

Report of the intersessional workshop on welfare and recommendations for future work

Submitted by the United Kingdom

Following the Welfare and Ethics workshop hosted by the UK at the Eden Project in March 2011 (IWC/63/WKM&AWI 4), at IWC63 the UK proposed an intersessional working group (IWC/63/10) to consider and develop the ideas and recommendations brought forward by the 2011 workshop. Representatives from ten IWC Governments attended a workshop held in London on the 6th March 2012.

The workshop heard several presentations; on the findings of the Eden workshop, the history of animal welfare issues in the IWC and developments in other International fora in dealing with animal welfare issues.

Summary of discussions and conclusions;

The group reviewed the conclusions of the Eden Project workshop and centred discussions on recommendations for next steps to be taken by the Commission with regard to animal welfare in light of the general conclusions regarding broad animal welfare principles. The group acknowledged that animal welfare is complex, multi-faceted public policy issue which includes important ethical, economic and political dimensions.

It was acknowledged that the report of the Eden Project workshop was a useful document, and should continue to be used for reference, but that the purpose of this workshop was not to affirm or validate its findings. The group agreed that numerous human activities in the marine environment can have direct and indirect adverse impacts on whale welfare, sometimes causing injury, pain, distress and/or death. In particular the workshop noted that animal welfare is relevant to many issues in addition to direct takes, including, inter alia, whale watching, ship strikes, and bycatch. The group discussed the importance of Contracting Governments continuing to share information with the IWC, as this data is needed to develop scientific understanding for conservation and management.

Given the relevance and importance of animal welfare to a wide range of issues discussed within the IWC, the workshop believed that it may be more practical and appropriate for animal welfare to be taken into consideration and, where appropriate, addressed by all relevant IWC working groups and committees. Especially those that deal with issues other than direct takes of whales, in the course of their work, rather than for all welfare issues to be exclusively referred to the Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues.

The workshop recognised that many IWC working groups are already giving significant consideration to the promotion of good animal welfare in the course of existing and ongoing projects (e.g. entanglements, ship strikes, ASW). It was discussed that the development of general guiding principles on animal welfare – in common with other inter-governmental bodies such as the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) - could also be a valuable exercise to ensure clarity and consistency of approach to the promotion of good animal welfare across the spectrum of the IWC's work.

It was acknowledged that the IWC has a significant history of working on welfare issues and a current action plan that is worth revisiting and building on. It was noted that the IWC Scientific Committee has already recognised the need for external expertise when dealing with animal welfare issues, and previous expert workshops have successfully allowed for that outside expertise to play a role in advancing work on this issue.

Therefore, the workshop concluded:

- There has been a long history of dealing with animal welfare issues at the IWC and it is important to further those efforts;
- The practice of holding regular topic-specific expert workshops has been very successful and an important mechanism for bringing in outside expertise; and
- That all existing Sub-Committees and Working Groups of the IWC, especially those that deal with issues other than direct takes of whales, should be encouraged to discuss animal welfare in their deliberations.

Recommendations

Recognising the significant work and progress that has been made by the IWC on welfare issues to date, and seeking to find ways forward for constructive progress amongst all IWC member nations, the group agreed three recommendations:

1. For the Commission to consider, at IWC64, requesting the WKM&AWI working group to form an ad-hoc intersessional working group to:
 - i. review its Terms of Reference and Action Plan on Animal Welfare Issues to see if they need updating or revision and make recommendations accordingly;
 - ii. recognising the success of previous IWC workshops on specific issues, with invited external experts, identify and agree upon important issues or themes to progress the promotion of good animal welfare and agree a timetable of regular (e.g. annual) future technical workshops on these issues, that would report back to the relevant working groups.
2. Pursuant to point (ii), above, to recommend to the Commission two areas that it believed could benefit from dedicated working groups/workshops in the immediate future:
 - the euthanasia of large stranded whales and;
 - the criteria for determining unconsciousness in whales

Summary proposals are included in Annex A to this report, and the workshop hoped that these suggestions may be considered by the WKM&AWI Working Group at IWC64, with a view to making a recommendation to the Commission to take one or both forward.

3. To consider directing the Secretariat to: a) develop a database of external contacts with expertise in animal welfare science pertinent to work being undertaken by the Commission, and b) recommend to the Commission opportunities for constructive co-operation with other relevant animal welfare bodies.

Annex A - proposal for a workshop/s

1. Euthanasia of stranded whales

Live strandings of cetaceans occur worldwide. Euthanasia is not the aim but often a welfare decision is taken and is the outcome of such events. Current techniques available for euthanasia of stranded whales differ according to region, species, size of the animals, and environmental conditions. The Workshop would be tasked to compare and contrast the various methods used worldwide and look at ways of improving efficiency, safety of personnel, when or if to intervene (including, potentially, a decision tree and reviewing triage techniques), and what lessons can be learned through the IWC's work on entanglements and make recommendations as appropriate.

1. Practical criteria for determining the onset of irreversible insensibility and death

The workshop will consider the anatomical, physiological, behavioural, pharmacological, technological, engineering and logistical considerations involved in the development and use of indicators of loss of consciousness and death.