

Bi-Annual VCF Report

January - August 2023

Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW) Fund

Ghost Gear Removal

A steering committee for this project has been established in collaboration with North Slope Borough with a workshop scheduled for late 2023, after the Alaskan whaling season, or potentially later due to recent events in the community.

Survey of Indigenous and Human Rights Instruments

In September 2015, the IWC Expert Workshop on ASW met to advance work to improve the Commission's management of subsistence whaling and the consideration of indigenous rights (Maniitsoq Workshop). The Expert Workshop recommended the Commission undertake a survey of international indigenous and human rights instruments, and that such a survey could inform the Commission's role in addressing indigenous rights.

Following the invitation to tender the contract was awarded to Ms Jessica Lefevre and Dr Nikolas Sellheim with the first draft report scheduled for March 2024 and the final report in June 2024. To date the process and timetable for development of the survey report (building in the consultation needed at various stages) has been established and £11,500 has been paid from the total £23,000 assigned to this project.

Invited Participants attending Scientific Committee meeting

The IWC SC was fortunate to receive funds to cover the costs of four ASW specialists to attend the SC69A meeting in Bled, Slovenia. The total costs were £11,397.

Funding

The IWC was grateful to receive AUD \$50,000 from the Australian Government and USD \$8,500 from the US Government, the latter through the grant under the NOAA Five-year Cooperative Agreement.

Current Uncommitted ASW funds: £24,791

Conservation Fund

Bycatch

Bycatch Risk Assessment training was implemented in Thailand by Ellen Hines with the assistance of Dr Vivian Kuit and Fernanda Barilari through a four-day virtual workshop.

\$1,000 was allocated to pay the two researchers to formulate and update training material and implement the training in coordination with the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, Thailand.

The Bycatch Risk Assessment (ByRA) toolbox enables the spatial/temporal assessment of bycatch risk using any amount of data, identifying areas for critical research and potentially immediate management actions while considering the reliability and robustness of toolbox results (Hines et al., 2020). There were 28 attendees, and we are currently in discussions regarding future collaborations that could align with our capsule project.

This project was overseen by Dr Ellen Hines, IWC Bycatch Expert Panel.

£6,622 has been allocated from NOAA funding to complete further ByRA training in Colombia – building on initial virtual training implemented in 2020.

Bycatch in Tuna Fisheries

£95,265 has been allocated under the Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction FAO project. The project objective is to achieve responsible, efficient, and sustainable tuna production and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ in face of a changing environment.

Ship Strikes

The IWC was fortunate to receive voluntary funds to cover the Ship Strikes Coordinators attendance at the SC69A meeting in Bled, Slovenia, which was critical to ensure engagement with the SC's 254 participants from 31 member countries.

Conservation Management Plan (CMP)

£9,600 was paid to Juan Pablo Torres Flores as Coordinator of the CMP to protect southern right whale habitats, minimise anthropogenic threats and recolonise their historic range. This management plan provides a framework for range states to collaborate to monitor population threats and recovery. Actions were taken across Argentina, Chile, southern Brazil, and Uruguay.

Funding

The IWC was grateful to receive AUD \$210,000 from the Australian Government, assigned to Bycatch and CMP Projects and USD \$13,500 from the US Government, assigned to Bycatch and Ship Strikes.

Current Uncommitted Conservation funds: £186,792

Small Cetaceans Research Fund

One project amongst the five currently running is:

Rapid assessment of the occurrence and conservation status of Guiana dolphins at the northern periphery of their range in Central America

The main goal of this study was to rapidly assess the conservation status of Guiana dolphins in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama by (1) characterizing Guiana dolphin interactions with fisheries using a fisher interview-based approach and by (2) estimating their distribution and relative abundance. Project Budget: £16,620.

Although the project did not find any impact on these populations of Guiana dolphins from fishing practices, there are other human activities in that area that are of concern and should be monitored in the future such as dolphin watching activities.

Funding

The IWC was grateful to receive AUD \$80,000 from the Australian Government, EUR €10,000 from the French Government and USD \$15,000 from the Animal Welfare Institute for Small Cetaceans.

Current Uncommitted Small Cetacean funds: £141,897

Southern Oceans Research Partnership (SORP) Fund

The IWC's Southern Ocean Research Partnership (IWC-SORP) was proposed to the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 2008 with the aim of developing a multi-lateral, non-lethal scientific research programme that would deliver coordinated and cooperative Southern Ocean science to the IWC. Currently, there are 13 member countries in the Partnership: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, and the United States. IWC-SORP is an open Partnership that welcomes new members. Our ethos is one of open collaboration, communication, and data sharing.

There are currently seven endorsed and ongoing IWC-SORP themes:

- 1) 'The Antarctic Blue Whale Project'
- 2) A theme aimed at describing the 'Distribution, relative abundance, migration patterns and foraging ecology of three ecotypes of killer whales in the Southern Ocean'
- 3) The 'Foraging ecology and predator-prey interactions between baleen whales and krill' theme
- 4) A theme that investigates the 'Distribution and extent of mixing of Southern Hemisphere humpback whale populations around Antarctica?' focused initially on east Australia and
1. Oceania
- 5) The 'Acoustic trends in abundance, distribution, and seasonal presence of Antarctic blue whales and fin whales in the Southern Ocean' theme
- 6) 'The right sentinel for climate change: linking foraging ground variability to population recovery in the southern right whale' theme
- 7) The 'Recovery status and ecology of Southern Hemisphere fin whales' theme.

£3,157 of contingency funding was awarded intersessionally by the IWC-SORP SSC to Dr Helena Herr leader of the *Recovery status and ecology of Southern Hemisphere fin whales theme*, to support the participation of an expert tagger and facilitate the deployment of up to 19 transdermal SPOT tags on fin whales during the 2023FINWAP research expedition (MSM115) aboard the RV *Maria S. Merian*.

Funding

The IWC was grateful to receive AUD \$130,000 from the Australian Government and GBP £140 from Emma Abel.

Current Uncommitted SORP funds: £128,451

Voluntary Assistance Fund (VAF)

Meeting Participation

A total of £22,287 was spent to facilitate the participation of Capacity to Pay groups 1 and 2 attending the Scientific Committee meeting in Bled, Slovenia.

Funding

The IWC was grateful to receive AUD \$30,000 from the Australian Government and USD \$8,000 from the US Government.

Current Uncommitted VAF funds: £98,859

Welfare Fund

Entanglement Training and Capacity Building

Training workshops have taken place, given by Michael Myer and Bob Lynch, in Mayotte, La Réunion, and Genoa (with colleagues from France and Monaco). IWC's Expert Panel on Entanglement Response has so far delivered training to 1300 participants from 36 countries.

The training starts with technical information on data collection, relevant laws or regulations, and cetacean species present in the region; and then provides practical in situ sessions at sea using disentanglement tools and manoeuvring vessels close to large whales.

In June 2023, two representatives from Kenya participated in an “entanglement response apprenticeship”. For two weeks, the Kenyan apprentices were trained by David Mattila, lead of the IWC Global Whale Entanglement Response Network, at the Center for Coastal Studies (CCS) located in Provincetown, USA. The IWC signed an MoU with the CCS at IWC68 in 2022.

Strandings Initiative and Capacity Building

A Strandings Expert Panel four-day Workshop was held in Venice, Italy in May 2023 which was co-funded by the University of Padova. The workshop discussed the implementation of the four year 2021-2024 IWC Work Plan and the strategies of the IWC Strandings Expert Panel including:

- List of training and emergency online tools
- Strategies for the Agreement with other IGOs/NGOs for global cooperation
- Implementation of the workplan 2021-2024 with the appointment of regional coordinators, regional trainings, coordination in case of emergencies

A total of £17,556 was allocated from Strandings Coordination fund to meet travel, accommodation and expense costs to facilitate the workshop.

Members of the IWC’s Stranding Expert Panel have also assisted on cetacean strandings in their respective regions, some of which are within the Indian Ocean region. Cetacean strandings interventions included unusual mortality events, mass strandings, epidemics, live strandings and out of habitat situations. Since a mass stranding event in 2020, there are ongoing discussions with Mauritius concerning stranding capacity building.

Spatial risk assessment Hector’s and Maui dolphins New Zealand

£16,845 of voluntary funding was utilised to facilitate a detailed independent review of a ‘Spatial risk assessment of threats to Hector’s and Māui dolphins’ (Roberts et al., 2019) with respect to this document’s use for informing management measures to address anthropogenic threats to Hector’s and Māui dolphins off New Zealand.

This was financed by a grant from the New Zealand government.

Funding

The IWC was grateful to receive EUR €30,000 from IFAW via the Dutch Postcode Lottery and USD \$5,000 from the US Government, both to entanglement work.

Current Uncommitted Welfare funds: £17,692

Summary position of voluntary funds to 31 August 2023

Fund	Project	Opening Balance	Income	Transfer	Expenditure	Balance
ASW	Ghost Gear Removal		6,622			6,622
	Survey on Indigenous & Human Rights			23,000	(11,500)	11,500
	IP's to SC69A			11,397	(11,397)	0
	Uncommitted ASW	32,591	26,611	(34,397)	(14)	24,791
	TOTAL	32,591	33,233	0	(22,911)	42,913
Conservation	SW Atlantic Southern RW CMP	15,600			(9,600)	6,000
	River Dolphin CMP	3,973				3,973
	Uncommitted CMP	76,186	58,543			134,729
	Bycatch General	289,717	53,221	(8,224)		334,714
	Bycatch Coordinator at SC69A			3,402	(3,402)	0
	ByRA	19,489				19,489
	Bycatch in Tuna Fisheries		95,265		(2,595)	92,669
	Bycatch Rapid Risk Assessment Training - Columbia		6,622			6,622
	Bycatch Assessment Workshop - Thailand			822	(822)	0
	CIBBRiNNA					0
	Pilot Project - Peru			4,000		4,000
	Ship Strikes Coordinator	28,643	10,000		(20,132)	18,511
	Ship Strikes Coordinator at SC69A		3,895		(3,581)	314
	Marine Debris	9,178		(9,178)		0
	Conservation Committee Database	10,000		(8,000)		2,000
	Whale Watching Fund	2,236		8,000		10,236
	Ecosystems Services	1,000				1,000
IP's to SC69A			2,812	(2,812)	0	
Uncommitted Conservation	180,664		6,366	(238)	186,792	
TOTAL	636,685	227,547	0	(43,182)	821,050	
Other	Governance Review (WG-OE costs)	13,738				13,738
	Rules of Procedure Review		3,895		(1,950)	1,945
	NOAA Intern		6,233			6,233
	TOTAL	13,738	10,128	0	(1,950)	21,917
Smalls	Small Cetacean Task Team	2,975				2,975
	Latin America Projects	1,164				1,164
	Rapid Assessment Guiana Dolphins - Central America	9,764		(2,944)	(6,820)	0
	Conservation of Guina Dolphins - Venezuela	2,070			(1,250)	820
	Population Assessment & Dynamics of Lahile's Bottlenose Dolphins in Argentina	8,510				8,510
	Barrage Operations on the Nepal-India Border for Ganges River Dolphin	2,494				2,494
	Bycatch of Burmeister's Porpoises in Peru	10,000				10,000
	IP's to SC69A			11,670	(11,670)	0
	Uncommitted Smalls	87,396	63,262	(8,726)	(36)	141,897
TOTAL	124,374	63,262	0	(19,776)	167,861	
SORP	Recovery Status & Ecology SH Fin	20,475		3,750	(3,750)	20,475
	Foraging Behaviour in Baleen Whales	3,158		(3,158)		0
	Long Range UAVs	7,644				7,644
	Demographic History of Blue & Fin Whales in the Antarctic	5,678			(5,678)	0
	Acoustic Ecology of Foraging Antarctic Blue Whales	17,831				17,831
	Humpback Sea-Ice Ecosystem Monitoring	12,889				12,889
	Ecology & Connectivity of Killer Whales SA & Indian Oceans	8,413			(8,413)	0
	Baleen & Toothed Whales in Scotia & Antarctic Peninsula	14,079			(4,079)	10,000
	Sampling Platform for Large Cetaceans	8,020				8,020
	Extracting Standardised Health Parameter Data	10,058				10,058
	Insights into Antarctic Blue Whale Population Structure	14,085			(14,085)	0
Southern Right Whale Demographic Parameters	11,375				11,375	
Uncommitted SORP	59,736	69,328	(593)	(20)	128,451	
TOTAL	193,440	69,328	0	(36,025)	226,743	
VAF	SC69A Participation			22,287	(22,287)	0
	Governance Review Participation	2,013				2,013
	Uncommitted VAF	105,210	15,966	(22,287)	(31)	98,859
	TOTAL	107,223	15,966	0	(22,318)	100,871
Welfare	Welfare General	64,613		(47,632)		16,981
	SEP Workshop - Venice			17,556	(17,556)	0
	Spatial Risk Assessment Hectors & Maui Dolphins		16,845		(16,845)	0
	ECS Workshops (Marine Debris & Strandings Database)			173	(173)	0
	Strandings Coordinator at SC69A			1,088	(1,088)	0
	Strandings Coordinator at IWC69			2,076		2,076
	Strandings Coordinator	18,834		26,738	(11,566)	34,006
	Strandings Marine Mammal Workshop - Barcelona 2019	2,135				2,135
	Entanglement General	1,531	28,743	(2,470)	(6,529)	21,275
	Entanglement Training			2,470	(2,470)	0
	Pump Prime - Project Development	7,556				7,556
	Uncommitted Welfare	17,922			(229)	17,692
TOTAL	112,589	45,588	(0)	(56,455)	101,722	