Report on Conservation Management Plans

Submitted at IWC62 to the Conservation Committee by the Government of Australia on behalf of the Small Advisory Group on Conservation Management Plans

Overview

The following report sets out the considerations of the Small Advisory Group on Conservation Management Plans, including discussions held in Florida, United States, on 5 March 2010. The Small Advisory Group includes representatives from Australia, Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The Small Advisory Group shared views on Conservation Management Plan principles and approaches, to assist the prioritising, development and implementation of Conservation Management Plans for species identified as most likely to benefit from such plans. It also considered a preliminary list of potential candidate species for Conservation Management Plans.

During the course of these considerations the Small Advisory Group identified the need to agree and articulate clear policy objectives for Conservation Management Plans, and to produce agreed guidelines which would (a) assist countries wishing to develop their own conservation management proposals and plans, whether self-funded or through the support of the Commission; and (b) assist the determination of conservation priorities for the implementation of Conservation Management Plans that would be supported by the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

The Small Advisory Group sees benefits in producing a Conservation Management Plan framework that sets out in clear terms aims and objectives and the suggested steps to be followed in producing and implementing effective Conservation Management Plans. A draft framework is at **Attachment A**. The framework would include clear objectives for Conservation Management Plans, together with well-defined procedures. The suggested approach draws heavily on SC/60/17 *Towards the development of effective conservation Plans for cetaceans* and we extend our gratitude to the authors Greg Donovan, Ana Cañadas and Phil Hammond. The Scientific Committee has commended the approach in that document, as do we. The Small Advisory Group also recommends the development of electronic templates to assist countries to produce proposals and to develop Conservation Management Plans. **Attachment B** sets out elements of a template for proposals.

The approach adopted by the IWC needs to be flexible enough to respond to both threats identified by scientific assessment of a problem and to meet the individual domestic legislative requirements of member governments. Conservation Management Plans are intended to complement and enhance existing national legislation, not replace it. The approach also needs to be equitable and inclusive. Given the migratory habits of cetaceans, the Small Advisory Group underlined the importance for co-operation and coordination between global, regional and national entities.

In discussions of an appropriate first candidate species for which a Conservation Management Plan might be developed, the Small Advisory Group suggests consideration of Southern right whales of South America. These could include the critically endangered Chile-Peru population of Southern right whales as well as right whales off Argentina, which have recently experienced a severe but as yet unexplained die-off.

To progress practical action on Conservation Management Plans, the Small Advisory Group suggest that a workshop be held intersessionally to finalise a framework for Conservation Management Plans, simultaneously with an assessment of the first Conservation Management Plan proposal. To encourage practical and tangible conservation action, last year Australia provided a voluntary contribution of $500,000 to support the development and implementation of Conservation Management Plans. The Small Advisory Group endorses the use of these funds to support a workshop to finalise a framework for Conservation Management Plans and to provide other expert support as necessary to prepare the first proposal.

Candidate Species for Development of Conservation Management Plans

The Small Advisory Group discussed at its meeting potential candidate species for the development of Conservation Management Plans. A number of species or populations were discussed, including Southern right whales, Northern right whales, Western gray whales, Southern blue whales and Southern fin whales.

The Small Advisory Group agreed at the meeting that the Chile-Peru population of southern right whales would make an ideal candidate for development of the first Conservation Management Plan.
It was further considered that due to the recent and unexplained die-off of southern right whales in Argentina, a Conservation Management Plan for all southern right whales in South American waters would be most beneficial.

The Small Advisory Group recommends undertaking discussions with relevant range states on the feasibility of developing a Conservation Management Plan for South American Southern right whales.

The Small Advisory Group was pleased to note that a management plan for Western Gray whales was already being developed, under the initial auspices of the IUCN processes. IWC scientists have played a major role in the development of this Plan that is due to be submitted to the IWC Scientific Committee in Agadir. IUCN is hoping for endorsement and support for the plan internationally and we recommend that the Commission considers such endorsement and support.

Attachment A

IWC Conservation Management Plans- A Draft Framework

Core Aims and Objectives

A Conservation Management Plan is a framework for the conservation of a species or population that allows threats to be identified and prioritised so that the most appropriate management measures can be developed and implemented to mitigate the threats.

Conservation Management Plans aim to provide the IWC with a tailored and practically-focused management tool to manage human and cetacean interactions where there is a reasonable expectation that such plans will deliver real conservation gains to the cetacean population(s). A Conservation Management Plan is underpinned by sound science and requires a full evaluation of the most appropriate tool(s) to address the important problems, and an involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

Conservation Management Plans aim to improve conservation outcomes for the target species, whilst also taking into account the needs of the stakeholders generating the threats.

Outline of Process for Developing Conservation Management proposal and Plans

A three stage process is envisioned: proposal, development, and implementation. The first stage of the process is the development of a proposal to explain why a Conservation Management Plan is needed or necessary including the setting of clear overall objectives. Countries, either individually or together, seeking to develop a Conservation Management Plan that they wish to be supported by the IWC would appoint an expert, or panel of experts, with the broad range of technical skills necessary to draft and implement a Conservation Management Plan based on an agreed template. Conservation Management Plan proposals may also be suggested by the Conservation Committee or the Scientific Committee, in consultation with range states and proposals developed in partnership with a Contracting Government or Governments.

The proposal should also include a rigorous review of the relevant scientific information on the species/populations in question, an outline of the nature and extent of threats faced by the target species and identify practical and achievable management actions. The proposal should outline how and why the development of a Conservation Management Plan will be beneficial to the conservation status of the target species or population. If possible at this stage it should identify some immediate actions that may mitigate or ameliorate these threats. Practical performance milestones also should be established in order to measure the effectiveness of the proposed actions.

The proposal to develop a Conservation Management Plan should be submitted to the Small Advisory Group, who would review the proposal based on the principles of conservation need and likelihood of success and provide feedback to the proponent(s). The Small Advisory Group will seek the advice of the Scientific Committee and the Conservation Committee where technical input is required. The Small Advisory Group will then make a recommendation to the Commission as to whether IWC support (expertise, money and/or endorsement) is appropriate to assist in the development of a full Conservation Management Plan, which is the second stage of the process. A draft list of elements that would comprise a proposal to develop a Conservation Management Plan is at **Attachment B.** We suggest this template be developed as an electronic document.

The role of the Small Advisory Group

Conservation Management Plan proposals would be assessed by the Small Advisory Group against agreed criteria. The Small Advisory Group will consider all submissions received. The Small Advisory Group will seek the advice of the Scientific Committee and the Conservation Committee if technical input is required. The Small Advisory Group would convey its recommendations to the Conservation Committee for support of the highest priority plans for development and implementation.

As well as recommending proposals to develop Conservation Management Plans, the Small Advisory Group would provide a regular consolidated report to the Commission, through the Conservation Committee, progress in developing, implementing and reviewing Conservation Management Plans, based on advice provided from Steering Groups for each individual plan.

Development of Conservation Management Plans

If a proposal to develop a Conservation Management Plan is endorsed by the Conservation Committee, a Steering Panel (with stakeholder representation) will be appointed by the proponents to develop and ultimately implement the plan- the third stage of the process. It is likely, but not necessary, that the Steering Panel will consist of those experts involved in drafting the proposal. The Steering Panel will report on progress to the Small Advisory Group.

The Steering Panel will be responsible for the development of a full plan. The Small Advisory Group proposes that the framework for proposals provided in **Annex A**, in conjunction with the guidance given in Donovan *et al* (2008), provides a good basis for development of Conservation Management Plans. Particular attention must be given to the development of costed actions (scientific, management and legislative, compliance, monitoring, capacity building/public awareness, and co-ordination). Performance milestones will be established by which to measure the effectiveness of the proposed actions. Legal considerations will also need to be taken into account in the development of effective plans. Individual plans will of course be tailored to the particular circumstances of the species, threat or region. Stakeholder identification and engagement, at all stages of the planning and implementation process, is also an essential element of the plan.

The Conservation Management Plan should be regarded as a live document, including a schedule for periodic review to consider progress in achieving objectives, ensure proposed actions remain relevant and appropriate, and allow, as appropriate, for adjustments to the plan, following principles of adaptive management.

Attachment B

Template for Proposals to Develop a Conservation Management Plan

Section 1: Introduction and Objectives

1.1 Why a conservation plan is needed
Short explanation as to why the conservation plan is required, focussing on the status of the population or populations involved (details should be given under Section 2). Normally when considering 'status', one is interested in (a) where the population is now compared to where it was originally and (b) where the population is going.

1.2 Overall objective of the conservation plan
For the conservation of cetacean populations and the management of human activities to try to achieve this, it is essential to decide (a) what it is that is trying to be 'conserved' and (b) what are the management objectives. In effect, this means deciding what we want to achieve by management and how we judge if it 'works'. Objectives are ultimately socio-political decisions, although scientific advice on the implications of decisions taken by managers and how these can be evaluated clearly play an important role.

- Objectives
    - Should state exactly what is being 'conserved' and what are the associated management objectives
    - Highlight the overall rebuilding target, and what science and management measures will be used to achieve this target.

- Criteria
    - Consider what it is exactly that needs to be measured in order to achieve an objective

- Priorities
    - Identification of priorities in order to determine what key actions are necessary to achieve relevant outcomes
    - Important to establish research priorities, determining where there is a lack of data to solve a specific problem

Section 2: Background- biology and population status

2.1 Population structure (including taxonomy)
Explain what is known and identify key information gaps with a focus on relevance to assessing and monitoring status.

2.2 Distribution, migration and movements
Explain what is known, including habitat considerations, and identify key information gaps with a focus on relevance to assessing and monitoring status.

2.3 Life history
Explain what is known with a focus on survivorship, reproduction and feeding. Identify key information gaps with a focus on relevance to assessing and monitoring status.

2.4 Abundance and trends
Explain what is known with a focus on direct surveys, abundance in various parts of the range, trends and modelling. Identify key information gaps with a focus on relevance to assessing and monitoring status.

2.5 Review of potential 'attributes' and recommendations for monitoring of these in the context of a conservation management plan
The most common overall 'attribute' (or parameter) of a population required for assessing the success or otherwise of a conservation management plan would be abundance and trend. However, depending on the threats and mitigation measures, other attributes may be appropriate including distribution, habitat use, health and nutritional status. Habitat condition, although strictly an attribute of a population, may also be appropriate in some cases. For any chosen attribute, as well as a qualitative objective there must be a quantifiable specific objective or 'target' related to the overall conservation objectives. Thus an essential factor in considering the appropriateness of any potential attributes is an evaluation of the ability to measure them and detect changes in them with reasonable resources and reasonable power in a reasonable timeframe.

Section 3: Actual and potential anthropogenic threats

3.1 Summarise information on actual and potential anthropogenic threats
For conservation efforts to be successful, potential risks must be identified and their relative importance to the species determined and assessed.

It's important to explain what is known, including whether they are identified or potential threats at the population level, and identify key information gaps and the need for monitoring levels of anthropogenic activity.

Threats to cetaceans can be said to incorporate two main categories. The first are those that result in death in the short-term (e.g. direct catches, bycatches in fishing gear, ship strikes). The other category of threats is more difficult to identify and quantify – those that can be said to affect the 'overall fitness' of the population with respect to reproductive success and/or survival and that are generally related to environmental degradation. These include such factors as chemical pollution, noise pollution, overexploitation of prey, disturbance, climate change, etc.

3.2 Evaluate and prioritise

A number of anthropogenic activities can contribute towards one or more actual or potential threats to cetacean populations. The ease in which threats can be quantified will vary considerably. Measuring both anthropogenic activities and their potential/actual indirect threats to cetaceans is complex and it may often be that a qualitative evaluation needs to be undertaken to identify those for which additional work is required to develop a more quantitative evaluation (e.g. see Table 2 in Donovan *et al*.). The uncertainty needs to be incorporated in the evaluation or in a management framework if and when one is developed.

Section 4: Mitigation measures

Once threats have been identified and prioritised, the next stage is to determine whether feasible, effective mitigation measures exist. Clearly this must be done on a case-by-case basis taking into account *inter alia* local stakeholders, national, regional and international legislative frameworks, costs etc. In many instances, while the problem may be easily identifiable, an acceptable and effective solution may not be. Similarly a mitigation measure practical in one region may not be practical in another.

Explain what is known with respect to mitigation measures, the available legislative framework (regional, national and international) and identify key information gaps.

Section 5: Actions

Clearly a critical part of any conservation plan is a series of well-specified actions. While there is inevitably some overlap, actions can broadly be said to be research or management related and six action types are given below. It is essential that actions are realistic, well-specified and prioritised with timelines. Too ambitious a set of actions can result in an overall plan that is never implemented. Actions need to be clearly written and precise. The type of information that needs to be presented is given in Donovan *et al*.

5.1 Research actions

These actions are established where there is an urgent need to solve a specific problem (e.g. bycatch mitigation measures) or for obtaining essential baseline data related to both animals/populations and anthropogenic activities or lack thereof (e.g. obtaining baseline abundance estimates, evaluating effects of activities on cetaceans).

5.2 Management and legislative actions

Management actions are designed to manage human activities (e.g fisheries, whalewatching, shipping, etc.) They may include the development of a management framework, the application of specified mitigation measures, international agreements, and/or the specification of an MPA management plan.

Legislative actions involve the creation or modification of laws, regulations, guidelines, etc. and the creation or ratification of agreements, conventions, etc (e.g. proposal of MPAs, international and national regulation, like IMO).

5.3 Compliance actions

Compliance actions are related to better implementation of existing regulations if in place (e.g. fishery regulations, pollution controls, shipping lanes) and if not evaluate the need of new management actions (e.g. MPAs, acoustic deterrent device regulation, maritime traffic accident contingency plans and shipping lanes).

5.4 Monitoring actions

Monitoring actions ensure that there is a systematic recording of conservation action goals for the analyses of population trends, their habitats and in the human activities causing actual or potential risk factors. That is they allow assessment as to whether conservation objectives are being met. Examples include monitoring of trends in abundance and modelling of the population viability and monitoring trends in fisheries catches and/or operations.

5.5 Capacity building, public awareness and education actions

It is important to take specific actions to assist local stakeholders in understanding and participating in the conservation plan (e.g. workshops and meetings with stakeholders, public awareness and education programme). Emphasis should be on compliance rather than enforcement.

5.6 Coordination Actions
Actions to ensure the effective operation of any conservation plan.

Section 6: Costs

- Costs should be clearly set out against proposed activities and timeframe
- Costs should be justified
- Funding sources should be identified