

Report of the Standing Working Group on Conservation Management Plans

Submitted by the Government of Australia on behalf of the Standing Working Group on Conservation Management Plans

Overview

At its 63rd annual meeting, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) accepted key guiding documents on Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) (IWC/63/CC5¹), submitted by Australia on behalf of the then Small Advisory Group on CMPs (and attached to this document). These documents provide a framework and templates to assist member countries who wish to develop a CMP, and to guide IWC support of CMPs, including funding support. The documents also include revised terms of reference for the Standing Working Group on CMPs (CMP Working Group) which is to work closely with the Scientific Committee as well as CMP proponents.

The Commission adopted the reports of the Scientific Committee and Conservation Committee, with regard to CMPs, but due to lengthy discussion on other matters, the Commission had limited opportunity to fully consider CMP documents and issues. The CMP Working Group has therefore proceeded with its work during the intersessional period on the basis of provisional acceptance of the recommendations contained in document IWC/63/CC5 pending a final confirmation of the Commission at IWC64. The CMP Working Group reaffirms the recommendations contained in document IWC/63/CC5, which are reproduced verbatim in this report.

At IWC63, the Conservation Committee discussed a proposal to compile a global inventory of cetacean conservation measures, on a regional basis. In accordance with these discussions, Australia has commissioned an inventory of cetacean conservation measures in the Pacific Islands region. Australia has submitted a separate paper to the Conservation Committee on the inventory.

Developments since IWC63

Membership of the CMP Working Group continues to expand; since IWC63, Italy and Ghana have joined the group, broadening its regional representation. The United Nations Environment Programme has also joined the group as an observer. The International Union for Conservation of Nature has been working closely with the IWC during development and implementation of the CMP for Western gray whales.

Also at IWC63, the Conservation Committee discussed a proposal to compile an inventory of cetacean conservation measures currently in place or underway by jurisdictions, on a regional basis. In accordance with this decision, Australia commissioned an inventory of cetacean conservation measures in the Pacific Islands region. The inventory highlights the many different ways these countries and territories have pursued cetacean conservation at the national, regional and international levels. Utilising information provided in the inventory, the paper demonstrates its utility as the basis for undertaking a management gap analysis and in turn for identifying opportunities for further enhancing existing cetacean conservation efforts through the application of innovative regional collaborative approaches, such as through the development of a CMP. The inventory will be reported separately to the Conservation Committee at IWC64.

Current and Potential Future CMPs

Coordinators and contacts for CMPs currently in development were approached for an update on progress over the intersessional period since IWC63.

Western gray whale

At IWC62, the Scientific Committee endorsed the draft Western gray whale CMP and encouraged all relevant parties to work together to further refine and implement it.

¹ http://iwcoffice.org/_documents/commission/IWC63docs/63-CC5.pdf

The overall goal of the western gray whale CMP is to manage human activities that affect western gray whales and maximise the population's chances for recovery, based on the best available scientific knowledge. Implementation of this CMP is being directed by the Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel, working with key range state governments, civil society, industry, the IUCN, and the IWC.

The Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel met most recently in Geneva, Switzerland, from 12-14 February 2012. Progress on implementation of this CMP during the intersessional period, will be reported separately.

South American populations of right whales

At IWC62, the Commission endorsed a proposal from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay to develop a CMP for the Eastern South Pacific (ESP) population of Southern right whales, found off Chile and Peru, and right whales off the South Atlantic coast of South America (WSA). In September 2011, Argentina hosted a workshop to develop a CMP for these South American populations of southern right whales. The draft CMP is expected to be submitted for consideration by the Commission at IWC64.

With regard to ESP southern right whales, the CMP will aim to guide and encourage range state stakeholders (*i.e.* government, industry, coastal communities and civil society, among others) and international partners to take steps towards the recovery of this population to levels that will allow the species to withstand both environmental and anthropogenic impacts and ensure its long-term survival.

To achieve this objective, the CMP will focus in the medium term on monitoring population status, anthropogenic threats and effectiveness of conservation measures. In the short term, it will 1) obtain baseline data, particularly in relation to population size, areas of concentration of the species (breeding or feeding areas) and stock structure; 2) conduct a detailed assessment of potential impacts in identified areas of concentration and; 3) develop specific mitigation strategies.

In relation to WSA southern right whales, the CMP will identify a range of anthropogenic threats and potential mitigation strategies. It will focus on the following key threats for immediate action: die-off events, kelp gull harassment, entanglement and ship strikes, and seismic exploration for oil and gas.

Arabian Sea humpback whale

Humpback whales in the Arabian Sea constitute a small, isolated population that is vulnerable to human activities. At IWC63, the Scientific Committee agreed that sufficient data exists on Arabian Sea humpback whales and the possible anthropogenic threats facing them to recommend that a process be commenced toward development of a CMP. The CMP Working Group agrees with this recommendation and encourages key range states to begin this process.

The CMP Working Group has developed key guiding documents to assist those member countries wishing to develop a CMP (IWC/63/CC5). In addition the CMP Working Group is well positioned to provide advice and support to key range states, as well as facilitate cooperation between the Conservation Committee and the Scientific Committee on issues related to the development of a CMP, should it be requested.

Inventory of cetacean conservation measures in the Pacific Islands region focusing on Oceania Humpbacks

Australia has commissioned a preliminary inventory of cetacean conservation measures in the Pacific Islands region. The inventory encompasses the following states and territories: American Samoa (United States of America [USA]), Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia (France), Guam (USA), Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia (France), New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands (USA), Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn Island (United Kingdom), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau (New Zealand), Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna (France).

The inventory has demonstrated its utility in identifying the nature and extent of conservation measures in the region. It could also be used as a tool to identify potential opportunities for range states to further expand the depth and coverage of cetacean conservation measures across the region. Should, for instance, countries elect to undertake an Oceania Humpback CMP at some future stage, the data provided in this preliminary inventory should be of valuable assistance.

Considerable additional information on the cetacean conservation, research and education in the region as well as on threats has been compiled by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP). Recognising SPREP's leadership on these matters and subject to the views of SPREP and Pacific Island contracting parties, if this preliminary inventory is considered a useful model, action could be undertaken by the IWC to further refine this inventory.

It is hoped that this inventory of cetacean conservation measures in place in the Pacific Islands region will act as a model for similar inventories in other regions, ultimately contributing to a global inventory.

Recommendations

It is recommended that that the Conservation Committee note progress during the intersessional period on current and potential future CMPs, as reported here.

It is also recommended that the Conservation Committee endorse the recommendations of the IWC63 paper IWC/63/CC5, contained below verbatim, for consideration by the Commission:

- that the CMP guidelines, templates and funding principles presented in IWC/63/CC5 be adopted;
- that these documents be placed on the IWC website for use by members wishing to undertake a CMP;
- that the Small Advisory Group on CMPs be reconstituted as a Standing Working Group on CMPs;
- that the terms of reference for the CMP Working Group, contained in IWC/63/CC5, be adopted;
- that the Scientific Committee be invited to undertake an analysis of priority candidates for future CMPs; and
- that the Conservation Committee be tasked with undertaking an inventory of cetacean conservation measures currently in place or underway in jurisdictions, on a regional basis.

It is recommended that the Conservation Committee note the findings of the inventory of cetacean conservation measures in the Pacific Islands region and recommend to the Commission endorse the following recommendations for consideration by the Commission:

- that the Commission note the Review of Measures for Marine Mammal Conservation, Protection and Management in the Pacific Islands Region in 2007 by IFAW and SPREP;
- that the Commission acknowledge the significant cetacean conservation measures currently in place to protect cetaceans in the Pacific Islands region, as identified in this inventory;
- that the Commission recognise the leadership of SPREP in advancing cetacean conservation in the Pacific Islands region, including through implementation of its regional Whale and Dolphin Action Plan and its partnership with CMS on the CMS Pacific Cetaceans MoU, and the important role of organisations such as South Pacific Whale Research Consortium;
- that the Secretariat write to SPREP advising it of the work of the Standing Working Group on CMPs and inviting SPREP to participate as an observer to the Working Group;
- subject to the views of SPREP and the Pacific Island Contracting Parties, if this inventory is considered a useful model it is proposed that the Chair of the Working Group contact SPREP with a view to exploring options to further refine the inventory;
- that similar regional inventories be developed for regions around the globe as part of the work of the Conservation Committee; and
- that regional inventories of cetacean conservation measures should be updated periodically (every 5-10 years or as appropriate).