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WHY CONSIDER HOSTING AN IWC BIENNIAL MEETING?

There is no doubt that hosting an IWC Biennial Meeting is a challenge and a commitment.

However, the benefits of hosting a prestigious international meeting of up to 500 participants from around the world on such an important topic as cetacean conservation and management are clear. It provides an opportunity to showcase the host country to a wide audience and to demonstrate the commitment of the country to its international obligations as a member of the International Whaling Commission.

The IWC and its Secretariat are there to assist throughout the process. The IWC budget has an allowance for the Biennial Meetings, based on a reference venue. The cost to the Host Government depends on the venue and the level of activities (e.g. receptions, trips) that the host may wish to lay on.

If you might be interested in hosting a meeting, this Handbook provides guidance and information.

1. ESSENTIALS

- **Understand the Commitments before formally offering to host.** This handbook will explain to you the financial and logistical commitments you need to make in hosting an IWC biennial meeting. A *Pro forma* is provided in Annex 1 to enable you to check the requirements and commit to them before making the formal offer.
- **Hosting an IWC biennial meeting is a complex but rewarding challenge.** With up to 500 attendees from all over the world (including ministers and VIPs), collaboration between several Government departments with the Commission and its Secretariat is required for the smooth organisation and facilitation of these meetings.
- **Time is of the essence.** Timing is everything – potential hosts will need to start planning as early as possible and in partnership with the IWC Secretariat to ensure sufficient time is available for each stage. See the preparation timeline (p. 6) for more details.
- **Partnership is the key to success.** A single *senior* point of contact is required to liaise and take ownership of the host's activities to help simplify liaison between the host Country and the IWC Secretariat's point of contact. The IWC Secretariat is there to provide advice and assistance to the Host Country at all stages.
- **Protocols matter.** It is essential that Host Countries provide a smooth and efficient process to enable all participants to attend, particularly with respect to visas and to ensure that the meeting is held in a safe and appropriate environment.
- **Outside engagement is important.** Host Countries should help to promote engagement with IGOs, NGOs, and members of the media with emphasis on transparency and inclusiveness.
- **Understand the Meeting Agenda.** The major topics to be discussed will shape the meeting; prior understanding of these issues and how they affect meeting organisation and flow is essential to providing the appropriate level of services.

2. GETTING STARTED

2.1 WHAT IS THE IWC?

The IWC was set up under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling which was signed in Washington DC on 2nd December 1946. The preamble to the Convention states that its purpose is to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry. It comprised 88 member Governments in 2022. What follows here is a very short introduction. More detailed information is found on the Commission website (www.iwc.int).

2.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEETINGS

The Biennial Commission Meeting is one week in length. It is attended by up to 500 people including government delegates, observers from non-member governments, other inter-governmental organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs) and representatives of the media. Private individuals are not able to attend. The Commission plenary sessions are preceded by virtual meetings of its subsidiary bodies, but not including its Scientific Committee (see Item 2.4). Its Scientific Committee holds an annual meeting. In addition, other Committees and sub-groups may hold meetings and workshops in the intersessional period between biennial Commission meetings. From 1949 to 2012 Commission meetings were held annually. In 2012, the Commission agreed to meet biennially.

2.3 WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THE BIENNIAL MEETINGS?

The Commission meets biennially to exchange ideas and information on all aspects of cetacean conservation and management. It may amend whaling regulations provided in the Schedule to the Convention, develop Resolutions on particular subjects, agree workplans for itself, its subsidiary bodies and the Secretariat, and agree the budget for the next biennium.

2.4 HOW IT IS ORGANISED (SUB-GROUP MEETINGS, PLENARY)

The **Commission** is the decision-making body of the IWC – member countries are represented at the biennial Commission Plenary meeting by Commissioners who have the right to vote should this be required. The Commission receives advice from several **subsidiary bodies** in this diagram.



2.5 IWC REFERENCE VENUE

In the event that there is no member government offer to host the Commission or if key and pre-identified deadlines are missed, the IWC Secretariat maintains a reference venue option in the preparatory timetable that serves to reduce the financial and logistical risk.

For the Commission meetings in 2026 this is the International Maritime Organisation building in London. This UN-standard venue was chosen because it is located in the UK, the Headquarters Country of the IWC (20% VAT reclaimable). It also has appropriate meeting space, is easily accessible internationally, has all of the required technical services *in situ* and can be easily supported by the IWC Secretariat which is based at the IWC Red House in Cambridge, UK.

In the event that this venue is unavailable due to internal use, the Secretariat should seek to find an appropriate venue that will fall inside the allocated budget.

3. TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE – THE PROCESS

3.1 MEETING DATES

Commission meetings must be held in **September or October**. The precise dates will depend on several factors, some of which are related to the host country e.g. availability of venues and national holidays, whereas others are more general such as avoiding conflicts with other IGO or related meetings and religious holidays. The Rules of Procedure state that there must be at least 100 days separating Commission meetings and meetings of the Scientific Committee. This is usually easy to achieve as Scientific Committee meetings are generally held in April or May. The Biennial meetings usually take the form of 3-4 days of virtual meetings of the subsidiary bodies (apart from the Scientific Committee which meets annually) and 5 days of in-person Commission Plenary sessions.

The timetable from the 2022 Meeting is provided here as an example:

13 Oct - Thursday	14:00-17:30	Working Group on Operational Effectiveness & cost savings measures (WGOE)
	18:00-21:00	IWC Bureau
14 Oct - Friday	09:00-13:00	Budgetary Sub-Committee (BSC)
	14:00-15:30	Whale Killing Methods & Welfare Issues WG (WKM&WI)
	16:00-18:00	Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Sub-Committee (ASW)
15 Oct - Saturday <i>(Infractions INF at 8:30 Saturday or Sunday)</i>	09:00-13:00 14:00-18:00	Conservation Committee (CC)
16 Oct - Sunday	09:00-12:00 13:30-16:00	Finance and Administration Committee (F&A)
	16:30-18:00	Private Commissioners' Meeting
Monday 17 - Friday 21 Oct	09:00-18:00	IWC Plenary

Potential conflicts will be researched by the Secretariat after receiving the initial application and communicated to the host in order to agree the final meeting dates.

If you are considering hosting a Biennial Meeting then adequate preparation time is essential. This section takes you through the process from initial consideration through to holding the meeting itself assuming that the application is successful. It may seem a long time but the application must be accepted by the Commission at the previous Biennial meeting, i.e. some 2 years ahead. Experience has shown that trying to shorten the timeline can result in serious logistical and financial challenges for the Commission, the Secretariat and the host. See timeline in 3.2 on next page.

3.2 TIMELINE

Proposed Timeline/Deadlines for the 2026 Biennial IWC Commission Meeting

Date	Months	Event	Host action	Secretariat Action	Reference venue
Sep-2023	-36	IWC Bureau Meeting	Informal consultation		If possible, hold informal discussions with Bureau members and the Secretariat if considering hosting in 3 years' time.
Mar-2024	-30		Initial application		This is the latest date for a country to provide the Secretariat with an initial application to host.
Jun-2024	-27			Assessment visit	This entails a Secretariat visit to prospective cities and the chance for the potential Host to discuss issues with the Secretariat.
Aug-2024	-25		Initial Letter of Commitment signed		Provisional booking This provides an initial Letter of Commitment signed by the potential Host and the Secretariat relating to facilities, provisional venue, provisional dates, and financial arrangements based upon the expected IWC budget.
Sep-2024	-24	Commission Meeting F&A sub-committee		Meeting approval Budget set	Invitation based on the initial Letter of Commitment submitted to the Biennial Meeting in light of meeting budget discussions. The Commission must approve the invitation and also finalise the IWC budget. <i>If no bid has been received by this point, the reference venue will be used.</i>
Dec-2024	-21		Letter of Commitment signed	Evaluation visit	This entails a Secretariat visit to finalise the venue and the associated accommodation hotels and date window. The final Letter of Commitment is signed.
Mar-2025	-18			Contracts signed	Booking confirmed or cancelled This is the latest date for final contracts to be signed (venue, meeting support, hotels etc). <i>If this deadline is missed, the reference venue will be used.</i>
Aug-2025	-13			Invitations sent	Formal invitations to the meeting including information on registration and hotels sent out by the Secretariat.
Dec-2025	-9			Final site visit	At this visit a final check will be made to complete security and technical planning.
Sep-2026	0	Commission Meeting	Host meeting	Meeting services	The preparations come to fruition.

3.3 PREPARATION: MEETINGS, DEADLINES AND COMMUNICATION

As noted earlier, good communication between the Secretariat and potential host countries is essential. Both must identify a senior point of contact and notify any changes immediately. This communication should also take advantage of the use of regular teleconferences as well as emails. However, there are times when face-to-face meetings and site visits are required. These are summarised below along with associated deadlines and shown in the timeline under Item 3.2. It is important to read this Handbook carefully and ensure that you are prepared to meet the conditions and recommendations in a timely fashion.

(1) DEVELOPING A BID/APPLICATION

- **Bureau meeting around 36 months before the meeting and 12 months in advance of the preceding Biennial Meeting (i.e. the one that will take a decision on the application).** The Bureau is a group of seven IWC Commissioners elected to oversee the work of the IWC during the intersessional period. Countries that may be considering applying to host a Commission meeting may wish to consult with Bureau members and the Secretariat in the context of the Bureau meeting that usually takes place around 1 year before the next biennial meeting. Bureau members are also encouraged to seek potential host countries. If there is more than one potential candidate, the Bureau will attempt to work with the countries concerned to avoid the need for a Commission vote on a venue.
- **DEADLINE: Submission of an initial application to host a Biennial Meeting 6 months before the preceding Biennial Meeting** i.e. the one at which a decision on whether to accept an application is taken.
- **VISIT: Assessment visit at least 3 months before the preceding Biennial Meeting.** It is recommended that the potential host country organises an initial assessment visit by the IWC Secretariat. This will provide an opportunity to go through the bid evaluation steps including financial aspects (e.g. the final IWC budget for the meeting will not be known until the preceding Biennial Meeting and so initial discussions will be based upon a provisional budget) and visit at least the potential host city or cities and provide advice before the development of a formal offer to the Commission.
- **DEADLINE: Submission of an official bid at least one month before the preceding Biennial Meeting.** This deadline is to allow time for the Commission (and its Finance and Administration Committee) to properly consider the bid which must use the agreed *pro forma* (Annex 1). In the absence of a bid the reference venue will be used.
- **Preceding Biennial Meeting.** The potential host country should attend the Finance and Administration meeting in order to present and answer questions on their proposal including any financial implications of discussions of the IWC meeting budget. They should also be prepared to give a short presentation (PowerPoint or video) at the Commission Plenary meeting. The Commission will decide in its final plenary session on the venue for the next Biennial Meeting.

(2) AFTER THE BID HAS BEEN ACCEPTED

- **VISIT: Venue evaluation visit within 3 months of the acceptance of the application (i.e. 21 months before the meeting).** The Host Country will arrange for a site visit by the Secretariat that will include: visiting the final venue (or choice of venues) and hotel(s); meeting with the Host Organising Team to discuss logistics; and finalise the Letter of Commitment for signature.
- **DEADLINE: Venue and other contracts signed at least 18 months before the Meeting.** This is the latest date for final contracts to be signed to ensure that the meeting goes ahead (venue, meeting support, hotels, etc.). If this deadline is missed, the reference venue will be used.
- **DEADLINE: Invitation circular sent out by the Secretariat at least 13 months before the Meeting.** This is the latest date for Secretariat to send out meeting invitations and information on online registration, hotels, visa requirements and travel information.

- **VISIT: Final site visit at least 9 months before the Meeting.** The Host Country will arrange for a final site visit by the Secretariat that will include: visiting the final venue and sorting out technical arrangements; security including meeting with security operators and reviewing the Security Risk Assessment; medical requirements; plans for an opening ceremony/welcome, etc.

4. THE HOST GOVERNMENT AND THE SECRETARIAT – A TEAM EFFORT

A successful meeting depends on a successful partnership between the Host Government and the Secretariat. Communication is dealt with under Item 3.2 but this section outlines the responsibilities of the two partners – final details will depend on the specific situation.

4.1 WHAT DOES THE SECRETARIAT DO?

- The Secretariat commits to follow the processes outlined in this Handbook including adhering to the timeline under Item 3.2.
- Key features include:
 - Nominating a senior point of contact and notifying the host government immediately if this changes.
 - Providing advice and support to the host government, including making site visits, throughout the process outlined under Item 3.3.
 - Drafting of the Host Country Agreement depending on the requirements for the meeting.
 - Organising teleconferences with the host government and others as required.
 - Arranging contracts (e.g. rapporteurs, interpreters, printing, ICT & AV etc.) and making payments.
 - Arranging travel, accommodation and associated insurances for staff and contractors.
 - Organising online pre-registration and circulating invitations and information.
 - Acting as primary liaison with venue management.
 - Providing necessary services and support during the meeting including:
 - delegate information;
 - document and report-related services;
 - ICT & AV services including digital signs; and
 - interpretation services.

4.2 WHAT ARE THE HOST GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENTS?

- The Host Government commits to follow the processes outlined in this Handbook including adhering to the timeline under Item 3.1.
- Key features include:
 - Nominating a senior point of contact and notifying the Secretariat immediately if this changes.
 - Signing of Host Country Agreement and acceptance of additional costs compared to IWC reference venue.
 - Participating in teleconferences and responding promptly to correspondence as required.
 - Ensuring that potential venues meet the minimum requirements outlined in Annex 2.
 - Arranging for the Secretariat site visits and ensuring the appropriate personnel are present.
 - Assisting with the choice of hotels for participants including liaising over price.
 - Assisting with customs if requested by the Secretariat.
 - Providing advice and assistance with Visas.
 - Providing (or assisting the Secretariat to provide) appropriate security arrangements for the meetings and participants including developing a Security Risk Assessment.
- The Host Country may also decide to:
 - Organise a short welcoming ceremony.

- Organise a reception or other side event(s) for participants.

4.3 LETTER OF COMMITMENT

The Letter of Commitment sets out the responsibilities of the host country and the Secretariat regarding the preparation, organisation and conduct of the conference, including staffing, logistics and financial arrangements.

The Secretariat is available to assist potential host governments in drafting a Letter of Commitment prior to its submission to the Commission. The Letter of Commitment will be drafted in the evaluation period, with the assistance of the Secretariat as noted above, and will comprise the following:

- Dates and Location
- Expected Attendance
- Venue and Technical Specifications
- Security and Medical Specifications
- Financial Arrangements – including:
 - Expected meeting costs and budget, provided by the Secretariat
 - Commitment from the Host Government to cover any expected overspend
- Applicable privileges and immunities (e.g. article 151 of the Principal EU VAT Directive EC/2006/112)
- Import / Export specifications
- Visa and Customs support
- Environmental consideration commitment
- Any other items as appropriate

5. SOME LOGISTICAL ISSUES

5.1 CHOICE OF CITY AND CONFERENCE VENUE

In addition to the venue requirements for the meeting provided in Annex 2, there are a number of factors that should be taken into account when recommending a city for the Biennial Meeting. These include:

- convenient location for international visitors;
- safe and welcoming environment for all participants; and
- selection of suitable hotels and restaurants of various categories within a reasonable distance of the meeting venue (ideally by walking, or else by regular public transport or by minibus or coach).

These matters should be discussed with the Secretariat when developing the initial bid (see Item 3.1).

5.2 CATERING AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

Given the heavy schedule of IWC meetings, it is essential that at least lunch is available for participants to buy within the conference venue. Sufficient options should be provided to account for different religious beliefs and dietary requirements throughout the duration of the conference and the service should be sufficiently swift to ensure that up to 500 participants can obtain and eat their meal within thirty minutes. The Secretariat will assist in this process.

It has been customary for the host country to provide an official welcome reception for participants on the first day of plenary, however this is voluntary. There is also usually a reception for Commissioners hosted by the IWC Chair during the plenary week, at the IWC's expense.

5.3 GOING GREEN

The host will make efforts to minimise and offset the negative impact of the meeting on the environment, while raising awareness of participants, contractors, staff and other partners about good practices. Sound environmental

considerations should be borne in mind during all aspects of the meeting preparation and organisation: venue selection, procurement, registration, catering, transportation, waste, accommodation, etc.

The host country and the Secretariat should work with the conference venue and contractors to minimise the effect of the meeting on the environment. This includes: using electronic documents wherever possible; avoiding use of plastic bags, bottles and cups; providing bins for recycling; using local products, etc.

5.4 MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

Media attendance at the Plenary is welcomed and the Secretariat will raise media awareness of the meeting and ensure journalists with an interest in the IWC are equipped with relevant information and invitations to attend. The Secretariat will also work with the host government to ensure national and local media needs are met and positive publicity opportunities for both the IWC and the host government are maximised. In countries where English is not the primary language, the host may need to nominate a media liaison.

The Secretariat will organise media accreditation and ensure that technical and facilities requirements are met. The Secretariat will also provide a 24-hour point of contact for media, and a regular and reliable flow of factual information about the meeting.

For both media and the public wishing to follow the meeting remotely, the Secretariat will use a variety of communications tools to maximise accessibility. These include livestreaming, the IWC website, press releases and one-to-one briefings.

The Secretariat will also provide branding (including a meeting-specific logo) and messaging, and work with the host government to ensure this references the host government and local area.

5.5 SECURITY

The host shall provide such police/security advice and protection as is necessary to ensure the efficient functioning of the meeting in an atmosphere of security and safety, whilst respecting the rights of the individual meeting participant.

A nominated host Liaison between the police/security agency and a designated official of the Secretariat is required and a real-time (including emergency and out- of-hours) contact point will be established for the duration of the meeting.

Peaceful public protests are to be expected at IWC Commission meetings and an area outside of the meeting security zone is to be provided by the host to accommodate these safely in accordance with local public gathering laws.

5.6 TRANSPORT

The host shall provide information on the availability and costs of transport, as well as arranging appropriate transport to host events.

5.7 MEDICAL FACILITIES & EMERGENCIES

Within the event premises the host shall provide medical facilities for emergency first aid appropriate for the number of participants and IWC designated staff or officials. The host shall ensure immediate transportation and admission to hospitals in case of serious emergencies and shall provide information on the location of medical centres and emergency numbers for the Secretariat to make available to Participants.

The host shall nominate local personnel to support anyone requiring emergency medical assistance in a timely fashion.

5.8 LOCAL PERSONNEL

The host shall provide information on local support personnel necessary for the effective functioning of the meeting who will be supervised by designated Secretariat staff. The level of required support will be determined prior to the Letter of Commitment being finalised and the costs will be covered by the IWC.

5.9 FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

The Letter of Commitment details the additional costs associated with hosting the meeting at the Host Government's nominated venue in comparison to the IWC reference venue and provides instruction on how these costs are to be covered by the host:

- The IWC sets a budget based on 'reference' location of IMO, London.
- If the anticipated meeting costs are more, the host country will need to pay the difference.
- The Secretariat can advise at an early stage of the anticipated costs and offer advice on minimising costs on the ground – please don't hesitate to contact us.
- The host will receive a full report of costs after the meeting and a refund if costs are lower than expected.
- Meeting expenditure is included in the Commission's accounts which receives an independent audit each year.

ANNEX 1: PRO-FORMA FOR PROSPECTIVE HOSTS

Country name:	
IWC Meeting name:	<i>eg. IWC70</i>
Date window:	<i>month/year</i>
Potential locations:	<i>city/venue</i>
Senior lead contact point:	<i>name/position/email/phone</i>
Acknowledgment of basic venue specifications (see Annex 2):	<i>yes / no</i>
Acknowledgement that the host covers any predicted financial shortfall after the IWC budget is agreed (full details to be included in the Letter of Commitment):	<i>yes / no</i>
Any applicable local privileges or immunities?	<i>(eg. Article 151 of the Principal EU VAT Directive EC/2006/112)</i>

Date	Year	Event	Host action	IWC Secretariat Action
September	[insert]	IWC Bureau Meeting	Informal consultation	
March	[insert]		Initial application	
June	[insert]			Assessment visit
August	[insert]		Initial agreement signed	
September	[insert]	Commission Meeting F&A sub-committee		Meeting approval Budget set
December	[insert]		Letter of Commitment signed	Evaluation visit
March	[insert]			Contracts signed
August	[insert]			Invitations sent
December	[insert]			Final site visit
September	[insert]	Commission Meeting	Host meeting	Meeting services

Signed by IWC Commissioner for host:	
Signed by IWC Chair:	
Signed by IWC Executive Secretary:	

IWC BIENNIAL MEETINGS – BASIC SPECIFICATIONS

Offers to host Commission biennial meetings are welcomed from all IWC Contracting Governments. In order to support a successful meeting host Governments are requested to provide:

1. A conference venue that meets the requirements for IWC meetings as detailed below. For the Commission plenary the venue must hold up to 500 participants and must also have access to a range of syndicate rooms. The total duration of the meeting period is likely to be two weeks including weekends. The venue should have good transport links including access to an international airport and a range of accommodation should be available either at the venue or within easy travelling distance. If accommodation is off-site, appropriate transport to and from the venue to be provided.
2. Appropriate protocol arrangements to allow the granting of visas and admission of diplomatic participants from a wide range of overseas states.
3. Security arrangements as appropriate for Ministers and VIPs.
4. A small number of local staff to assist with Secretariat liaison, translation and other meeting-related tasks.
5. Internet connection sufficient for efficient communication.
6. Printing equipment through a rental agreement with an appropriate local supplier.
7. If desired, an official reception on behalf of the host Government or city for IWC participants.

VENUE CRITERIA

1. Main plenary room with capacity of 500 people, classroom style¹ (week 2).
2. Sub Committee room for 200 people, classroom style (week 1).
3. Room(s) for Secretariat office(s) with printing and IT facilities for 25 people.
4. 2 Rooms as private offices for Senior officers.
5. 1 Breakout room with seating for up to 50 people and 1 for 20 people for side meetings.
6. Fibre Internet connection with at least 100Mbps download and 50Mbps upload.
7. Wireless network in the meeting room able to support at least 1000 devices.
8. Adequate electricity supply and water for up to 500 people.
9. Adequate area for serving food and refreshments.
10. Media office for 10 people.
11. Media area for interviews.

INTERNET/WIFI

Meeting room:

The internet speed provided must be over 100Mbps download and 50Mbps upload and have sufficient wireless access points to support at least 1000 devices. (The preferred speed is at least 200Mbps download and 100Mbps upload).

¹Classroom style refers to the size of the room not the setup of the tables. A full room plan with table setup positions will be provided during the setup days before the plenary starts.

Secretariat offices:

A dedicated line is required with a minimum of 100Mbps download and 50Mbps upload. (The preferred speed is at least 200Mbps download and 100Mbps upload).

Wired network connections are required in all the rooms and the media area. Further details for this will be provided after the final site visit.

PHOTOCOPYING/PRINTING

The following printers are required for the duration of the meeting:

1. 1 medium-volume colour network printer/copier (over 50 pages per minute plus stapling, scanning & A3).
2. 5 boxes A4 white copier paper, 1 box A3.

INTERPRETATION, MICROPHONES AND AV

Simultaneous interpretation into 3 languages (English, French & Spanish) is required for the Sub-Committees, Plenary and Private Commissioner's meetings, including the appropriate equipment, technicians and translation booths.

A total of 120 microphones will be required for the duration of the meeting, which will be distributed according to the room plans provided by the Secretariat. A HD video projector and screen is to be included in each meeting room for presentations.

During Plenary sessions a HD talking-head video projection is required for the screen(s) to present all interventions and presentations from the floor and the head table. This video will be used as a live video stream for the event and will serve as the verbatim record. The appropriate supplier, associated equipment and technicians will need to be sourced and contracted.

Display screens both inside and outside the Plenary sessions may be needed as static displays of relevant text under discussion or to pinpoint the Agenda Items being discussed.

The Secretariat holds a portfolio of suppliers/contractors for the above should you require assistance in organising these.

VENUE SOURCING

The IWC Secretariat is able to assist in the selection of an appropriate venue and perform site visits to evaluate potential locations. Once a suitable venue has been identified the Secretariat will arrange for a technical site visit and survey in order to make and finalise the logistical and technical arrangements.

It is recommended that a lead venue is selected at least 18 months prior to the event to ensure availability of rooms and to allow sufficient time for negotiation and site visits.