25% of 30–49 yrs 9% of 50–64 yrs 3% of 65+ yrs	29% of those in urban area 20% of those in suburban area 20% of those in rural area	22% of those with high school education or < 29% of those with some college 20% of those with > college	27% of those earning < \$30k 26% of those earning \$30k–74,999 22% of those earning > \$75k
YouTube	183 million	78% of women 68% of men	85% of 13–17 yrs 90% of 18–24 yrs 93% of 25–30 yrs 87% of 30–49 yrs 70% of 50–64 yrs 38% of 65+ yrs	77% of those in urban area 74% of those in suburban area 64% of those in rural area	64% of those with high school education or < 79% of those with some college 80% of those with > college	68% of those earning < \$30k 75% of those earning \$30k–74,999 83% of those earning > \$75k

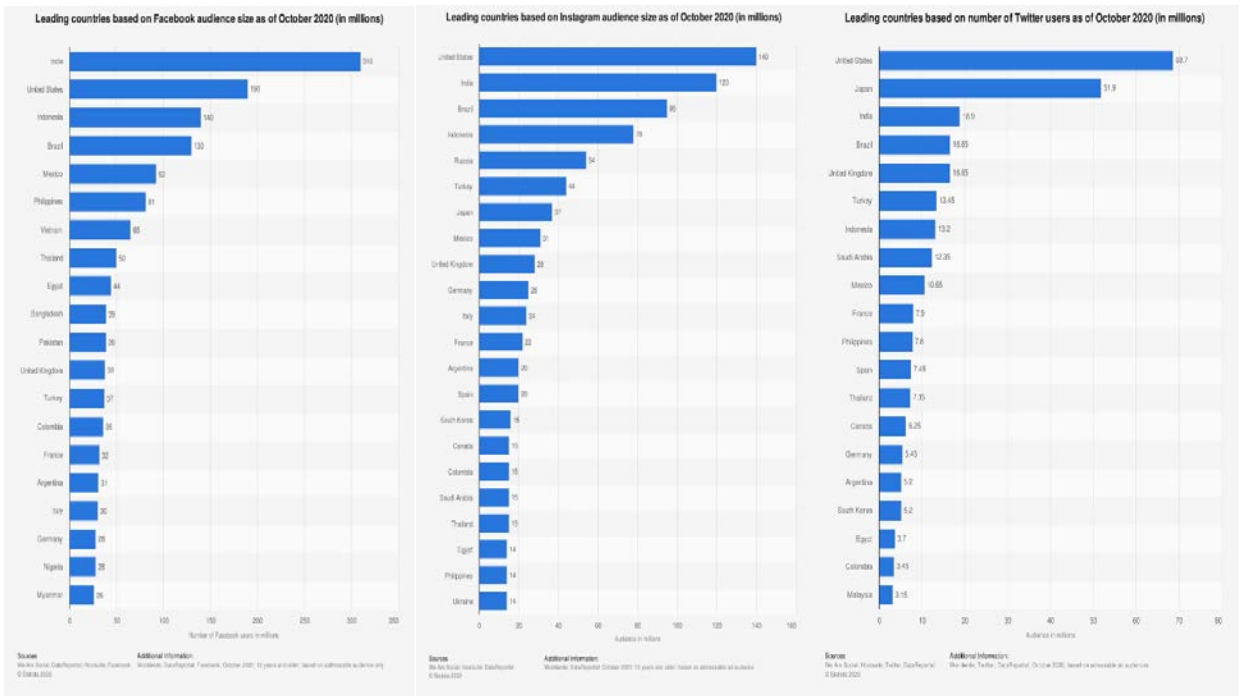


Fig. 1. An international comparison of users of Social Media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter)

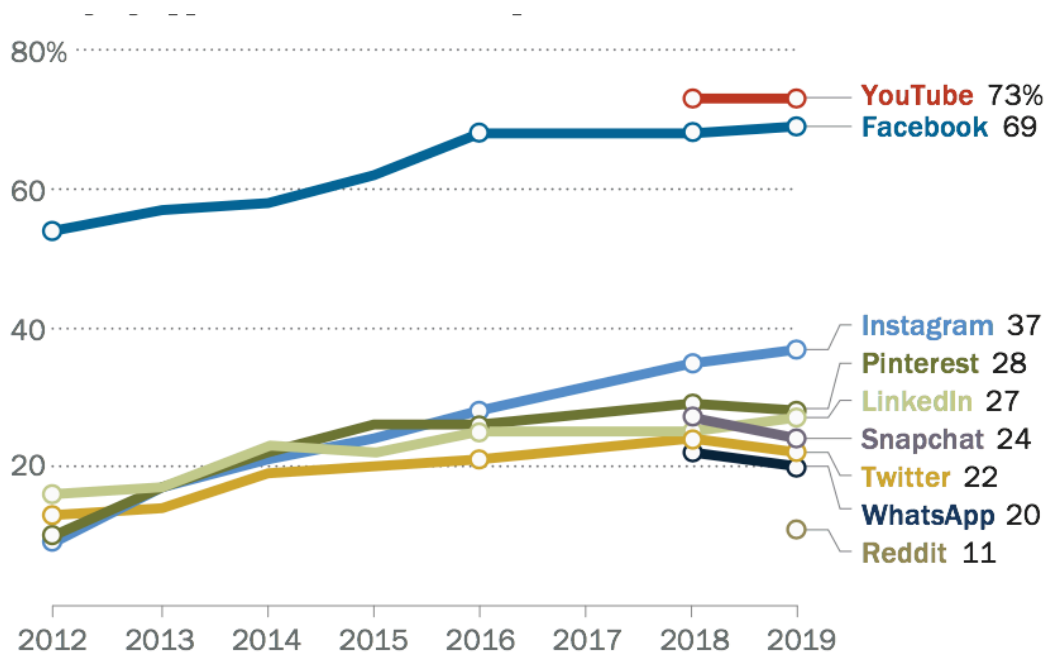


Fig. 2. Percentage of US population using different types of social media (from Pew Research Center, 2019)

In terms of potential audience, Twitter, followed by Facebook and LinkedIn, have the largest possible audiences, although the reach of Twitter is declining and that of TikTok is increasing. However, just because someone is a follower of a social media account does not necessarily mean that followers see content, as social media algorithms will “push” certain accounts to users over others. For example, pages that followers interact with will be more likely to be seen by users. Encouraging interaction requires regular, relevant content production and online conversation. As a result, actual viewer numbers and *engagements*¹⁰ may be much lower.

On Facebook, generally users see posts from groups that they are members of more frequently than pages they have liked. This means, although follower numbers for a group are often less than a page, the number of group members that see the posts (or impressions) is relatively higher.¹¹ In short, a high number of followers does not necessarily translate to having a great impact in terms of social media outreach; the better metric is having content that people want to engage with.

Social media use at the IWC:

The Commission has taken a cautious approach to social media because of the potential politicisation of content and online interactions. An IWC Twitter account was created in 2018. Twitter was selected because of the size, geographic/demographic spread of the audience, lesser resources required to manage it than other options, and (perceived or otherwise) higher ‘official news’ content than other platforms.

The IWC uses third party accounts (other IGOs and relevant interest groups) to share content on other platforms, particularly Facebook. The Secretariat is working on a plan to extend social media to create an Instagram account, again selected due to the audience size and profile, and minimal resources required to manage an account. Commission endorsement will be sought as soon as enough photographic material has been compiled/organised to ‘feed’ Instagram.

Again, the SC WW Comms Strategy could provide valuable input by sharing research, images, other news and content about whale watching that can be used to increase the regularity of posts. Using the hashtags identified in the CC WW Comms Plan (see below) is also invaluable.

The Secretariat could also share social media hashtags and “key messages” with members, containing pre-written social media posts and pictures that can be posted on personal or organizational social media accounts, shared at relevant events, meetings or alongside relevant news stories, etc.

Podcasting

Podcasts are currently one of the most effective forms of science communication, as they are: (a) widely distributed both nationally and globally; (b) relatively cheap to produce per episode (especially

¹⁰ To use social media terminology, an *impression* is the number of times a social media post appears to users, either their timeline or search results. This may be much lower than the follower number. An *engagement* is when a social media user interacts with a post – for example, sharing, liking, commenting on a post or clicking on links, images or videos in a post. Looking at the rates of engagements compared to the number of followers or number of impressions gives an idea about the level of attention the public is paying your social media. What is considered to be a good engagement rate varies by social media type - generally an engagement rate of more than 0.5% is considered to be good for Twitter, 1-2% is considered to be good for Facebook, and a little higher (1-3%) is considered to be good for Instagram.

¹¹ Engagements tend to be higher in groups too, as people follow these because they are interested in topics and will often interact with posts, adding comments and interacting with other commenters. Having a moderator who comments on posts and answers questions also increases the amount of engagement. Likewise, regular content of interest leads to a greater amount of engagement

compared to video); and, importantly, (c) they allow researchers to explain their work in their own words, rather than coming through the filter of a journalist or a publicity office. Podcasts are a popular medium for communication and outreach, as the public listen to them on their commutes, while jogging/at the gym, while travelling, or while unwinding last thing at night. Unlike printed articles, the public tends to listen to podcasts in their entirety, with studies showing that people, on average, listen to 35 minutes of a podcast, versus reading headlines or first paragraphs only for printed media. Even with video, people often watch only the first eight seconds on average.¹²

It is estimated that currently 104 million Americans, or 37% of the US population, listen to podcasts monthly, and 24%, or 68 million people, listen weekly.¹³ The audience for podcasts is more likely to be younger than 35 years of age (48% vs 37% of general population), although 20% of listeners are older than 55 (vs 23% of general population).¹ The US podcast audience has recently been growing at a rate of 10 to 20% per year.¹⁴

We propose to develop IWC podcast content to:

- (i) introduce the general public to the work of the IWC and its mission;
- (ii) keep the public informed and engaged about IWC activities, especially those related to whale watching;
- (iii) share new research on whale watching activities;
- (iv) share examples of whale watching best practices.

The IWC could produce and fund its own podcast. However, establishing a new podcast is time consuming. Not only do episodes have to be produced and edited, but it takes time and effort to build an audience.

We propose that podcast episodes be produced in partnership with an existing podcast. The IWC would pay for the production, interviewing and editing costs of an episode, while the hosting podcast distributes and deals with the technical side of the podcast production.

This would ensure that: (i) the messaging in the podcasts would be IWC-appropriate; (ii) the IWC had a degree of editorial control, rather than being a one-off guest on a podcast – generally podcasts do not give any editorial control to guests; (iii) episodes would be on topics that the IWC SC thinks are important rather than this decision being left to the show hosts; and (iv) multiple episode arcs could be produced that build upon each other, e.g. episodes that describe different aspects of whale watching science and a variety of case study examples, allowing a greater depth than a one-off guest spot.

The *Marine Mammal Science* podcast would be a natural venue for IWC podcast episodes; however, as it is geared towards practitioners of marine mammal science, episodes on innovative scientific studies on whale watching may be more relevant here. Content on *Marine Mammal Science* is essentially “preaching to the choir”, talking to a community that is already aware of whale watching issues.

To reach a wider, public audience would be better when seeking a partner podcast. For example, *Marine Conservation Happy Hour* has an audience that includes a wider array of marine ecotourism professionals, marine scientists, students, ocean enthusiasts and conservation managers and practitioners.

In addition, the IWC could approach ocean-themed podcasts for single episodes highlighting the work of the IWC, such as NOAA’s *Our Ocean* podcast, *the American Shoreline Network*, *Ocean Science Radio* and others.

¹² <https://www.richardfarrar.com/how-long-should-a-podcast-be/>

¹³ <https://www.podcastinsights.com/podcast-statistics/>

¹⁴ <https://www.convinceandconvert.com/podcast-research/the-13-critical-podcast-statistics-of-2018/>

Guests on the podcast episodes could include scientists, reputable whale watching operators, local managers and members of the IWC Scientific and Conservation Committees.

In addition, content related to whale watching tourism might be relevant for a variety of non-science podcasts that have an appeal to a broader swathe of the general public (such as surfing, sailing or travel podcasts) and the IWC could work to promote possible speakers and guests for these podcasts for one-off interviews.

Conferences and meetings

Presentations and exhibition booths at conferences or trade events are two major ways to connect with scientists or industry. However, similar to social media, the potential audience versus the actual audience that are engaging with the presented material (i.e., listening and thinking about the presentation) may be different by orders of magnitude. Nonetheless, presentations or exhibitions at such events may be “low hanging fruit” in order to communicate with two major stakeholder groups (i.e., academia and industry).

Potential scientific conferences at which projects could be presented at include:

- Society for Marine Mammalogy Meeting
- European Cetacean Society Meeting
- Latin American Aquatic Mammals meetings
- International tourism conferences

Meetings with a more NGO and policy-oriented audience include:

- Our Ocean Conference
- Capitol Hill Ocean Week
- UN Ocean Decade events

Ocean-associated and key stakeholder group meetings include:

- Blue Tech Week
- Diving Equipment and Marketing Association Show
- National Marine Educators Conference
- Our Coastal Futures
- International Ecotourism industry conferences

The types of presentations and materials would include:

- General overviews of IWC whale watching programs and activities
- Details of agreed whale watching principles and guidelines
- Details of specific case studies and best practices in the area of whale watching management and practice
- Factsheets about IWC whale watching programs and activities
- Poster presentations about IWC whale watching programs and/or specific projects
- Video presentation sat exhibitor booths about IWC whale watching programs and/or specific projects.

Some promotional material is already in circulation including poster/banners, handouts and presentations which can be downloaded and/or printed for use anywhere in the world. The support of SC members in acting as ‘ambassadors’ for IWC’s work on whale watching would be extremely valuable, as would alerting the Secretariat to events where whale watching promotion may be appropriate. Additional materials that could be prepared to be used by any IWC designate, at any meeting, include slide decks containing IWC whale watching content that could be inserted into conference presentations posters or “lightning talks” that members could take to meetings to present

on behalf of the IWC.

NGO forum

NGOs may not only have an interest in IWC whale watching activities, but they are, by their nature, specialized in advocacy and communicating with multiple audiences. A good avenue of communication, and a means of mutual knowledge-sharing, with ocean science-related NGOs would be a not only help communicate about whale science and conservation, but would make IWC activities more transparent to civil society.

It is, therefore, proposed that, working together with relevant NGOs, to produce a series of symposia, workshops, or meetings to discuss IWC whale watching-related projects, progress, and opportunities. NGOs such as IFAW, WWF and WDC have staff working specifically on whale watching and whale watching management, so briefings and workshops for these staff to inform them of the latest science and deliberations of the IWC, and to get feedback on what science, information and resources might be of use to the NGOs, would be valuable.

A similar forum with academic bodies and tourism companies interested in whale watching might be achieved in collaboration with academic tourism research groups or ecotourism/whale watching associations.

Exhibits at museums & aquariums

There are approximately 850 million visits each year to American museums.¹⁵ What is more, visitors to museums are usually doing so specifically to discover and learn, and as such you have a receptive audience for science communication. Many museums also have programs specifically tailored for school age children and, therefore, they are a good medium for informal education of younger stakeholders. Many aquariums also have similar programs, with strong educational curricula and cutting-edge exhibits that have been developed using the latest research on effective education and communication.

Developing temporary exhibits in partnership with strategic museums and aquariums could help communicate issues related to whale watching and also simultaneously aid the facilities in terms of providing new and interesting materials. Examples of locations temporary exhibits or displays could be posted include the Sant Ocean Hall of the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History and the Monterey Bay Aquarium, just to give two US-based examples. There are also many small local museums and visitor centers located in areas where whale watching is a major local industry, where posters or exhibits might be placed (e.g., Friday Harbor and Provincetown in the US, Tobermory or the Cromarty in Scotland etc.). Different facilities would have differing abilities to host temporary exhibits, but examples of temporary exhibits could include videos or posters promoting sustainable whale watching practices.

Policy-maker briefings

Policy makers are an important stakeholder group with which to connect and inform about IWC activities. Many policy makers may have whale watching activities within their constituencies and therefore ensuring the sustainability of these industries may be important to them. However, policy makers are busy and have limited time. Therefore, briefing sessions on IWC whale watching activities

¹⁵ <http://ww2.aam-us.org/about-museums/museum-facts#:~:text=There%20are%20approximately%20850%20million,number%20that%20continues%20to%20grow.>

that might be relevant to their constituents could be held with staffers and interns will be valuable. In such briefing sessions, discussion of not only the IWC whale watching activities is important, but, in particular, what whale watching does for society at large – for example its role in promoting a blue economy, provide jobs for coastal residents, or help preserve natural resources, i.e., how whale watching can aid the conservation of coastal cetaceans and underlying marine ecosystems.

Community gatherings

To communicate key messages related to sustainable whale watching, it is proposed to work with local bodies (agencies, local government or NGOs) to help facilitate community gatherings to discuss IWC whale watching activities and what they might mean for communities, in particular the opportunities that might be provided.

This facilitation would include presentation materials about sustainable whale watching and best practices, including materials from whale watching industry champions, as examples of best practice. Materials could also include guidelines for developing community meetings with stakeholder groups. For example, suggestions for activities and formats that help to break down barriers and facilitate discussion. This sort of communication may be particularly valuable for low-income countries where whale watching is developing. Therefore, it would be quite important to have materials translated into multiple languages.

It is important that these gatherings should listen to communities – for example, do they have concerns about whale watching development? Is there an issue that communities have local or indigenous knowledge of that could help projects or might pose additional unforeseen challenges?

Scientists often seek to inform - these gatherings should be seen as opportunities to inform the scientists and managers by listening to, and accepting feedback from, the communities. In addition, they are an opportunity to interact, hopefully build new partnerships, and attract new talent for projects. Guidelines for developing such meetings will help to produce activities that are productive and constructive.

Blog and magazine articles

Articles on IWC whale watching activities could be produced for a variety of platforms, including government agencies media and blogging platforms. However, for a wider audience written articles could also be produced for other platforms.

The ocean science magazine *ECO* (estuaries, coasts and oceans magazine) is an example platform. The IWC has already partnered with *ECO* magazine on a special issue on marine mammal which included an article on the whalewatching handbook. Popular ocean science blog sites such as *Southern Fried Science* and *Deep Sea News* (the two largest marine science blogs) are also less formal options.

The IWC is currently working with the *Economist* on an extended essay about IWC-related issues including whale watching, and is in the early stages of negotiating placed articles on whale watching with BBC Wildlife Magazine and sustainable travel, eco-tourism platforms.

In addition , articles could also be produced, by committee members, or via working collaboratively with science or other specialist journalists for various targeted magazines with different audiences, such as:

- Popular science magazine (e.g., Scientific American)

- Ocean and conservation NGO member magazines
- Scuba diving magazines
- Outdoor and adventure tourism magazine
- Travel and airline magazines (including Rough Guide and Lonely Planet)

IWC blog content is also another possibility. This could be a relatively fast way to produce articles of public interest and also bring people to the IWC website. Producing a blog would require a substantial investment of time (recruiting guest bloggers, editing and writing blogs) especially promoting the blog. However, once established, it could be a valuable way to communicate with the public on hot topic issues or issues of high public interest, as well as informing the public about the latest whale science and management.

Table 2. Communications activities with the audiences targeted

Audience	Website	Wikipedia	Social Media	Podcast	Conferences	NGO Forum	Museums & Aquariums	Congress. Briefings	Community Gatherings	Blogs & Magazine Articles
Policy makers	●	●	●	●	●			●	●	
UN/IGOs	●	●			●	●				
Business/Industry	●	●	●	●	●		●		●	●
Donors/Foundations	●	●	●	●						
General Public	●	●	●	●			●		●	●
Civil Society/NGOs	●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●
Aquariums/Museums	●	●					●			
Scientists	●		●	●	●	●			●	●
Other academia	●		●	●	●	●			●	●
Professional Societies	●	●			●	●				●
Early career professionals	●	●	●	●	●		●			●
Media	●	●	●	●					●	●
Local/Indigenous Knowledge Holders	●	●	●	●			●		●	●

Table 3. Potential outputs from communications projects

Audience	Social Media	Podcast	Conferences	NGO Forum	Museums & Aquariums	Congressional Briefings	Community gatherings
Tweets, Facebook posts etc	●						

Podcast episodes		●					
Presentations			●	●	●		●
Posters			●		●		
Factsheets					●	●	
Guideline documents/ Training videos							●
Meetings/ Events			●	●		●	●
Exhibits			●		●		

IWC Conservation Committee Communication Plan for Whale Watching

A Communications Plan was developed to support the launch of the Whale Watching Handbook in 2018. This is overseen by the Conservation Committee and updated annually, although the extent of each update and the activity proposed is subject to available resources.

The aims and priority audiences of each version of the plan are dictated primarily by website analytics which provide information such as popularity of sections/pages, user locations and user demographics. The most recent version prioritizes outreach to regions where use of the Handbook is low, particularly Asia, Africa and South America, and in the context of ongoing efforts to increase awareness of the French and Spanish versions. The latest version of the plan is attached at Annex A.

Scientific Committee Communication Priorities

This document contains numerous possible communication avenues for the Scientific Committee, but to conduct them all would take substantial resources and staffing. The activities should be both science-focused and complimentary to the activities of the Conservation Committee, adding value and not-competing.

However, there are some “low hanging fruit” activities that could be conducted relatively rapidly and have substantial benefits in terms of outreach.

These include:

(1) Podcast - A podcast may be a cheap and easy product that involves the least controversy. A podcast could have IWC committee members highlighting what they are doing in terms of whale watching, and disclaimers can be added easily that although it is a IWC product, the comments by the hosts and guests are not official IWC statements.

Conducting podcast interviews are now done primarily via zoom, and a silver lining to the pandemic is that most potential guests would be conversant with zoom and have computers that would allow a decent recording quality. The most technical (and time-consuming) part of podcast production is audio editing – a half hour episode can take 3-6 hours to edit and requires some technical skill.

However, there are several science podcasting networks that can sub-contract to edit episodes at a rate of just \$300-\$500 an episode (depending on length) An IWC podcast could be a high-profile, high-quality product that could be put out quickly and relatively easily.

(2) Additional content for website/handbook and website optimization – New and regular online content for potential whale watchers and the whale watching industry is important to bring visitors to the site. This new content could be new case studies, blogs and/or factsheets. Social media postings to advertise this new content on the website is important, but again this would again need to be done regularly.

Ensuring that the website is search term optimized is also very important, as the best content in the world is ultimately ineffective if the links to this content do not appear in google searches etc. In general, constant updating and analysis of the IWC website and handbook is important to assess its efficiency and effectiveness.

(3) Wikipedia – Creating a Wikipedia page for IWC whale watching should be done as a matter of priority. Wikipedia pages on whalewatching could also be edited and updated with IWC-relevant text. Care should be taken, however, to regularly monitor the page in case members of the public try to re-edit the page.

(4) Conferences and meetings – Developing a slide pack and/or a general information poster about the IWC whale watching activities, for members to take to conferences they are already attending, could be relatively low cost and efficient means of conducting outreach. However, materials presented at conferences are largely to a restricted audience, i.e., scientists/academics, unless presentations are at industry or public conferences or conventions.

(5) Articles and blogs – Writing strategic articles on the science of whale watching and the Whale watching handbooks for placement in ocean science magazines (e.g., ECO, oceanography and ocean science blogs, etc.), wildlife tourism magazine and blog platforms would be another “low hanging fruit” communications project. As the conservation committee has also highlighted this avenue for communications, there should be coordination of topics, with the articles being produced via this plan being focused on the impacts and the science behind whale watching, and targeting science-oriented blogs and publications.

(6) Social media – There are some challenges with having social media accounts for the IWC, although these are not insurmountable. One possible “low hanging fruit” might be to form a moderated facebook group on whalewatching managed by the IWC. For a moderated group, permission has to be granted for materials to be posted, therefore rules and guidelines could be easily set as to the content that could be posted without wider IWC approval (e.g., posts about scientific articles, news items from bona fide sources, or posts from agencies).

Staffing for a communication plan

Science communication is a skill and putting communications into untrained, inexperienced hands has all too frequently resulted in major communication crises. Ideally scientists who are also trained communicators should be producing communications content for the IWC to ensure that the content is accurate, appropriate for the audiences it is aimed at and, importantly, apolitical and/or non-controversial. All content is subject to scrutiny according to the Commission's Guidelines on use of the IWC website and other outreach material.

However, without dedicated staff such expertise could only be done on voluntary basis, for example if IWC member government agencies allowed staff to work on IWC communications as part of their duties – although this is likely to be limited at best, and on specific issues related to interests of member Governments. Such voluntary work may be useful to produce factsheets, one-off blogs, or single podcast episodes at best. This assumes that science staff working on single communications products have communications expertise, and vice versa.

ANNEX A

IWC Conservation Committee – Whale Watching Standing Working Group

Whale Watching Comms Plan – version 5 (comprehensive update) - 2023

Aims

- Identify key opportunities to raise awareness of IWC work on whale watching to specific, priority audiences (see table below).
- Create a regular flow of information about whale watching and the Handbook on social media, focusing on conservation and tourism platforms.
- Increase awareness/use of the Spanish and French sections of the Handbook (currently under 20% of page hits).

Key Messages (top lines which are repeated across promotional material and in conjunction with additional, more tailored messages).

- The IWC has wide-ranging expertise which it uses to support regulators, operators and the public achieve the shared goals of sustainable and educational whale watching.
- The IWC has produced an online and interactive Whale Watching Handbook, General Principles for Whale Watching and a Strategic Plan, incorporating leading scientific knowledge and management practices.
- The Whale Watching Handbook is a living and global resource containing country and species information, advice and case studies for operators and educational resources, developed in consultation with governments, scientists, industry leaders and environmental organisations around the world.

Hashtags (selected using aggregator for Twitter only as IWC doesn't currently use Instagram):

- #WhaleWatchingHandbook
- #ecotourism
- #whalewatching
- #responsibletravel
- #sustainabletravel

Funding priorities (£1.5k available from SWG WW)

- Translation of promotional material into French and Spanish, plus language(s) to reach Asian audiences.
- Short-term contract for a Wikipedia editor.

Event/activity/'news hook'	Timing	Primary Audience(s)	Detail	Comments & Evaluation
Publication of <i>IWC General Principles for Whale Watching</i>	Mar 2023	Multiple - see below All organisations in priority regions:	Letter from Exec Sec to individuals in each of the following stakeholder groups, highlighting the publication of the Guidelines, reminding them of the contents and aims of the Handbook, asking if they would like to submit Handbook content, and seeking regional 'ambassadors' willing to disseminate future promotional material about the Handbook to local orgs (operators, regulators, educators). Africa	English, French & Spanish personalised letters sent out March 23. Responses still coming and so far include suggestions for new content/research papers, names of potential regional stakeholder organisations and

		<p>IGOs with interest in sustainable WW</p> <p>NGOs that have supported/referenced the Handbook previously</p> <p>Entanglement Network member orgs</p>	<p>COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO (see below also) West Africa EcoTourism Network Launch - West Africa Eco Tourism Ecotourism Kenya</p> <p>South America Colombia: Universidad del Valle Viajes de Monte NGO Fundacion Macuaticos Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Peru: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos Universidad Cientifica del Sur Pacifico Adventures Oceanica Expeditions Chile: NGO CIFAMAC Universidad de Valparaiso NGO Panthalassa Asia: to follow</p> <p>CMS (Handbook partner) ACCOBAMS ASCOBANS SPREP SPAW IORA CPPS COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO Marine Mammal Twinning/Ocean Governance (EU)</p> <p>ORCA IFAW AWI HSI Defenders of Wildlife WDC Oceancare</p> <p>Suggested because of links with whale watching operators and their support to national entanglement response network by reporting and standing by (when feasible) entangled whales.</p>	<p>individuals to engage with, invitations to contribute to newsletters and participate in conferences, and commitments to forward info about the Handbook to operators.</p> <p>Activity tbc</p>
Publication of <i>IWC General Principles for Whale Watching</i>	Mar 2023	Eco-tourism sector – global	A second attempt to engage with orgs and companies promoting sustainable tourism, suggesting links to the Handbook are included	

			<p>on their sites, and the Handbook is highlighted where appropriate as a useful resource for travellers.</p> <p>UN World Tourism Organisation Sustainable development UNWTO</p> <p>Wanderlust Sustainable Travel BBC Wildlife Travel Planner www.responsibletravel.com www.naturetrek.co.uk https://www.travelstride.com/guide/eco-sustainable-green-travel-tours-companies www.drinkteatravel.com/choose-sustainable-tour-operator Home - The International Ecotourism Society https://www.voyageons-autrement.com Global Sustainable Tourism Council https://www.gstcouncil.org/topics/news/ https://travindy.com/ Best Places For Dolphin & Whale Watching - Friend of The Sea Federation of Community based Tourism Organizations (FECTO) One Planet network International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators</p>	<p>Joint approach with CMS proposed to engage UN orgs inc UNWTO & UNEP – details tbd</p> <p>Personalised e-mails sent March 23. Low response rate (3) so far.</p>
Publication of <i>IWC General Principles for Whale Watching</i>	Mar 2023	Specialist science and conservation media	<p>MMS podcast – i/v arranged with IWC Head of Programme Development</p> <p>SevenSeas Media</p> <p>Cetus GeoMagazine (Australia focus: we have discussed a placed article previously and could offer one linked to publication of the Guidelines)</p> <p>Earth Journalism Network</p>	<p>Podcast broadcast Mar 23 and available here.</p> <p>Article agreed for April edition</p> <p>Article scheduled for the next issue (issue 10)</p> <p>Article or interview offered to journalist sponsored by EJN to attend IWC68.</p>
Publication of <i>IWC General Principles</i>	Mar 2023	Social media with focus on conservation,	Post/request post of a short, explanatory piece and Handbook link to wide range of groups inc.	Posted/contacted with material. Mar 23

<i>for Whale Watching</i>		whale watching and eco-tourism	IWC Twitter (& IWC website) CetalFauna - Facebook Whale Watching Worldwide – Facebook Lonely Planet - Facebook	
Publication of new material in the Handbook (e.g. each time a new case study or country profile is published).	Ongoing and targeted to the region or sector that is the focus of new Handbook content.	Relevant member governments Regional environmental & tourism orgs Regional whale watching operators	tbc – depending on what new content is published and what support or resources are available to track down contacts.	
Focus on cruise industry	When resources allow	International and regional cruise companies	Specialist industry media (digital & print) – details tbc Cruise Hive Cruise Industry News Seatrade Cruise News Porthole Cruise Cruise Addicts	
Themed days (use UN and other ‘World Day of..’ as a news hook depending on opportunities available through sponsor org or more widely.	8 June 27 Sept 24 Jan 3 March =	tbc – but will be audiences relevant to: World Oceans Day World Tourism Day UNESCO International Day of Education World Wildlife Day	tbc – likely to be social media focused.	
The Economist Extended Essay	Nov 2023	Economists, policy makers, business leaders	In discussion on broader piece about relationship between whales and economics, including whale watching	Initial scoping interview, Feb 23.
tbc (see row below also)	tbc	Public with interest in conservation/e co-tourism.	Seeking placed articles, interviews or links Anthropocene BBC Wildlife Magazine	
tbc (see row above also)	tbc	tbc	Seek opportunities to offer interviews with key figures in IWC WW inc SC WW (Robert Suydam who has already been approached independently (see quotes in Hakai Magazine) and CC WW (currently vacant)	

Wikipedia	Ongoing – when resources are available	General public	Wikipedia editing rules proved impenetrable last time and the IWC voice is still absent from any content inc. on whale watching. We will need funding in order to make this happen.	
+++++				
Version 3 (last comprehensive update – 2020)				
‘Species of the week’ initiative on Twitter and IWC website.	Launched 14/4/20	General public. Children (home-schooling). IWC Twitter followers.	New, weekly webpage and Tweet featuring a ‘Species of the Week’ quiz and picture competition for children, directing people to the Handbook for quiz answers.	Complete – initiative ran for 6 weeks. Small but consistent spike in Handbook hits in 24 hours following each weekly quiz/ artwork post. 16% rise in IWC Twitter following from Wk 1 – Wk 6 (note: also several other factors inc. the rise in people at home/online).
Publication of new cetacean factsheets.	Published 15/7/20	WW guides and educators General public seeking more info on whale watching.	IWC website news item with links. Post to Cetal Fauna Facebook Group (Information sharing forum with 8.2k members).	Complete. The Handbook recorded a daily visitor increase averaging 56% during the week following publication. The factsheets section attracted the most hits of any website section with 18% More outreach is planned for the factsheets, focusing on schools and children.
Review of Handbook’s Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) in order to improve search rankings.	Ongoing.	Generic – anyone searching online for information about whale watching.	SEO Review complete. Secretariat has begun rolling programme to register/broaden SEO keywords.	Complete. SEO now has title, description and keywords in three languages which should boost rankings.

			<p>Also planning to edit Wikipedia entries related to whale watching to ensure IWC work, links and references are incorporated which will improve search rankings.</p> <p>Also investigating scope to include Handbook material on Google Scholar.</p>	<p>Wikipedia edits are underway. Hope to have completed the whale watching page by end of Nov. Update: impossible to edit internally due to Wikipedia rules. Will need to review and possibly seek funding.</p> <p>Have discussed with IT and not sure this will be feasible. Each article needs an abstract in order to feature. Unclear whether we can produce an abstract for the whole Handbook or would this have to be page by page. If anyone is familiar with workings of Google Scholar, please let me know.</p>
Improve visibility of the 'languages' tab on Handbook homepage.	As soon as resources allow.	Generic - French and Spanish speakers.	Make languages tab more prominent (incorporate flags?).	Complete. Flags now visible on all webpages.
Create YouTube demo of the Handbook.	Now – basis of the YouTube recording will be Gianna's presentation to CC Meeting.	Generic – anyone searching online for information about whale watching.	<p>Post on IWC website (home page and Whale Watching Handbook page) and Twitter, and ask CMS to do the same.</p> <p>Post to other social media platforms (see below).</p>	Complete. Published on 27/11.
Publication of each new case study and each new country profile.	Rolling programme is most realistic option – focusing on	<p>Whale watching industry.</p> <p>National governments</p>	IWC Circular reminding IWC community of the benefits of engagement with the Handbook, seeking support for promotion, and highlighting the need for Spanish and French language outreach. The	<p>Complete. Circular and multi-purpose text sent 6/11.</p> <p>3 responses as of 18/11 including</p>

	<p>each target audience individually, depending on when preparations can be put in place.</p>	<p>esp those supplying new material for the Handbook: Canada, Maldives and Chile, Denmark (Greenland), Dominica, Ecuador, Mexico.</p>	<p>Circular might include a short multi-purpose press release/article, with an appeal to all members of the IWC community to disseminate this text to their own stakeholders as widely as possible. CMS Notification to their membership as above.</p> <p>Provide a short text for governments to include in official gazettes that post whale watching requirements and regulations (Lorenzo).</p> <p>If resources are available: Approaches to travel companies known to be ‘eco-friendly’ - with the message that there is more content now for them to use to advise their target groups on how to choose responsible WW experiences.</p> <p>www.responsibletravel.com www.naturetrek.co.uk www.stridettravel.com/eco-sustainable-gree-travel-tour-companies www.drinkteatravel.com/choose-sustainable-tour-operator</p> <p>Approaches to tourism bodies in specific regions and countries (IORA, AECO others?)</p>	<p>Environment Society of Oman invite: Feb 21 – Env. Society of Oman online web event inc opening remarks and tour of Handbook.</p> <p>Complete: note to SWG members, seeking their support to insert text about the Handbook when they publish annual, national guidelines.</p> <p>Draft e-mail attached. Work through the list whenever time/opportunity allows.</p>
Non-specific				

<p>Some possible platforms and dates that might be appropriate vehicles for outreach on the Handbook. In some circumstances we may increase our impact by pairing up a platform and a date (for example a placed article in ECO Magazine on World Habitat Day).</p>	Broadcast 2/7/20	Marine mammal scientists and others with an interest in marine mammals or careers in marine science.	Marine Mammal Science podcast interview ' The Whale Watching Handbook .'	Complete – 38 min interview inc. positive/comprehensive discussion of Handbook aims, content and success so far. The MMS podcast consistently achieves top ranking for nature-themed podcasts across a wide range of countries.
	Published April/21		Publications: placed article or interview with special interest media ECO Magazine, BBC Wildlife.	
	International Day of Education Jan 24	Marine & marine science trades and industries		Complete – ECO Magazine article published Apr 21 as part of special edition on IWC.
	World Wildlife Day March 3			BBC Wildlife referred us to BBC Wildlife Travel Planner.
	International Day for Biological Diversity May 22		Events (virtual/in-person subject to Coronavirus): present, demonstrate, display banner, handout information. Geneva Forum: annual conference including Annual International Platform on Sustainable Tourism. (Free to attend if virtual in Dec 2021).	Oct 20 – presentation to UNEP SPAW CARIMAM conference.
	World Environment Day June 5			
	World Oceans Day June 8		Social Media: share any relevant news with: Cetal Fauna Marine Mammal Magazine Marine Biologist Network Conservation of Cetaceans Wildlife Workers Network International Marine Conservation Congress African Marine Mammal Research Marine Mammal Observer Association Whale Watching Guides of the World	
	World Tourism Day Sept 27			
	World Animal Day Oct 4			
	World Habitat Day Oct 7			
International Day of Education				

	Jan 24 World Wildlife Day March 3 International Day for Biological Diversity May 22 World Environmen t Day June 5 World Oceans Day 8 June			
--	---	--	--	--

ANNEX B

Podcast proposal – Sponsored episodes

Although podcasts are arguably one of the most cost-effective ways of conducting science communication, with it seeming relatively easy to record episodes, it results in many students and early career scientists being eager to volunteer to create podcasts.

However, having a podcast that is impactful, successful and is reaching a wide audience is *much more difficult* for a variety of reasons:

- The high level of existing competition is undeniably the biggest challenge for a new science podcast. The number of podcasts increased dramatically in recent years, with many new podcasts being started during the pandemic. In 2021 there were an estimated 2 million podcasts, with 525,000 of these shows being currently active.^[1] The public has already established trust and loyalty with their favorite podcast shows and familiar hosts. This leaves the majority of new science shows struggling to get traction.
- Followers and listeners take years to establish. New podcasts start with zero listeners and followers. Building an audience via podcast and social media platforms takes time and much additional effort in terms of social media campaigning, marketing and building publicity.
- A long-term commitment is required when starting a new podcast - they depend on reliable and dedicated host/s, producer/s, and editor/s. You need a long-term commitment for the podcast host especially as the audience identifies with their favorite host, and with most volunteer or hobbyist hosts, this commitment often quickly fades which jeopardizes your audience's commitment to your podcast.
- Editing is a fulltime to part time job for a podcast. There is a steep learning curve when it comes to editing. Poor editing dramatically impacts the quality and listenability of a podcast.
- Production commitment and consistency is hard to establish, especially if it is handed over to volunteers. The podcast needs to be recorded, edited, and published on a regular basis. This involves a major and continuous time commitment and for those who are not professional podcasters, this can be hard to manage.

The energy and excitement of the podcast fizzles out. There are many podcasts that have started but have then run-out of steam because it is hard work. To illustrate, of the top 26 ocean-themed podcasts on google:

- 46% have shut down;
- 27% did not produced any more than 20 episodes;
- Only 19% of these produced at least 1 episode a week and only 11% produced 2 episodes a week (and one of these shows was MCHH).

Therefore, rather than start an entirely new podcast it is suggested that it is more cost effective to sponsor episodes on an existing podcast with an ocean issue following audience.

How do sponsored episodes work?

It's proposed that weekly episodes (~20min) would be produced for the existing show *Marine Conservation Happy Hour Podcast*. These episodes will come out every Wednesday and would cover topics and content related to the IWC. The sponsored episodes will be announced with an introduction such as "this is IWC - Wednesday on the Marine Conservation Happy Hour Podcast" and in each sponsored episode would be accompanied by a text description, which will increase web search visibility. Topics would cover issues designated by the IWC with a guest. Costs include production, publication, editing, and hosting.

Four episodes a month at \$300 per episode = \$1200/month

Marketing

To increase the reach of the episodes each would be accompanied by a social media audiogram and/or video clip which would be then shared on social media.

Social Media Audiogram for each episodes = \$50 (\$400/month)

Social Media Video Podcast Clip each episodes = \$50 (\$400/month)

ANNEX C

Proposed SC Whale watching Communications Budget

Podcast	
Sponsored episodes (see Annex B)	
4/month	\$1200/month
Social media marketing	
Video/audiogram/episode/month	\$ 400/month
Blogs	
1/month (600 words and \$0.75/word)	\$ 450 per blog
Wikipedia	
Research and editing whalewatching Wikipedia page	
Initial editing	\$ 750
Maintenance/re-editing	\$ 50/month
Conferences	
Designing powerpoint presentation on whalewatching science and IWC	\$ 500
Designing poster presentation on whalewatching science and IWC	\$ 500
Content for Websites and Social media	
Writing social media content on whalewatching science (2 posts on 2+ platforms/week)	\$ 200/month
TOTAL (6 months)	
Wikipedia editing and conference content	\$ 1750
Podcasts (24 episodes/6 months)	\$ 7200
Blogs (6 months)	\$ 2700
Social media and Wikipedia maintenance (6 months)	\$ 3900
	<hr/>
	\$15550