

Terms of Reference for the Voluntary Conservation Fund Steering Group

The Voluntary Conservation Fund Project Steering Group (VCF-SG) is responsible for overseeing the Voluntary Conservation Fund, evaluating project proposals and determining the selection of projects in accordance with Commission-endorsed conservation initiatives which aim to support the rebuilding and maintenance of healthy whale populations.

1. Membership

The Steering Group is open to all contracting governments but shall include the Chair and/or Vice Chair (or their nominated representatives) of both the Scientific Committee and the Conservation Committee.

The Chair of the Steering Group shall be elected from amongst its members and may hold the position for a period of up to four years. The current chair may be re-elected if the group so chooses.

2. Duties

The main duties of the Steering Group include:

- allocating funding for projects which support the delivery of the strategic plan of the Conservation Committee and its Standing Working Groups;
- evaluating project proposals using the eligibility and evaluation criteria;
- notifying the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Conservation Committee of what projects have been successful, seeking input if the Steering Group is unable to reach a decision;
- monitoring and reporting progress of project outcomes to the Finance and Administration Committee;
- ensuring and maintaining rigorous, transparent decision-making when allocating funds.

The Steering Group will assess all project proposals to ensure each application meets the eligibility criteria agreed at IWC64 in 2012 (Annex A) and will evaluate those that do, using the evaluation criteria (Annex A).

When needed, the Conservation Committee will provide input on project prioritisation to facilitate the VCFSGs decision. The VCF-SG will ensure that any proposed project contributes to the delivery of the strategic plan of the Conservation Committee. Where appropriate, the Steering Group shall also aim to ensure that projects are representative of different regions, so that funding can be targeted at particular range state areas where it may be difficult to secure local financial support.

The Steering Group shall report on the progress of each funded project to the Conservation Committee and the Finance and Administration Committee.

3. Recommendation making

Consistent with the Commission's Rules of Procedure, the Steering Group will make every effort to reach consensus on its recommendations. Where this is not possible, the Steering Group will report this to the Commission through the Conservation Committee.

4. Meetings

The Steering Group shall primarily undertake its work electronically, but may meet face-to-face, subject to the availability of funding, to facilitate decision making on the prioritisation and agreement of conservation projects.