

SC/68B/CMP/17

Conservation Management Plans: Update from the CMP Standing Working Group

Adam Clark; Annie Robinson



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLANS: UPDATE FROM THE CMP STANDING WORKING GROUP

Adam Clark ^a and Annie Robinson ^b

a Assistant Director – International Heritage and Whales Section

Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Parkes, Australian Capital Territory, 2600, Australia

Contact email: adam.clark@awe.gov.au

b Policy Officer – International Heritage and Whales Section

Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Parkes, Australian Capital Territory, 2600, Australia

Contact email: annie.robinson@awe.gov.au

ABSTRACT

The IWC's Conservation Management Plan (CMP) program continues to develop and remains a unique and effective model for generating and maintaining range state involvement in the conservation of at-risk cetacean populations around the world. This paper provides a summary of recent progress and updates from existing CMPs, several CMPs in development, and plans for priority populations. This includes a request for advice to support further progress to develop a CMP for Arabian Sea humpback whales. This paper also outlines challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and outlines the CMP Standing Working Group's recent work on outreach and strategic planning.

INTRODUCTION

There are four existing Conservation Management Plans (CMPs), and five prospective CMPs in various stages of development.

While interest in the CMP program from IWC members remains strong, achieving continuity of funding remains a challenge. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, coordinators and drafters have also experienced setbacks in stakeholder engagement and implementation of CMP actions. The CMP Standing Working Group (SWG-CMP) will continue outreach and strategic planning activities, and work to support coordinators and range states. The SWG-CMP registers its appreciation for the continuing efforts of the SC-CMP in supporting the development and implementation of CMPs, including by identifying priority candidates for CMP development.

Updates on existing CMPs

Western South Atlantic Southern Right Whale (Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay)

In January 2020, work on this CMP resumed under the coordination of Juan Pablo Torres-Florez, of the Centro Nacional de Pesquisa e Conservação de Mamíferos Aquáticos (Brazilian government agency). This CMP has been dormant since 2017, requiring meetings and significant travel to re-establish interest and commitment from range states, however the COVID-19 pandemic has made this difficult.

The Ministry of the Environment (Brazil) and the Ministry of Foreign Relationships of Brazil have commenced dialogues with their counterparts from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, to identify sub-coordinators in each range state to work together to establish work plans and budgets for CMP actions.

Meetings with researchers from Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina have been held to coordinate possible satellite tagging in Uruguay and Brazil. Funding proposals were sent to potential funders. When/if these are approved, the priority will be tagging in Brazil, followed by Uruguay and then Chile. Conversations have been carried-out with Dr. Zerbini's tagging team, who is expecting to tag in Brazil and Uruguay. Researchers are collating information to update their understanding of the population and priority actions to be carried out in each range state.

Eastern South Pacific Southern Right Whale (Chile, Peru)

Important advances on this CMP occurred during 2019-2020, particularly regards the Passive Acoustic Monitoring project, the obtention of photo-IDs, new insights into the genetic identity of the population, educational lectures and workshops, and media outreach program. The government of Peru has kindly offered to host the third coordination meeting and workshop on experience exchange on whale watching and research permits. However due to COVID-19 these activities are on hold.

Franciscana dolphin (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay)

Work over the past year has focused on preparing the review of the status of franciscana by the Scientific Committee, which will guide future conservation efforts under the CMP. A preparatory workshop took place from 12-14 February in Porto Alegre, Brazil, on abundance and trends, threats, and national management and conservation initiatives for the review. The workshop was hosted by Grupo de Estudos de Mamíferos Aquáticos do Rio Grande do Sul (GEMARS) and supported by Fundo Nacional do Meio Ambiente (FUNBIO) of Brazil. The workshop was attended by 25 participants from the three countries.

A public campaign will be developed as a priority, to raise awareness about the conservation challenges facing the franciscana and launched in all range states.

Western North Pacific Gray Whale (Japan, Russian Federation, USA, South Korea, Mexico)

The workshop to finalise rangewide population modelling and the associated small scientific drafting group meeting to finalise the scientific aspects of the updated draft CMP for submission to the SC have been postponed due to COVID-19. Work has continued via email and it is hoped to hold the meeting later in the year if the COVID-19 situation resolves. The plan will then be to bring the update to the SC and the Memorandum of Co-operation countries (Japan has indicated that it will continue to be a member of that group) in 2021, with the aim to present the revised CMP to IWC69. IUCN (co-sponsor of the original CMP) has indicated its willingness to help organise a stakeholder meeting as part of this process.

Update on Priority Species/CMPs in Development

Mediterranean fin whale

At IWC68a, the SC-CMP recommended the Mediterranean fin whale sub-population be treated as a priority population for CMP development. An updated draft of the Mediterranean Fin Whale CMP was endorsed at the ACCOBAMS SC in February 2020. The proponents indicated an intention to submit the draft CMP to SC68b, however the draft has not yet been received or reviewed by the SWG-CMP.

Central American Humpback whale

At IWC68a, the SC-CMP recommended the Central American Humpback whale population be treated as a priority population for CMP development. The proponents indicated an intention to submit a draft CMP to SC68b, however the draft has not yet been received or reviewed by the SWG-CMP.

A workshop took place from 9-10 March in Panama City, Panama, to discuss the development of this CMP, including biological and ecological aspects, threats, mitigation and monitoring. The workshop was hosted by the Minister of Environment of Panama and supported by Ministerio de Ambiente, la Secretaría Nacional de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación (SENACYT) de Panamá and Cetacean Society International (CSI). The workshop was attended by 21 participants from eight countries (US, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama).

Arabian sea humpback whale

The Arabian Sea humpback whale (ASHW) is a priority population for CMP development. The IWC is actively engaging with India and Oman (the two Commission member range states for the population) to encourage and support the development of a CMP.

India's national efforts to work with the western provinces on addressing ASHW conservation is an important step towards an IWC CMP for this species. In discussions with the IWC Secretariat following the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) Conference of the Parties in 2020 (COP13), India noted the constraints faced by their national program including the fact that sightings of this species are rare, and a lack of knowledge on how to monitor and mitigate ASWH interaction with offshore trawl fisheries.

In Oman, the site where the most dedicated ASHW work takes place, limited surveys were conducted in 2019 with research teams maintaining basic data collection and monitoring programmes using their own resources. At a regional level, communication between researchers and representatives of conservation organisations is maintained through the Arabian Sea Whale Network. India's IWC Commissioner has retired and notification of the new leadership is awaited before continuing discussions with the Commissioners of India and Oman.

In February 2020, the CMS COP13 approved the [extension of the ASHW Concerted Action](#) into the next triennium (2020-2023). This proposal includes several activities similar to those normally incorporated in an IWC CMP. The Concerted Action includes the following categories of activity:

- Addressing knowledge gaps
- Information sharing and awareness raising
- Capacity building and development and implementation of mitigation strategies

The last category of activity will hopefully lead to a joint IWC-CMS CMP with active support and participation from government stakeholders. However, considering the current global turmoil caused by COVID-19, the timing is uncertain. It is important to ensure that government stakeholders can focus on these issues, which is unrealistic at present, but every effort will be made to reinvigorate the process as soon as is practicable.

Request for advice from the Scientific Committee

Until a CMP can be developed, the following recommendations from the SC would be helpful to support further conservation work in the ASHW range:

1. A recommendation that the IWC and IWC members in ASHW range states support all the elements of the CMS Concerted Action.
 - a. This should include support for research and monitoring required to assess and update the Key Ecological Attributes that form the focus of population monitoring in the CMS Concerted Action (current version at **Annex A** for information).
2. That the IWC in partnership with other Conventions and inter-governmental organisation and relevant range states support viable and consistently funded research programmes that are designed to collect necessary data (as recommended in the action plan of the ASWN, the CMS Concerted Action, and IWC processes). As a matter of urgency these should include areas where few dedicated cetacean surveys have been conducted to date – particularly Pakistan, India and the Sea of Oman coast of Iran, as well as areas of Oman beyond the two areas that have been the focus of research for the past 20 years.
3. That the IWC Secretariat and SWG-CMP continue efforts with Oman and India towards development of a CMP

Small cetaceans

South American River Dolphins

The IWC Commissioners of Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru continue to work together to progress plans for a CMP for the Amazon river dolphin (boto). The proponents had indicated an intention to submit a CMP nomination to this meeting, however the draft has not yet been received or reviewed by the SWG.

Asian freshwater small cetaceans

The SWG-CMP and Sub-Committee on Small Cetaceans have supported World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) to submit a paper to SC68b seeking advice on whether three threatened species of Asian freshwater cetaceans (South Asian river dolphin, Irrawaddy dolphin and the narrow ridged finless porpoise (also known as Yangtze finless porpoise)) should be treated as a 'priority species/populations' for the purpose of the CMP development process and progress straight to the CMP development stage, therefore not requiring a nomination.

During CMS COP13, two proposed Concerted Actions relating to Asian river dolphins (Ganges river dolphin and Irrawaddy dolphin) were put forward by the Government of India and these were adopted by the meeting. Assessment of dolphin numbers and threats is a focus of this work, along with community-level programs to address bycatch and direct consumption. The Bycatch Mitigation Initiative is currently scoping opportunities to assist bycatch assessment and reduction efforts focused on river dolphins, particularly in relation to its planned 'pilot projects'. The IWC Secretariat is in discussions with India on how the IWC and BMI could assist with its river dolphin research and conservation efforts.

There may be possible linkages and opportunities for collaboration between the CMS Concerted Actions, a CMP, and a pilot BMI project.

Reminder about communicating recommendations

As per SC/68A/CMP/03, the SWG-CMP requests that the SC-CMP makes clear recommendations at each of its meetings on which species/populations, if any, should be considered priorities for CMP development. Pending agreement from the SWG-CMP, such a recommendation will result in proponents moving straight to the CMP development stage (no nomination required), with support from the SWG-CMP and SC-CMP to ensure the information being included and the prioritisation of actions is on the right track.

Consistent with SC/68A/CMP/03, the SWG-CMP reminds the SC-CMP to use the following phrasing for its recommendations on this matter:

The Scientific Committee considers that [species/population] would benefit from the development of a CMP and **recommends** that the SWG-CMP treat the species/population as a 'priority species/population' for the purpose of the CMP development process. In making this recommendation, the Scientific Committee acknowledges that a nomination would not be required for the species/population, and the Scientific Committee encourages the SWG-CMP to commence outreach to relevant range states and stakeholders to encourage and support the development of a CMP.

Both nominations and draft CMPs should be provided to the SWG-CMP in the first instance, which will provide advice prior to the document being submitted to the SC.

CMP program management and outreach updates

Thematic Strategic Plan

The current [CMP Work Plan](#) is due to end in 2020. The SWG-CMP Chair has drafted a thematic strategic plan for consultation ahead of IWC68. This will be circulated to the SC-CMP convenors for review. The strategic plan frames CMPs as collaborative partnerships, establishes clear roles and responsibilities, and sets out long-term strategic priorities for the program. The document will still function as the primary source of information for anyone wanting to know about the CMP initiative.

Fundraising

Achieving financial self-sufficiency of CMPs remains a challenge. The SWG-CMP continues to work with the Secretariat to explore external funding opportunities to support CMPs going forward. Australia has prepared a concept note for the CMP program that the Secretariat and others can use when approaching potential funders. We hope to work with co-ordinators to develop fundraising materials for distinct CMP actions.

Promoting the CMP program

The SWG-CMP launched a biannual newsletter ‘*CMP Deep Dive*’ in 2019 to promote the achievements and upcoming priorities of the CMP program (Issue One can be downloaded from the IWC Website: https://iwc.int/document_3705). The second issue will be distributed in mid-2020. SC-CMP members are invited to provide content for the newsletter at any time, including upcoming training and workshops, new research, and information about any of the cetaceans that are covered by CMPs. Content can be sent to whales@awe.gov.au.

Funding update

The SWG-CMP reports to the SC-CMP at each Scientific Committee meeting on the voluntary funds approved or raised (as we expand our use of the Secretariat’s new external fundraising process) for each CMP in the preceding 12 months. The SWG-CMP encourages the SC-CMP to also notify the SWG-CMP whenever funding to support CMPs is approved from the research funds.

Approved in 2019:

- Employment of a coordinator for the Southwest Atlantic Southern Right Whale CMP: £19,200 + up to £6,000 for travel to coordination/SC meetings.
- Extension of coordinator contract for Eastern South Pacific Southern Right Whale CMP for 12 months: £2,500 (+ £13,500 unspent from previously approved coordination meeting support)

Annex A: Arabian Sea Humpback Whale Data

Table 1 Current status of Arabian Sea humpback whale Key Ecological Attributes/Indicators (from Baldwin, R., Collins, T., Antonopoulou, M., & Willson, A. (2017). Viability Assessment for Marine Biodiversity Indicators. *Emirates Wildlife Society -WWF*, 120. And used in the CMS Concerted Action on ASHW).

| KEA | Indicator | Current status | Rationale/Justification |
|----------------------------|--|----------------|--|
| Population size | Number of whales in study area | Fair | Population is likely Critically Endangered (currently listed by IUCN as Endangered) with fewer than 100 individuals in Oman and probably low hundreds regionally. |
| | # of whale encounters per day during dedicated surveys | Fair | Dedicated surveys are limited to Oman where whale hotspots are known, boosting encounter rates. |
| | # of dead whales per year | Poor | Recent strandings data indicate an unsustainable mortality rate. |
| Population stability | Population trend | Fair | (Tentative). A recent preliminary population estimate suggests no significant change from the first estimate made over 10 years previously. Detailed investigation of whaling records may reveal more information on longer-term population trend. |
| Population structure | Age class and sex ratios | Fair | Calving rates appear to be low, but longevity of individuals is considered good; sex ratio of encountered whales skewed towards males in certain studied areas, such as Dhofar (presumed to be related to singing behaviour). |
| Reproductive success | # of calves observed | Fair | Very few calves sighted. |
| Health | 'Skinniness' (blubber thickness) | Fair | Skinny whales are occasionally recorded (post-monsoon). Baseline and scale not yet established. |
| | # of new scars from fisheries/vessel interaction | Fair | Baseline not yet established, but assumed to be 'Fair' at best based on high % (~40%) of whales with fisheries scarring. |
| | Presence/absence of lesions (TSD) | Fair | Baseline established by Bressemer <i>et al.</i> (2014) and suggests ~16-26% of adults affected. Is assumed to be 'Fair' at best given an apparent increase in prevalence of whales with lesions. |
| | Hormonal levels | Unknown | No data currently available. |
| Extent of critical habitat | % of effectively protected critical habitat | Poor | Critical habitat areas known in Oman (only) but these are all outside of Oman's two marine protected areas (Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve and Ras al Hadd Turtle Reserve). |
| Habitat condition | Abundance, quality and trend of food sources | Good | Stocks of small pelagic fishes in Oman thought to be relatively healthy (MAFW, unpublished data), though recent indication of declining sardine stocks in India are cause for concern. |
| | % of ports with vessel speed controls | Poor | Ports are known to be adjacent to important whale habitat throughout the region but Duqm Port is the only port in the region with vessel speed guidance in place for whales; the level of adherence to this guidance is currently unknown. Salalah Port is the other main port adjacent to known habitat hotspots. There are further ports that require attention in the region. |
| | # of ship strikes | Unknown | No confirmed reports of ship strikes of ASHW available, though there are records of bryde's and blue whales being struck by ships in the region, including Oman and Sri Lanka. |
| | # of bycaught whales | Poor | Direct observations of entanglement, strandings and scarring indicate unsustainable bycatch. |
| Habitat connectivity | Ability to access critical habitats | Fair | Current movement of whales appears largely unhindered, but continued access to critical habitat may be under pressure due to the amount of vessel traffic and fishing activity that is increasing. |

Table 2. Summary of indicator ratings for Arabian Sea humpback whale KEAs

| KEA | Indicator | Indicator Rating | | | | Current Rating | Desired Rating | Date of Current Rating |
|----------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------------|
| | | Poor | Fair | Good | Very Good | | | |
| Population size | # of whales in study area | <60 | 60-150 | >150 | >250 | Fair | Good | Oct 2017 |
| | # of whale encounters per day during dedicated surveys | < 1 whale p/d (ave) | 1-4 whales p/d (ave) | 5-10 whales p/d (ave) | >10 whales p/d (ave) | Fair | Good | Oct 2017 |
| | # of dead whales per year | Deaths > estimated recruitment | Deaths = estimated recruitment | Deaths < estimated recruitment | 0 | Poor | Good | Oct 2017 |
| Population stability | Population trend | Any decline | ≥0% (stable or increasing) | >1-5% increase per year | >5% increase per year | Fair | Good | Oct 2017 |
| Population structure | Age class and sex ratios | tbc* | tbc* | tbc* | Age class /sex ratio even | Fair | Good | Oct 2017 |
| Reproductive success | # of calves observed | 0 per year | <5 per year | 5-10 per year | >10 per year | Fair | Good | Oct 2017 |
| Health | 'Skinniness' (blubber thickness) | >50% of whales | 25-50% of whales | <25% of whales | <10% of whales | Fair | Good | Oct 2017 |
| | # of new scars from fisheries/vessel interaction | >10% of whales | 5-10 % | <5% | 0 | Fair | Good | Oct 2017 |
| | Presence/absence of lesions (TSD) | >30% of adults | 15-25% | <25% | 0 | Fair | Good | Oct 2017 |
| | Hormonal levels | Baseline tbc | Baseline tbc | Baseline tbc | Baseline tbc | Unknown | Good | Oct 2017 |
| Extent of critical habitat | % of effectively protected critical habitat | 0% | <25% | 25-75% | >75% | Poor | Good | Oct 2017 |
| Habitat condition | Abundance, quality and trend of food sources | >10% decline | 5-10% decline | <5% decline | No Decline | Good | Good | Oct 2017 |
| | % of ports with vessel speed controls | <10% | <40% | 40-60% | >60% | Poor | Good | Oct 2017 |
| | # of ship strikes | >2 per year | 1-2 per year | ≤1 per year | 0 per year | Unknown | Good | Oct 2017 |
| | # of bycaught whales | >2 per year | 1-2 per year | ≤1 per year | 0 per year | Poor | Good | Oct 2017 |
| Habitat connectivity | Ability to access critical habitats | tbc# | tbc# | tbc# | Unimpeded access | Fair | Good | Oct 2017 |

* Indicator Ratings to be measured in relation to % population in specified age brackets and % skew in sex ratio