

## Whale Watching Strategic Plan (2018-2024)

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### 1. Introduction

Whale watching is a globally recognised use of cetacean resources and since 1955 has been an activity of growing economic importance. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) has considered the issue since 1975.

Over that time, the Commission has provided an increasing focus for the sector, considering at various meetings the scientific, legal, socioeconomic or educational aspects of whale watching. The IWC adopted its first resolution on whale watching (Rep. int. Whal. Commn 44:33-4) in 1993 at IWC45, and the following year, at IWC46, a further resolution (Rep. int. Whal. Commn 45:49-50) requested advice from the Scientific Committee on whale watching (the development of guidelines), and established, through a review of all aspects relating to the sector, what has in practice now become an ongoing programme of work. A standing Whale Watching Sub-Committee was set up under the Scientific Committee (Rep. int. Whal. Commn 50) in 1998 and while it has since addressed a range of matters concerning the sector, its work has had a strong focus on better identifying and assessing, and increasing understanding of, the potential impacts of whale watching on cetaceans. A standing Working Group on Whale Watching (SWGWW) was established under the IWC's Conservation Committee in 2010. This working group focuses its efforts on identifying best practices of responsible whale watching, assessing and promoting potential benefits from whale watching, and identifying areas for increased international coordination and collaboration. A Five Year Strategic Plan was developed by the SWGWW and adopted at the IWC in 2011, covering the years 2011-2016 (see IWC/63/CC3, Appendix A). This plan has mainly resulted in the development of the IWC's Online Handbook on Whale Watching and increased communication between the IWC and other bodies regarding whale watching, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Convention on Migratory Species.

### 2. The Issue

In response to the recent rapid growth of the sector, its anticipated future expansion and the recognised need to promote best practice management to realise associated environmental, social and economic benefits, the Commission further addressed whale watching in 2008 (IWC60).

Considering that a responsible (i.e. environmentally, economically and socially sustainable) industry required the integration of good science and information, appropriate management regimes and good governance, the Conservation Committee established an Intersessional Correspondence Group to consider the issue further and identify future directions (IWC/60/Rep 5). The Working Group on Whale watching was subsequently established to take forward the recommendations from the report of that Intersessional Correspondence Group (IWC/61/CC9).

This report recognised the opportunity presented to build on the momentum that had been generated in relation to whale watching. It noted the importance of whale watching as a valuable economic opportunity that, whilst still in the early stages of development in many countries, required cooperation and information sharing to encourage responsible development, consistent with international best practice.

It was agreed that responsible development of the whale-watching sector would benefit from a strategic approach, commencing with a five-year strategic plan. A Draft Strategic Plan 2010-2015 was prepared by the Working Group on Whale watching (IWC/62/CC8) and recommended that a workshop be held to undertake an assessment of what tools and information communities needed, and the most effective way to deliver this support, through engagement with scientific, management and conservation experts, industry, governments and interested communities. A Whale Watching Workshop was held in Puerto Madryn, Patagonia, Argentina in November 2010. Thirteen countries attended the Workshop and its conclusions (Report of the IWC workshop on Whale watching – refer Circular Communication IWC. ALL.163) provide the basis for the further development of the five-year strategic plan. Three key elements were identified: research and assessment; management; and

capacity building and development. The Workshop considered that these elements would assist countries in building responsible whale watching industries.

The Workshop recommended that the Working Group consider, as one of the primary methods for achieving the objectives of the Strategic Plan, the development of a web-based Handbook would provide advice on governance, capacity building, monitoring, compliance, business, community and education/training/communication. The Workshop also stressed the importance of coordinating the whale watching work of the Conservation and Scientific Committees.

Now that the Handbook is completed, this Strategic Plan continues those efforts and further underscores the need to continue working on these issues. In addition, there are scientific and management concerns regarding whale watching impacts on cetacean individuals and populations, particularly for populations whose conservation status is of concern, as well as on local communities. All of this should be taken into consideration as this Strategic Plan is implemented.

### 3. Legal and International Framework

Article V(1)(a) of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling provides that the Commission may adopt measures with respect to the conservation of whale resources.

While the IWC has an important advisory role in facilitating the development of responsible whale watching, responsibility for adoption and use of any tools or products under the Strategic Plan lies with national governments or their subsidiaries.

Local issues require local solutions – there are many different types of whale watching, and there is no universal prescription of what comprises best practice, or as yet a scientific basis to define it unequivocally. The Strategic Plan is intended to provide direction to the efforts of the IWC and its adoption does not change the responsibilities of Contracting Parties.

Involvement in the actions of the Strategic Plan is on a voluntary basis and is intended to complement other national or international legislation, frameworks or plans that support the conservation and responsible nonlethal use of cetaceans.

### 4. Scope and Structure

The Whale Watching Strategic Plan sets out objectives and actions designed to facilitate development of the whale-watching sector by Contracting Parties in a manner that is responsible and consistent with international best practice. It is intended to build upon the Whale Watching Strategic Plan for 2011-2016. Success will be measured by considering both outputs - the timely development and delivery of products and tools under the Strategic Plan; and outcomes - uptake and adoption of best practice by Contracting Parties. The Strategic Plan will be subject to iterative review and ongoing adjustment in line with the principles of adaptive management.

### 5. Vision

Whale watching in harmony with healthy whale populations – communities, regions and countries realising the benefits of responsible whale watching.

In seeking to promote best practice management of whale watching the principle outcome should be to further the effective long-term conservation of cetacean populations. As such, the whale watching industry and national governments (or their subsidiaries) have clear responsibilities, as resource users, to both conduct and manage whale watching in ways that do not compromise the fitness of individual cetaceans, their populations or their habitats.

### 6. Objectives

In order to achieve this vision, an adaptive management framework is critical. Three objectives have been identified as the key components of such a framework for work to be completed during the period 2018 through 2024. The newly developed digital Whale Watching Handbook (Handbook), the SC Subcommittee on Whale Watching, and the Standing Working Group on Whale Watching will be important mechanisms through which these objectives can be achieved.

The Strategic Plan identifies a suite of short-, medium-, and long-term actions associated with each objective. Short-term actions are taken to be those which can be delivered within two years of the adoption of the Strategic Plan, with medium-term actions delivered over five years.

Two long-term actions are identified in this iteration of the Strategic Plan:

- (1) Continued development of the digital Whale Watching Handbook, and
- (2) Development of an integrated research plan.

Communities and regions will have culturally, socially and economically-specific requirements for the development and/or expansion of whale watching industries. Research is likely to increasingly identify both species- and population-specific mitigation measures. As such, all identified actions should be read as requiring the accommodation of this diversity in any outcomes or products they generate.

Additionally, within two years of commencing work on the actions outlined below, this Working Group aims to undertake a comprehensive review of outputs to allow activities to be refocused, if required.

#### Objective 1 - Information Sharing

Identify methods to facilitate cooperation and information/expertise-sharing between Contracting Parties and others to support the development of a responsible whale-watching sector, including the provision of benefits to local communities. The newly developed digital Whale Watching Handbook (Handbook), the SC Subcommittee on Whale Watching, and the Standing Working Group on Whale Watching will be important mechanisms through which information sharing can be achieved.

Action 1.1 – Use the Standing Working Group on Whale Watching, the SC Sub-Committee on Whale Watching, and the Handbook to continue to improve industry and public access to data, information and research results.

Action 1.2 – Continue to update, maintain and improve the Handbook.

Action 1.3 - Identify and facilitate opportunities for the transfer (or development where a gap has been identified) of best possible practice approaches to meet identified capacity building needs including in the Handbook and elsewhere.

Action 1.4 - In conjunction with relevant international bodies, facilitate access to guidance for Contracting Parties and others on creating enabling environments for whale watching operations to market and run their businesses responsibly.

Action 1.5 - Continue to develop training and education tools for industry practitioners so that they can:

- Understand and improve cetacean and visitor safety;
- Improve whale watching practices; and
- Enhance visitor understanding and experiences.

Action 1.6: Implement a communications strategy to actively promote IWC whale watching resources (e.g., the Handbook, reports and training opportunities), with approaches tailored to target key audiences. These audiences include:

- the public
- whale watching managers
- researchers
- operators
- on-board naturalists.

Action 1.7: Continue to improve the coordination between the SWG and the SC Sub-Committee on Whale Watching.

#### Objective 2 - Research and Data Collection

Continue to develop the necessary research principles and tools to assist the collection of data important to ensuring that whale watching (1) does not significantly and adversely affect the behaviours and fitness of individual cetaceans or populations or their habitats and (2) realizes its potential benefits, e.g., educating the public, positively affecting attitudes toward conservation, improving local economies. These tasks and the actions below are for the SC Sub-Committee on Whale Watching, which should coordinate closely with the CC SWG on WW.

Action 2.1 – Continue the Modelling and Assessment of Whale Watching Impacts (MAWI) initiative, to develop tools and methodologies to assist researchers and managers in their efforts to assess potential impacts of whale watching on cetaceans and to mitigate them. This initiative is ongoing and could focus on:

- Investigating modelling methods to link short- (e.g., behavioural reactions) and medium-term (e.g., changes in population distribution) responses with potential impacts from whale watching to long-term (i.e., >10 to 20 years) consequences (e.g., vital rates).
- Establishing standard data collection methodologies, including from platforms of opportunity.
- Identifying key locations for whale watching research projects and programmes, taking into consideration logistics, capacity and management urgency;

Action 2.2 – Develop a long-term integrated research programme to better understand the potential impacts of whale watching on the demographic parameters of cetacean populations. Seek to:

- Investigate whether there is a causal relationship between whale watching exposure and the survival and vital rates of exposed cetacean individuals and populations;
- Understand the mechanisms involved in causal effects, if they exist, in order to define a framework for improved management;

Action 2.3 – Develop processes and mechanisms for whale watching activities to collect and provide scientifically robust and useful data to researchers and research programmes; and

Action 2.4 – Develop an approach (e.g., hold an intersessional workshop; establish a joint intersessional working group) to integrate social and ecological scientific research within the IWC to inform whale watching management and promote potential benefits. This is a coordinated action between the SWG and the SC Sub-Committee on Whale Watching.

#### Objective 3 - Capacity Building and International Collaboration

Support the development of a responsible whale watching sector and the provision of benefits to local communities.

Action 3.1 - Identify, on a regional basis, specific capacity building, research and development needs. In particular, those (or including those) providing long-term benefits for the livelihood of local communities.

Action 3.2 - Identify and list in the Handbook, funding and development organisations able to offer assistance relevant to the establishment and maintenance of whale watching operations at varying scales.

Action 3.3 - Work with relevant international bodies, industry associations and outside expertise, to develop guidance and training tools in the Handbook that address occupational health and safety aspects of whale watching operations.

Action 3.4 – Investigate and promote best practices on cost-effective monitoring and compliance regimes and alternative strategies to promote environmentally responsible whale watching.

Action 3.5 – Identify and work with key partners and priority organizations who might contribute to the vision and objectives/goals.