

Update on Work Across Topics of Mutual Interest

IWC Secretariat

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides a brief update on intersessional progress made by the Conservation Committee (CC) and Scientific Committee (SC) across their common work areas since the last Joint Working group meeting in July 2022. It also includes brief updates of progress at and since the subsequent SC meetings (SC68C and D). For further background to each topic please refer to the [2022 Update document](#).

TOPICS OF MUTUAL INTEREST

Anthropogenic Underwater Noise

Scientific Committee

Resolution 2018-4 on underwater anthropogenic noise was adopted at IWC67. The Resolution called on both the SC and CC to work on aspects of underwater noise and its impacts on cetaceans and their prey, as well as mitigation and management (Resolutions CO1880 and CO1881).

Underwater Noise was considered at the International Maritime Organisations (IMO) Marine Environmental Protection Committee (MEPC) 76 in June 2021 and the IWC Secretariat submitted a short paper outlining recent IWC work on the subject and highlighted the desire to work with IMO on this issue. In particular, the IWC could contribute to the proposed outputs of raising awareness related to the available scientific evidence on the impacts of underwater vessel noise on marine ecosystems, and to the evaluation of measures to further prevent and reduce underwater radiated noise in terms of the expected benefits to cetaceans. The paper also highlighted connections between reducing underwater noise and ship strike risk associated with slower vessel speeds.

At this meeting, the IMO agreed to review the 2014 Guidelines and identify next steps. This was addressed in the Ship Design and Construction Sub-Committee (SDC 8) in January 2022 and IWC contributed a short paper (SDC 8/14/5). An outcome from this meeting was the establishment of a correspondence group (CG) to work on updating the IMO noise guidelines and identification of next steps. The Convenor of HIM, Chair of the CC Anthropogenic Underwater Noise ICG (AUN ICG) and Secretariat were on the CG and received input from SC and CC Noise group members on the areas we can contribute to most effectively. The work plan envisages that recommendations to establish international solutions for the reduction of underwater noise could be submitted to SDC9 in January and the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 80) in 2023. More details can be found [here](#).

In SC68C, an intersessional correspondence group was established on beaked whales, due to concerns over the effects of noise on this group of species. The group will develop response protocols for beaked whale strandings to ensure that the necessary datasets can be rapidly assembled to assist with the identification of the time, location and cause of the mortality event.

Conservation Committee

In 2018 the IWC Conservation Committee established a small intersessional working group to consider and propose initial steps in addressing underwater noise.

A planning meeting was held in September 2022 to develop a workplan which was subsequently endorsed at IWC68. In addition, the ICG continues to work with SC and the Secretariat to provide input to the review of the IMO underwater noise guidelines as noted above.

As part of the AUN ICG workplan, a questionnaire was developed to compile global information on marine seismic surveys for hydrocarbon exploration, including currently ongoing activities and planned activities for the next 5 years [2023-2028]. The questionnaire was submitted to SC68D and approved. The survey was distributed via Circular to all Contracting Governments, SC members and Observers in February 2023 as well as other relevant international organisations, such as the CBD, the

CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Joint Noise Working Group, CCAMLR and HELCOM for further distribution. Initial results from the survey were presented to SC 69A. The survey can be found and answered [here](#).

Bycatch Mitigation Initiative

Programme Coordination

At SC68B the Committee agreed to support the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI) work plan (2020-2024) activities. The workplan was also endorsed by the CC at its meeting in 2020. The CC re-affirmed the importance of addressing cetacean global bycatch and underscored that bycatch remains one of the priority issues for the IWC. During the intersessional period, the BMI has and will continue to focus on bycatch in gillnets and other fixed fishing gears and prioritise information gathering in currently identified and future priority pilot project locations. The SC encourages the ongoing collaboration among the BMI, RMFOs, independent researchers and NGOs. It requests that relevant NGOs and researchers contact the BMI regarding their specific geographical interests and expertise. For more information, please refer to the BMI report ([SC 69A HIM 13](#)) and the Cooperation with other Organisations report ([SC 69A O 02](#)).

At its meeting in 2020 the CC endorsed the SWG-Bycatch proposal for the allocation of existing funds to support BMI Work Plan activities in 2021 and noted the intention for possible future submissions to the Voluntary Conservation Fund (VCF) for seed funding or co-funding of pilot projects (if needed). It also encouraged wider fundraising efforts to support the full implementation of the 2020-2024 work plan activities. The IWC Secretariat is actively engaged in external fundraising, which will be essential for implementation of plans for capacity building and pilot projects. The Bycatch Coordinator will work with the Chair of the Bycatch SWG and the Chair of the VCF fund to consider applications to the VCF funding.

The Terms of Reference for the Expert Panel were updated, reviewed and agreed by the SWG in September 2021, including a procedure for rolling over membership for existing panel members willing to serve another four-year term. The panel membership is being reviewed. Expressions of interest for reappointment from existing members who have served for more than 4 years are being evaluated and a call for new members to fill expertise and geographical gaps was opened. The Secretariat encourages Contracting Governments, members of the SC and Observers to submit nominations until 15 May 2023 for members of the Expert Panel for the BMI. Particularly, candidates from (or with work experience in) Central and South America (highly desirable) and the western South Pacific are welcomed; as well as nominees with expertise in fisheries economics, social science and community engagement (highly desirable), cetacean biology and behaviour, cetacean population monitoring and assessment, fisheries science and technology, and fisheries management.

Collaboration and engagement with other international organisations on bycatch

The IWC has continued to engage with the FAO on the issue of cetacean bycatch (more details in [report to SC69A](#)). The Secretariat is working with the FAO Secretariat to promote the [FAO Technical Guidelines to prevent and reduce bycatch of marine mammals in capture fisheries](#) and update the technical information. In early 2022 the IWC was contracted to produce the content for a series of ~15 factsheets illustrating the Technical Guidelines. These were completed in September 2022 and published online on FAO's [website](#).

The IWC Secretariat has attended FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) meetings (2018, 2021, 2022), where IWC interventions were provided in relation to the need to address cetacean bycatch, and for collaborative opportunities between fisheries management organisations and the IWC. In addition, the Secretariat has participated in two FAO organised meetings with Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and Bodies and IGOs to discuss areas of cooperation and collaboration including bycatch and mitigation and management of Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing in the Indian Ocean.

The IWC Secretariat is a formal partner in the Global Environment Facility, Common Oceans Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction Programme, Tuna Project Phase 2, and a Letter of Agreement (LoA) to formalise a four-year capsule project with the IWC was signed in February 2023. This capsule project will provide funding to the Secretariat over four years to undertake gap analysis, spatial bycatch risk assessment and address other information gaps related to cetaceans and its bycatch in tuna fisheries in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific Ocean. It also aims to address the mitigation of cetacean bycatch by working collaboratively with Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), national governments, experts and the fishing industry to raise awareness of practical solutions.

The Secretariat is coordinating with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), SPREP and other partners to develop the actions planned in its capsule project. As part of this project the IOTC signed a Cooperation Agreement (CA) with IWC in March 2023, and the IWC was granted observer status to participate in Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) meetings. The establishment of the Indian Ocean Sanctuary Cetacean Monitoring Initiative within SC and/or a cross cutting Pacific group would constitute an important step to advance the understanding of cetacean populations and its threats in both ocean basins, which will be particularly useful to inform this capsule project in assessing the impact and mitigating bycatch.

Pilot projects - bycatch

The Secretariat continues to work with the Bycatch Expert Panel, the Standing Working Group on Bycatch and other collaborators on identifying and developing pilot projects for addressing bycatch; particularly in small scale fisheries using gillnets. There is a focus on proven and novel approaches to monitoring, mitigating and managing bycatch. The BMI has made particular progress towards the collaborative development of pilot project concepts in Peru, drafting the ToRs for the first instalment of the project. The focus during 2023 is to continue developing project concepts, applying for external funding, and beginning some activities with existing ‘seed funding’.

Capacity building - bycatch

The BMI has continued to develop its capacity building programme to assist countries to assess, monitor and mitigate cetacean bycatch. The Entanglement Initiative has partnered with Dr Ellen Hines in order to offer combined entanglement response and Bycatch Risk Assessment (ByRA) capacity building whenever requested. Prior to the pandemic the Bycatch Coordinator worked closely with the Entanglement Initiative and Dr Hines to develop abbreviated virtual seminars that were given to Colombia, a follow-up training in person is thought to take place in 2023. In May 2023, a remote workshop for ByRA training will be provided to scientists from the Thai Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, with seven government research stations participating. The long-term aim is to build a network of regional ByRA experts to gather data and increase capacity to assess and mitigate bycatch in each location. The Bycatch Coordinator will continue to engage with some Small Cetacean Task Teams, and proponents of CMPs in relation to how the BMI can assist in bycatch assessment and mitigation activities. In addition, the Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Phase 2 project has a specific focus on capacity building activities.

AFFILIATED PROJECTS

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

Since 2021, the IWC Secretariat has been collaborating as a beneficiary partner in the development and fundraising for the proposal “Coordinated Development and Implementation of Best Practice in Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic region” (CIBBRiNA project). The CIBBRiNA project proposal was prepared under the leadership of Anne-Marie SVOBODA (Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, The Netherlands). CIBBRiNA's aim is to work jointly with fishers, scientists, fisheries and environment ministries of thirteen European countries in the Northeast Atlantic, Baltic and Mediterranean Sea to improve knowledge on bycatches in different fisheries, to minimize bycatch of priority ETP species and to work towards science-based assessments of the impacts of bycatches on their populations. This project is a 6-year project with a substantial budget, which will also benefit from the participation of and/or collaboration with international and overseas organisations, including the IWC along with 5 fisheries Advisory Councils, ICES, HELCOM, OSPAR, EAPO and EFCA. As a beneficiary partner in the CIBBRiNA project, the IWC will work on joint solutions for incidental bycatch, as well as bringing experience and experts on this issue via its Expert Panel on Bycatch and the Scientific Committee. In March 2023, the CIBBRiNA proposal was approved by the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) and the Grant Agreement preparations have started, and the project should be able to start in September 2023. Total budget is 12.5M euro, of which between 8.3M and 9.3M euro is eligible for funding from the EC.

Marine Mammal Bycatch Risk Assessment in Chile – Lenfest Ocean Program

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

Cetaceans and Ecosystem functioning

Scientific Committee

In response to the Commission Resolution 2016-3 asking for advice on the role of cetaceans in ecosystem functioning the SC held a workshop in April 2021 to: (a) define short- and medium-term objectives to be addressed; and (b) to identify what further research is required in order to begin initial modelling of the contribution of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning. This was the first of two workshops and focused on the more general aspects of cetacean ecosystem functioning, notably: (1). nutrient circulation that includes carbon sequestration, nutrient flux, etc.; (2) ocean fertilization that includes whale pump (vertical) and whale conveyor belt (horizontal) dimensions; (3) whale falls; and (4) cetaceans as predators. The first workshop [report](#) was endorsed and the second workshop is planned for November 2023 and will consider specific issues around modelling cetacean ecosystem functioning.

Conservation Committee

In 2018, the IWC also endorsed the proposal to hold a Conservation Committee workshop to assess the socio-economic dimensions of the contribution of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning outlined in IWC/67/CC/16. Progress and an updated workshop proposal were presented to the virtual CC meeting in 2020 (CC/68A/13.00/01) and a workshop was held virtually in April 2022. The workshop received information on the relationship of ecosystem functions and services to other traits from marine megafauna and to cetacean carcasses; the possible future impacts of climate change and other threats related ecosystem services; and the United Nations System of Environmental Economic Accounting. Socio-economic experts participated to share market and non-market techniques of economic valuation of ecosystem services.

At the CC meeting in 2022 (IWC68) the Commission endorsed the [Workshop report on Socio-Economic Values of Cetaceans to Ecosystem Functioning](#) with further development required on the pilot project proposal.

A Working Group was established to work on the next steps. and also, an Advisory Group for the development of the pilot project. The AG is composed of ecology and economic experts and has met three times to date, in February, March and April. Work has focussed on selecting the species for the pilot project and specifications of what the pilot project will work to accomplish. More details can be found in the [WG report](#) and the [AG report](#).

Climate change

Resolution 2009-1 on climate change was adopted at IWC63. This Resolution directs the Scientific Committee to continue its work on studies of climate change and the impacts of other environmental changes on cetaceans (CO0904). The impact of climate change has been considered an overarching topic by the Environmental Concerns Sub-committee of the SC since 2017, interacting with almost all other stressors of concern. The Commission has noted the importance of collaborating with other relevant international bodies on this topic and initiating specific activities in the future (CO0902).

The importance of understanding the potential effects of climate change to cetaceans was agreed at SC68D and the Climate Change Steering Group was encouraged to find ways to continue to integrate climate change within the work of all relevant sub-committees. While the SC could not support an in-person workshop at present, it endorsed the workshop's other recommendations. These included, *inter alia*, prioritising work in regions known to be experiencing intense climate change impacts, particularly those which are key habitats for cetaceans; the incorporation of multi-disciplinary considerations at the design stage of any research programme and identify possible collaborations with other environmental sciences; and stronger collaboration between IWC and CCAMLR, and potentially with other Antarctic science bodies (including SCAR and ICED) to enhance understanding of the impacts of climate change.

The workshop report and its recommendations was presented to CC at IWC68 ([full report here](#)) and endorsed, including the ToRs for the new Climate Change ICG.

Conservation Management Plans

Progress on Current Conservation Management Plans (CMP)

Western Pacific Gray Whale

A Virtual meeting of the IUCN Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel (WGWAP) took place in November 2020 and was attended by SC members as well as the IWC Secretariat Head of Science, Conservation and Management and the Executive Secretary. The work of the WGWAP has continued by way of several formal meetings and the drafting of a suite of 'legacy papers' for publication, including one on the population assessment modelling that has also been reported regularly to the Scientific Committee. The Panel was due to be dissolved at the end of 2021 after the final meeting in Switzerland in November 2021 (report not yet posted on IUCN website). The report states that the IWC will continue work to update the CMP but requires input from two delayed workshops. The workshop considering the scientific considerations in an updated CMP will be held before the next SC meeting.

South-west Atlantic Southern Right Whale

Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay

Research and conservation actions under this CMP continue, with strong collaboration among the range states. A CMP workshop was recently held in June 2022 after some delays due to COVID. Considering new scientific information and the advance of some of the CMP actions, the aim of the workshop was to review and update the last CMP (2016-2020). During the workshop, new actions were identified, some of the previously proposed actions were identified as advanced, while other actions were identified as necessary mainly for some of the range states. Finally other actions were identified as important to start due to no progress being made. In relation to the actions that are less advanced or that

have not started, it is worth mentioning in particular the one that has to do with the development of a geographic information system and subsequent generation of a risk atlas, which was highlighted as a priority action to start as soon as possible. The complete report of the workshop ([SC 69A CMP 18](#)) will be presented at SC69A.

South-east Pacific Right Whale

Chile, Peru

Research and conservation actions under this CMP continue, guided by a 2021-2023 implementation strategy and the MoU between Chile and Peru for protection of the population ([report](#)). A 6-year review of the CMP was implemented in 2022 as well as a workshop for experience exchange regarding research permits and whale watching. Outcomes of the fourth coordination meeting held in Lima, Peru in October 2022 can be found in the [report](#).

Franciscana

Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay

As part of the activities related to the Scientific Committee, the review of the species continues. To this end, a workshop was held in June 2022 in Curitiba, Brazil, where the main points considered were population structure and abundance estimation. Once the review of the species has been completed, the actions identified within the CMP, which has been in existence for six years, will be updated.

The dissemination campaign "Our neighbour the franciscana" was launched during the 68th Meeting of the IWC. This campaign is one of the priority actions identified from the beginning and includes various outreach and communication materials (infographics, video, stickers, panels and posters). The information produced can be used by the three range states and is in English, Portuguese and Spanish. It is available on the [IWC website](#).

A franciscana's book has been published, (edited by Paulo Simões-Lopes and Marta Cremer of Elsevier) and highlights the situation of the species in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. This information will also be useful for the future update of the CMP, as several of the actions identified by the IWC have been developed in this book.

Amazon River dolphin

Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil

A CMP for Amazon River dolphins was endorsed at SC68C and agreed by the Commission at the Virtual Special Meeting in September 2021. The main objective of the CMP is to promote the conservation of river dolphin species (*Inia geoffrensis*, *Inia boliviensis*, *Inia araguaiaensis* and *Sotalia fluviatilis*) in the Amazon, Orinoco, and Tocantins/Araguaia basins through a regional strategy. The CMP will facilitate prioritisation of research and conservation actions among the different South American countries where these species live as well as guide national and regional actions. A coordinator has been appointed to manage delivery of CMP actions.

Future: Updates on Potential New CMPs

Central American Humpback Whales

Mexico is progressing development of this CMP with the governments of US, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. The main objective of the CMP is to conserve the Central America humpback whale population (CAHW) and its habitat through collaborative regional actions to reduce anthropogenic threats throughout its range. Additional objectives include improving habitat connectivity and conservation and improving knowledge about population size, trends, movement patterns, and habitat use. A third workshop was held in October 2022. This workshop focused on biological knowledge of the population of the CAHW, such as abundance, distribution, movements, migration, and genetics. Details are provided in the document [SC 69A CMP 08](#).

Asian River Dolphins

Paper [SC/68B/CMP/10](#) provided an update on several Asian freshwater cetacean populations and reported that all three genera are subject to multiple threats and that additional coordinated action is required throughout their range as a matter of priority.

A proposal was presented to CC and requires further detailed discussion. There are strong synergies with the two other CMS Concerted Actions relating to Asian river dolphins (Ganges River dolphin and Irrawaddy dolphin) adopted at CMS COP13. The IWC Secretariat is in discussions with India on how the IWC and BMI could assist with its river dolphin research and conservation efforts.

Mediterranean Fin Whale

In 2018 a CMP for Mediterranean fin whale was proposed and endorsed by ACCOBAMS. Subsequently, a workshop funded and organised by ACCOBAMS was held in Spain, to develop an initial draft CMP. The ACCOBAMS plan is that: (1) the initial draft be examined by the ACCOBAMS SC; (2) the IWC SC review the CMP from a scientific perspective; (3), the revised CMP be sent to member states; and (4) a stakeholder workshop be held to develop a final CMP (to which IWC as well as other IGOS, NGOs, local and national authorities will be invited).

ACCOBAMS has adopted the IWC guidelines for its CMPs. The SC welcomed progress made in developing a CMP for Mediterranean fin whales and reiterated the recommendations that the Mediterranean fin whale be treated as a ‘priority population’ for the purpose of the CMP development process. The Committee encouraged the relevant IWC members and ACCOBAMS parties to work towards finalising a draft CMP for fin whales to be presented at the next SC meeting. The plan is to start organising and planning two stakeholder workshops in 2023.

Mediterranean Sperm Whale

ACCOBAMS is progressing development of a joint ACCOBAMS/IWC CMP that will address the key threats for this population including ship strikes and bycatch. Mediterranean sperm whales are considered ‘Endangered’ under the IUCN Red List and the Scientific Committee reiterated the recommendation from SC68C (SC2149) that the Mediterranean sperm whale be treated as a ‘priority population’. At SC68D it was noted that the sperm whale CMP development is about to start its drafting stage but after the November 2022, Meeting of the Parties (MOP), additional effort/progress will be made.

Arabian Sea Humpback Whale

There has been continued positive response from Oman and India for the development of a CMP for the Arabian Sea humpback whales since 2018. Research activities for this population were reported to the SC meeting in 2019 and 2020. The SC68B recommended that the IWC Secretariat and SWG-CMP continue efforts with Oman and India towards development of a CMP in partnership with CMS. It further recommended continuation of research by scientists within the region to guide the development of a CMP.

The CC 2020 meeting reported that the IWC Secretariat and SWG-CMP will work with Environment Society of Oman and the CMS to continue outreach efforts with Oman and India towards development of a CMP. A workshop was held in November 2022 to develop both a National Conservation Action Plan and how can Oman participate in a CMP for Arabian Sea humpback whales ([SC 69A ForInfo 34](#)).

The Arabian Sea Whale Network continues to undertake conservation action and research to further knowledge of this population. In 2022, focus areas for the network included furthering acoustic research and stranding response efforts for cetaceans in the Arabian sea. Thanks to the network’s efforts, knowledge of Arabian Sea humpback whales is increasing which can feed into a CMP ([SC/69A/CMP/04/Rev1](#)).

Work of the CC Standing Working Group Conservation Management Plans

As per recommendations from IWC67 the SWG-CMP Chair has drafted a [CMP Strategic Plan](#) (2022-2030). In addition, a Handbook has been developed to raise awareness of the CMP program and help IWC members and stakeholders to navigate the CMP process (Link coming soon). This “CMP Handbook” will function as the primary source of information on the CMP programme and takes a flexible approach to CMP development. Three strategic objectives will be put forward for consideration, covering financial self-sufficiency of CMPs, strengthening CMP partnerships and improvements to monitoring and evaluation of the CMP program. This represents a change in program definition/scope and requires consultation with the CC, SC and endorsement by the Commission. A new workplan was presented to Commission to support the Strategic Plan, covering 2022-2024 (CC/68/9.1/01).

Marine Debris

The IWC has a correspondence group on marine debris that is joint between the Scientific Committee and the Conservation Committee.

The joint CC/SC ICG met at the beginning of April 2021 to review progress with recommendations and to identify some priority issues to discuss at the Scientific Committee. There is ongoing work to engage with other organisations on marine debris, taking forward recommendations from the 2019 workshop and existing recommendations. Recently this has included the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) statement of support which will need endorsement by Commission and joining the Global Partnership on Marine Litter. Details of the ICG can be found in their report for SC69A ([SC/69A/E/09](#)).

In March this year Heads of State, Ministers of environment and other representatives from UN Member States endorsed a historic resolution (UN Treaty on Plastics) at the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5). The [resolution](#) is aimed at addressing plastic pollution and forging an international legally binding agreement by 2024. It addresses the full lifecycle of plastic, including its production, design and disposal. There will be future opportunities for the IWC to engage in the process as it goes forward. Noting this context and potentially other processes, the Secretariat now has a list of experts drawn from the correspondence group who might be called upon to represent the IWC at relevant meetings. In this regard, the IWC secretariat requests that any participant in the forthcoming second session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-2) in Paris (29 May to 2 June 2023) who is interested in becoming an IWC observer contact them. As a back-up option, Parties who will be attending the Paris meeting are invited to share any relevant points on cetaceans with the Secretariat.

A new review paper documenting what is known about the impacts of marine debris on all cetaceans, and which takes a particular look at pandemic generated plastic wastes has been published. This new [review](#), references the work of the IWC, including the last IWC workshop. Whilst this is not a direct product of the intersessional group, discussions by the IWC clearly helped to inspire and inform the paper. This paper was presented at SC68D.

A new Resolution on Marine Plastic Pollution was adopted by consensus at IWC68. The marine debris group will work with the Secretariat SC and CC to progress the action points of this resolution. We would like to draw attention in particular to OP5 of the resolution: *‘REQUESTS the Scientific Committee to develop an approach to be considered by the IWC that would assess the current knowledge of the impact of marine plastic pollution on cetaceans and would provide a global risk assessment that identifies ‘hotspots’ of cetacean exposure to plastic debris.’* If the CC Members are aware of good practices regarding data collection and/or spatial analysis of human pressures, they are encouraged to get in touch with the Secretariat and the co-convenors of the correspondence group on marine debris

In response to recommendation SC19208, the Secretariat is actively working with the Alaskan native community and the USA, to convene a workshop of stakeholders to assess, discuss and recommend mitigation for bowhead whale entanglement in ALDFG, primarily ghost crab gear.

Ship Strikes

The Secretariat and members of the Committee have continued to work with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) on ship strike related issues ([SC69A_O_02](#)).

The Conservation Committee and Commission endorsed the Strategic Plan for 2022-2032 as well as the Workplan (2022-2024) at IWC68 and the Secretariat and SWG are working on implementation. This includes establishing the Ship Strikes Expert Panel and confirmation of the Data Manager position. The Data Manager has been in place since April 2021 with funding from VCF and the SC. The Data Manager, in collaboration with the IWC Ship Strikes Working Group, Scientific Committee, and newly established Expert Panel, works to progress the strategic development of the Ship Strike Database and delivery of the Ship Strikes Workplan.

Small cetaceans

There are currently two task teams in place focusing on the Africa-focused *Sousa plumbea* and Lahille's bottlenose dolphin. A third Task Team for the South Asian River dolphin was suspended following SC68C on the understanding that it could be reconstituted at any time should new actions be warranted on specific issues based on the recommendations made earlier by this task team. The Task Team Steering Committee will continue to monitor work on these two species and identify areas where additional work or involvement is required.

Africa Sousa Task Team (AFS-TT)

In 2019, a list of potential participants was compiled, and the team was established in 2020 and now comprises 35 members from 14 African countries. The first online meeting of the AFS-TT was held immediately prior to SC68B. At SC68C the committee heard about the development of a comprehensive action plan by the Consortium for the Conservation of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (CCAHD) focussing on *Sousa teuszii*. It was agreed, given the excellent work in progress on *Sousa teuszii* by the Consortium that the AFS-TT would cease to address this taxon. Consideration is now being given to how it might assist in the conservation of other Sousa species.

Lahille's Dolphin Task Team (LD-TT)

The team was proposed in 2020 in order to initiate, guide and co-ordinate implementation of conservation strategies for populations in Brazil and Uruguay, and also to investigate the causes of population declines in Argentina and Uruguay. At SC68D the committee heard about activities conducted during 2021(SC/68D/SM/08). The Team held two virtual meetings with the Southern Brazil-Uruguay (SBU) and Argentina research teams, to exchange information and set goals and priority actions. These included photo-identification studies, train surveillance agents, conduct interviews with fishermen and promote conservation of Lahille's bottlenose dolphins and cooperative fishing through community-based tourism. In September 2021, 40 participants were trained in mark-recapture analytical techniques and more than 30 agents from three different governmental agencies (IBAMA, ICMBio and PATRAM) participated in training designed to combat illegal fisheries at a regional scale. Surveys for the next two field seasons were planned and a virtual space of sharing dorsal fin catalogues was created. A citizen surveillance app was also developed, specifically to record illegal fishing activities in coastal areas, and both sightings and strandings of Lahille's bottlenose dolphins. A further report will be presented at SC69A ([SC/69A/SM/05](#)).

Species of urgent and emerging concern

In 2020 the CC established a small working group convened by Mark Simmonds and comprising USA, the Chair of the CC, IUCN and other interested parties to further review how to improve IWC response where populations are in decline, especially small, threatened populations. This small working group will report to the next meeting of the CC. The work of this group to identify priority species and populations will inform the wider joint SC/CC initiative to raise awareness of the threat of extinction (see below).

In response to discussions which began at SC68B, work has been undertaken to raise awareness of the real threat of cetacean extinctions. An Extinction section of the IWC website has been published

<https://iwc.int/cetaceans-and-extinction> and the SC and CC have developed templates for public statements of concern regarding known or potentially imminent extinction/extirpation.

The Commission endorsed the joint CC/SC Extinction Initiative, with the process modified to seek Commission approval, including intersessionally via a silence procedure or alternative. The Commission endorsed the formation of a new intersessional group to develop recommendations for overcoming conservation challenges.

Whale Watching

Scientific Committee

At its previous two meetings the SC discussed the need for ongoing promotion of scientific models to assess the impacts of whale watching on baleen whales and regional reviews of whale watching in various locations. The SC expressed concern regarding the growing number of illegal or unregulated whale watching operations in some locations. In 2018 the Committee recommended that a 3rd workshop on Modelling and Assessment of Whale Watching Impacts (MAWI) be held. This was in the process of being planned for early 2020 but was postponed due to COVID-19. The MAWI intersessional steering group will consider ways forward and report to SC69B.

Whale watching Handbook

The 2023 workplan for the Whale Watching Handbook is focused on, modest updates to existing content, scoping new content and further promotion. The Handbook's [searchable database of scientific literature](#) was updated in April 2023 and now features the details and abstracts of more than 550 reports and peer-reviewed articles on whale watching. The Secretariat is continually engaged in keeping this table up to date.

Secretariat staff have been trained to update and edit Handbook content. The Secretariat will now continue working with countries and experts on updates or requests and have begun scoping for new content. All updates (as new content) will be guided by the Editorial Protocol endorsed by the SC and the CC. Most recent updates include details of the High-Quality Whale Watching certificate case study, alterations to the Norway country profile page and additions to the bowhead whale species page. All updates have been completed in all three languages.

The Secretariat has developed a new promotional plan for the Handbook and there will be renewed efforts in 2023 to increase awareness, particularly for the French and Spanish language versions of the Handbook.

During SC68D the WW Sub-committee discussed options for the wider promotion of WW related work. It recommended the preparation of a comprehensive communications plan to disseminate whale watching outputs of both the CC and SC WW groups to as broad an audience as possible. A steering group was formed to prepare this plan which was presented at SC69A.

General Principles for Whale Watching

At its meeting in 2019 (SC68A) the SC drew attention to the need to review the IWC General Principles for Whale Watching, which had not been updated since 1996.

Several rounds of comments were conducted during 2020 and 2021 with both WW groups. The revised and updated General Principles for Whale Watching were submitted to SC68D and the group approved and endorsed them with the addition of a cross reference to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) (Resolution 11.29).

At IWC68 the Conservation Committee recommended the Commission endorse the [Principles](#) and they were subsequently adopted. These have now been added to the IWC website and linked to the WW Handbook.

Workplan

The 2020 Conservation Committee agreed that a new four-year workplan would be developed for consideration at IWC68. The SWG presented a draft workplan to SC68D for input. The workplan was endorsed at IWC68 and the refreshed SWG will now work with the SC WW sub-committee to progress

this. A Primary focus of the plan will be the review of the progress against the current Strategic Plan and initial development of a new four-year workplan.

SC representation on the CC SWG

At SC68C the WW Sub-committee was invited to comment on the proposal that the Convenor of the Sub-committee, and either the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Committee and one other Committee member be included on the SWG. The Committee was also invited to nominate industry representatives, as there are two vacancies on the SWG for industry as ex officio members. At SC68D it was agreed that the SWG will now include WW co-convenors (Suydam and Urbán), the Chair and vice-Chair of the Committee (Zerbini and Porter) and another member of the Committee (Parsons). These have been added to the group list.

Further, it was agreed to reconstitute a standing intersessional correspondence group on communication between the Conservation Committee's Standing Working Group on Whale Watching and the Scientific Committee's Sub-Committee on Whale Watching, with a Chair who is a member of both.

Early in 2023 a review of membership of the SWG was conducted in order to both add the new members. Thank you to Ryan Wulff for his many years of leadership of the SWG and for locating the new additions from industry. The subcommittee was also asked for suggestions for a new Chair and industry representatives. Suggestions are welcome.