
A Strategic Approach to the development and implementation of Conservation Management Plans

Submitted to the IWC61 Conservation Committee by the Government of Australia

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) is the primary international body with the responsibility to conserve and manage the world's cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises). Cetaceans are a diverse group; some are highly migratory and depend on multiple marine ecosystems while others have very restricted geographic ranges and habitat requirements. Some species are at risk across their entire range, others across only some of their range, while for others there is little known about either their distribution, abundance or conservation status. Responding to the conservation needs of all cetaceans in an effective manner will require prioritised and flexible strategies and new approaches, international collaboration and cooperation, and guidance from the latest available science.

The IWC has long recognised the integral relationship between science and conservation. This functional linkage is reflected in the structure of the Commission itself with its Scientific and Conservation Committees.

Australia's paper '*Conservation Management Plans for Improved Cetacean Management*' (IWC/60/15), submitted at IWC60, proposed conservation management plans as a modern, flexible, and adaptive tool for the conservation management of cetaceans as they face a wide range of established and emerging threats. Australia's paper explained the need for conservation management plans and outlined the essential elements of a plan.

Also submitted at IWC60 was a paper by Donovan *et al* 2008, '*Towards the development of effective conservation plans for cetaceans*' (SC/60/O17). This paper outlined a model framework for developing conservation management plans within the IWC. Australia fully endorses this framework as an excellent initial approach.

Conservation management plans are intended to provide the Commission with a tailored management tool to be applied to improve conservation outcomes for cetacean populations through targeted management of human activities.

In this paper we outline a strategic approach to developing and implementing conservation management plans within the IWC.

Prioritising Plans

Conservation management plans should be applied to manage human and cetacean interactions when there is a reasonable expectation that they deliver real conservation gains to the cetacean population(s). This final and tangible outcome should generally be derived from the advantages implicit within the conservation management plan framework:

- Voluntary, cross-jurisdictional cooperation in addressing a threatening process
- Clearly determined, practical objectives and methodologies which result in conservation gains for cetaceans
- Assessment milestones by which progress can be measured.

Global cetaceans face a vast array of human-related threats, so there is a consequent need to prioritise the substantial task of conservation management plan development to species, regions and threats of the most pressing need and the greatest likelihood of success.

The IWC has a range of mechanisms by which it might review the global status of cetaceans, evaluate key threats in a regional manner, and thus develop a strategic evaluation of where to target conservation management plans. Firstly, the Comprehensive Assessments of the Scientific Committee provide an extensive summary of the status of knowledge of many of the large whales, and include information on key threats and knowledge and conservation status. The work of most of the Scientific

Committee's sub-committees also provide substantial information on which to evaluate global cetacean populations. Perhaps of more immediate and contemporary relevance to an assessment of the conservation status of cetaceans is the 2008 IUCN 'red list' evaluations in which all cetacean species were evaluated for their current conservation status, along with summaries of known threats. These, and some other resources (e.g. the Australian Government's '*Conservation and values: global cetacean summary report*' – which can be found at the following web link: www.environment.gov.au/coasts/species/cetaceans/index.html) represent available information on which to determine conservation management plan priorities.

Progressing Plans

The IWC Scientific Committee is already focusing on the need to implement a conservation management plan for the critically endangered western gray whale. The framework for conservation management plans developed by Donovan *et al* 2008 is being used to develop this plan. The western gray whale is one of the world's most critically endangered cetacean populations and prioritising this population for conservation management plans fits well within the framework for prioritisation outlined in this paper. The conservation management plan for this population will provide an excellent case study for developing and implementing conservation management plans within the IWC and Australia fully endorses priority development of this plan.

To support development of this and other conservation management plans, which may require significant resources, Australia has made a voluntary, one off contribution to the IWC of \$AUD 500 000. Australia's contribution will support the collaborative efforts of IWC members to identify and prioritise those species for which active management of human activities will benefit cetacean conservation outcomes, and support the development and implementation of conservation management plans to achieve those outcomes. Australia fully supports consideration of the use of this contribution to rapidly advance development of a plan for the western gray whale.

In developing a conservation management plan for the western gray whale, the Scientific Committee has welcomed the advice and support it has received from the IUCN Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel (WGWAP). The WGWAP is an excellent initiative and provides an ideal model for obtaining regional and discipline-relevant expert input and collaboration for progressing conservation management plans.

Developing conservation management plans within the IWC will require an integrated approach across all areas of the Commission as well as obtaining input from managers and policy makers and collaborating with groups and States outside the IWC. This task can be facilitated by the fact that the two most relevant Committees, the Scientific and Conservation Committees, include some of the world's foremost cetacean scientists, managers and policy makers, supremely equipping the IWC to establish conservation management plans as a tool for achieving its conservation and management objectives in a prompt and effective manner.

Australia has proposed regional, non-lethal collaborative research partnerships (IWC/60/16) as a model for a modern approach to science within the IWC. Regional research partnerships would address key scientific needs in priority areas and employ the best available techniques to gather essential information. Along with the workings of the Scientific Committee, such partnerships can provide the necessary scientific underpinning for conservation management plans, and advance the conservation needs for cetaceans globally. The first such regional research partnership is the Southern Ocean Research Partnership.

Recommendations

Two priorities exist for the next step in developing conservation management plans within the IWC. First, a prioritised list of candidate conservation management plans should be established on the basis of conservation need and likelihood of successful conservation outcomes. IWC and IUCN resources most readily support the development of such a list. Australia proposes appointment of a small specialist group to construct this list intersessionally, and make it available for review at IWC62. Second, the development of the first conservation management plan, for western gray whales, should be seen as a priority within the IWC. This plan will provide a template and model for the development of future conservation management plans for other species and populations. Australia fully supports consideration of the use of its voluntary contribution to the IWC, for the development of conservation management plans, to support both of these high priority activities.