



Report from the International Whaling Commission on progress relevant to the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 5 December 2023, 78/69 of Oceans and Law of the Sea

June 2024

Summary

The International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling contains an integral Schedule that sets out specific measures that the IWC has collectively decided are necessary in order to regulate whaling and conserve whale stocks. In addition, the IWC coordinates and funds conservation work for many species of cetaceans. Through its Scientific Committee, it undertakes extensive study and research on cetacean populations, develops and maintains scientific databases, and publishes its own peer-reviewed scientific journal, the *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management*. The Convention has 88 member governments and more than a hundred accredited observers.

The biggest threats to healthy cetacean stocks are not under the regulatory authority of the IWC, and as such, the IWC places a high value on cooperation with other intergovernmental organisations, industry (fishing, shipping, etc.), and the wider non-governmental and research communities, as well as on the development of regional approaches to conservation and management. The IWC is mandated to co-operate with other intergovernmental organisations including the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), UN Environment and the Biodiversity-related MEAs (particularly the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The IWC is a member of the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions (BLG) and is actively inputting to the development of the Post 2020 Framework for Biodiversity. The IWC is particularly pleased to be a member of the FAO's Regional Secretariat's Network to pursue collaboration with regional fishery bodies and RFMOs.

The work of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies has considered an ever-expanding range of issues that are also addressed by UNCLOS and by the UN General Assembly resolution 78/69 including:

- *Capacity building* – IWC conducts various capacity building exercises. Examples include the Global Whale Entanglement Response Network, creating a global network of professionally trained and equipped responders to whale entanglements. Secondly, the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI) works at building capacity within national governments and fisheries management bodies to help understand and select the most appropriate tools for bycatch assessment and management. The IWC also: supports the development of cetacean strandings response and investigation through the IWC Strandings Initiative; supports the development of a responsible whale watching industry; allocates funds to priority projects on



small cetacean conservation; and provides scientific advice on research projects and publication of papers. One of the aims of the IWC's Journal on Cetacean Research and Management is to support authors from developing countries, being both free to publish and open access.

- *Sustainable fishing* – The IWC'S Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI) addresses the critical need to monitor and mitigate cetacean bycatch in fisheries around the world. The BMI is a collaborative partner in two interdisciplinary projects that started in 2023. The IWC is leading a Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Phase II capsule project, in collaboration with RFBs and RFMOs in two ocean basins – the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. Secondly, IWC is a partner in the Coordinated Development and Implementation of Best Practices in Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic region – (CIBBRiNA) project was approved in March 2023 by the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE). This project will work to achieve EU cross-border cooperation and fisheries engagement to improve knowledge on bycatch in different fisheries, to minimise bycatch of priority ETP species and to work towards science-based assessments of the impacts of bycatches on their populations. The IWC also completed the first part of the Peruvian Pilot Project in partnership with the national government. This project focussed on identifying knowledge gaps and priority species in need of research and management.
- *Marine safety* – Ship strikes can have negative consequences for both humans and cetaceans, and the IWC has focussed on collaborative ways to minimise such occurrences including work with IMO, governments and regional organisations (e.g. on rerouting shipping lanes, speed reductions, guidance to marine users). The IWC continues to develop a global database of ship strikes continually adding historic and new records. This provides a useful resource for the assessment of shipping related mortality both spatially and temporally.
- *Climate change* - This continues to be considered by the IWC's Scientific and Conservation Committees. The Scientific and Conservation Committees have formed a joint Climate Change Intersessional Correspondence Group. The joint group will consider a future workshop and how to bring more information on climate change issues into SC.
- *Marine debris* – A [Resolution on Marine Plastic Pollution](#) was adopted by consensus at IWC68 (October 2022). The Resolution states that marine plastic pollution is now recognised as a major global threat to cetaceans (entanglement, ingestion), ocean and ecosystem health, biodiversity, livelihoods, and wild animal conservation and welfare, and that plastics contribute to climate change at each stage in their lifecycle. It referenced the adoption of UNEA Resolution 5/14 (*'End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument'*) in 2022 as a significant step towards addressing this major threat. There is an opportunity for the IWC to contribute to these efforts by taking a lead in addressing the negative impacts of marine plastic pollution on cetaceans through actions that would be supportive of, but distinct from, the UNEA Resolution. Intersessional work has already begun and a workplan is under development and will be presented later in 2024, at IWC69.



- *Marine Protected Areas* – The IWC has currently designated two Sanctuaries, the Indian Ocean Sanctuary and the Southern Ocean Sanctuary around Antarctica. The Southern Ocean Sanctuary was just reviewed at the SC68B meeting in 2024. The IWC also engages with the CBD process on scientific criteria for ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), the IUCN Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) and aspects of the IMO Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs).
- *Underwater noise* - Since 2014, the IWC has been working to reduce anthropogenic underwater noise. This includes assisting with IMO initiatives, the development of guidelines for responsible seismic surveys and the minimisation of the impacts of marine renewable resource developments on cetaceans. Recent work focuses on engagement with IMO and efforts to address underwater noise from shipping. IWC is part of the Global Partnership for Mitigation of Underwater Noise from Shipping (GloNoise Partnership) project, designed by IMO, UNDP and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which began in December 2023. The objective of the GloNoise Partnership is to establish a global stakeholders partnership, with a strong focus on developing countries, to deal with the issue of underwater noise from shipping.
- *Whales and ecosystems* - The IWC has long recognised the importance of whales in the functioning of ecosystems. The Commission adopted Resolutions directing work on the issue in [2016](#) and [2018](#) and the Conservation and Scientific Committees have both focused efforts on different aspects of this topic. In recent years, a range of global organisations have contributed to a rapid increase in knowledge and interest in the role played by whales in ecosystems. The IWC, with CMS, held a workshop on modelling the contribution of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning in Bonn 14-16 November 2023. Outcomes from this workshop will inform future research into the socioeconomic value of cetaceans' contributions to ecosystem functioning.

This year, the Scientific Committee (SC69B) met in Bled, Slovenia, in April (Full report available [here](#)). The Conservation Committee will meet virtually in early September and the Commission meeting, IWC69, will be in Lima, Peru on 22-28 September.



Detailed progress report relevant to sections of the General Assembly Resolution 78/69

1. Capacity building

Section II of Resolution 78/69 addresses the need for capacity building and paragraph 11 “Emphasizes that capacity-building is essential to ensure that States, especially developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as well as coastal African States, are able to fully implement the Convention, benefit from the sustainable development of the oceans and seas and participate fully in global and regional forums on ocean affairs and the law of the sea”.

The IWC contributes to such capacity building efforts through several programmes:

1.1 *The IWC entanglement response programme* was established in 2011 to address the growing problem of whale entanglement in fishing gear and marine debris by building a global network of professionally trained and equipped entanglement responders. Since its first training workshop in 2012 this initiative has provided training to more than 1,293 participants from 34 countries. In addition, it has hosted apprentices from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Norway and Oman. The programme now has eight trainers from North, Central and South America, as well as the Pacific Islands and Africa, with the capacity to deliver training in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese. Since June 2023, we have had Entanglement Response Training in Costa Rica, Argentina, Chile, Reunion, Mayotte, and received apprentices from Kenya and Brazil. These trainings had a total of 151 participants.

1.2 The *IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI)* was established in 2016 in recognition that bycatch in fishing gear is the major conservation issue posed to cetaceans. The BMI aims to raise awareness, at national and international levels, of the need to address cetacean bycatch and share the tools available to understand and mitigate the issue. It aims to promote solutions for monitoring and management and promote collaborative, multi-disciplinary and inclusive approaches to bring about lasting change.

The BMI is collaborating with partners to build capacity within national governments and fisheries management bodies, to support decision makers in with the most appropriate tools for bycatch assessment and management. Since July 2023, Bycatch Risk Assessments (ByRA) training courses have been taught in Bogota, Colombia and the Amazon (including representatives from Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador) in partnership with Dr Ellen Hines. Additionally, the BMI is advancing on pilot projects in the Republic of Congo and finalised the first part of the Peruvian pilot project to test and demonstrate locally led solutions and is working on novel approaches to sustainable financing for bycatch research and management



implementation. The IWC Secretariat with the FAO is implementing the Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Phase II capsule project with an initial assessment of available data and information on bycatch, fishing effort, and, if possible, the status of cetacean populations in the Indian and Western Pacific regions that are prone to bycatch and entanglement. The Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) approved the CIBBRiNA project in March 2023. This project will promote EU cross-border cooperation and fisheries engagement to improve bycatch knowledge in different fisheries, minimise bycatch of priority ETP species, and develop science-based bycatch population impacts assessments. The BMI's Expert Panel also provides multi-disciplinary expertise and technical advice upon request.

- 1.3 The IWC *Strandings Initiative* aims to build capacity of countries to respond to and investigate cetacean strandings. This includes the provision of virtual, real-time advice during ongoing strandings events, allocation of funding for emergency response and investigations, support for the development of strandings networks and training in “on the beach” response and necropsy. Since July 2023, the Stranding Initiative has implemented the Caribbean Marine Megafauna and Anthropogenic Activities (CAMAC) strandings capacity building training programme. This project included specialized training workshops for each nation (Suriname, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, St Kitts, Aruba, Bonaire, Jamaica, and Haiti), with a total of 146 participants.
- 1.4 The IWC *Small Cetacean Conservation Research Fund* supports high priority research and capacity building projects that improve conservation outcomes for populations of small cetaceans, particularly those that are threatened or especially vulnerable to human activities.
- 1.5 Ongoing research led the IWC to develop the General Principles for sustainable whale watching to help guide the development of whale watching regulations around the world. These were updated in 2022 and are available [online](#). The IWC/CMS [Whale Watching Handbook](#) is a comprehensive online tool for regulators, industry, and the public. IWC has been collaborating with the Indian Ocean Rim Association since they have relaunched the IORA Whale Watching Network. The Network's first Whale O'Clock webinar in April 2024 featured a presentation on the IWC's work on whale watching, including the previously outlined tools as well as the Scientific and Conservation Committees' and WW group's working processes. As part of the network's reboot, they relaunched their [newsletter](#), and IWC contributed an excerpt.
- 1.6 The Commission's Voluntary Assistance Fund supports countries of limited means to participate in its work. The IWC made such funding available to support participation of African, Latin American and Small Island Developing States' government delegates and



researchers in its Scientific Committee meetings in April 2023 and 2024. This will also be available to assist government delegates to attend IWC69.

- 1.7 The IWC's Journal of Cetacean Research and Management actively encourages and supports scientists from developing countries in publishing their work in an international peer-reviewed, fully open access journal that has no publishing fees.

2. Marine environment and marine resources

Section IX of Resolution 78/69 addresses the Marine environment and marine resources and the need to protect and preserve the marine environment and its living marine resources against pollution and physical degradation. This reflects key priorities for the IWC which is active in several areas addressed in this section including:

2.1 Climate change

Paragraphs 200-203, 213, and 214 of Resolution 78/69 “Notes with concern the impacts of climate change...”, “Also notes with concern the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its successive reports” and “Recognises the importance of improving understanding of the impact of climate change on oceans and seas.”

IWC's current work on climate change is primarily undertaken by the IWC's Scientific Committee, although the topic is now addressed jointly with the Conservation Committee. This has been and continues to be considered through a range of scientific and technical workshops and has included work focussed on biological, socio-economic and development effects on the Arctic. The Scientific Committee recognises that climate change has a bearing on work across its entire agenda, given the far-reaching implications to cetaceans of observed and predicted changes in the marine environment and associated changes in human behaviour. This led to the implementation of the Climate Change Intersessional Correspondence Group, run jointly by the Scientific and Conservation Committee. The group of 80 people from around the world focuses on how to work on Climate Change integrally in the IWC, the possibility of a future workshop, and how to bring more information on climate change-related issues into the SC.

2.2 Marine pollution

Paragraph 216 of the Resolution recalls that in “The future we want”, States noted with concern that the health of oceans and marine biodiversity are negatively affected by marine pollution, including marine debris, especially plastic, persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals and nitrogen-based compounds, from several marine and land-based sources.’

2.3 Marine debris



Paragraph 221 (*inter alia*) notes the work of the International Whaling Commission on assessing the impacts of marine debris on cetaceans. The IWC has undertaken extensive work on this issue to understand and mitigate potential threats from a variety of different types of debris.

An IWC [Resolution on Marine Plastic Pollution](#) was adopted by consensus at IWC68 (2022-1). The 2022-1 Resolution states that marine plastic pollution is now recognised as a major global threat to ocean and ecosystem health, biodiversity, livelihoods, and wild animal conservation and welfare, and that plastics contribute to climate change at each stage in their lifecycle. It referenced the adoption of UNEA Resolution 5/14 (*‘End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument’*) in 2022 as a significant step towards addressing this major threat. There is an opportunity for the IWC to contribute to these efforts by taking a lead in addressing the negative impacts of marine plastic pollution on cetaceans through actions that would be supportive of, but distinct from, the UNEA Resolution. The IWC is working on a proposal encompassing the scientific, conservation and welfare aspects of the resolution. The proposal will be presented later this year at IWC69 for endorsement.

2.4 Chemical pollution

The IWC has been concerned about the impact that chemical pollutants may have on cetacean populations since the early 1980s. Many chemical pollutants, particularly persistent organic pollutants are 'endocrine disrupters' and as such they can increase susceptibility to disease and reduce reproductive success. This is a complex issue given the huge number of synthetic chemicals introduced into the environment, the ways in which they may interact with each other, the difficulty in establishing whether they cause adverse health effects, and the difficulty in quantifying any potential impacts on whale populations.

The IWC presented a report (UNEP/MC/COP.5/INF/31) for the COP to the Minamata Convention on Mercury 5th meeting in Geneva, October 30–3 November 2023. The report detailed the IWC's work on pollution, including Resolutions and recommendations, workshop reports and the IWC Contaminant Explorer tool. Further discussion on how IWC and Minamata Convention could enhance collaboration was had during the Bern III workshop, SBSTTA26 and continues.

3. Marine biodiversity

Section X of Resolution 78/69 addresses the conservation and sustainable use of Marine Biodiversity. Ongoing IWC work directly contributes to priorities in this section including:

Paragraphs 271-273 of Resolution 78/69 specifically relate to areas beyond national jurisdiction and, "the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity" IWC is working with FAO and RFMOs to investigate effective management and mitigation of fisheries in regard to bycatch in both the Indian and Pacific Ocean basins as well as in the North Atlantic Region with the CIBBRiNA project partners (See Section 1.2 *Bycatch Mitigation Initiative*).



3.1 Area based management

Paragraphs 271-273 of Resolution 78/69 address area-based management including marine protected areas. Paragraph 287 notes the work of States, relevant intergovernmental organisations and bodies, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, in the assessment of scientific information on and compilation of ecological criteria for the identification of marine areas that may require protection. The IWC has actively engaged in CBD work on the application of scientific criteria for ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs) and aspects of the IMO Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (paragraph 273). In addition, IWC collaborates with the IUCN led programme for the development of Important Marine Mammal Protected Areas (IMMAs).

Two Sanctuaries are currently designated by the International Whaling Commission. The Indian Ocean Sanctuary was established in 1979 and covers the whole of the Indian Ocean south to 55°S. Adopted in 1994, the second sanctuary encompasses the waters of the Southern Ocean surrounding Antarctica. A revised Southern Ocean Sanctuary Management Plan was endorsed by the Commission in 2018, and a review of the Sanctuary was completed at SC69B in April 2024. Preparations to review the Indian Ocean Sanctuary are being set for next year.

3.2 Ocean noise

Paragraph 282 notes (*inter alia*) the potential significant adverse impacts of ocean noise on living marine resources, affirms the importance of sound scientific studies in addressing this matter, and encourages further research, studies, and consideration of the impacts of ocean noise on living marine resources.

Paragraph 284 calls for further research into, and testing of, technologies to reduce the impact of underwater noise on marine life.

Paragraph 285 calls for continuing collaboration between organisations and IMO.

[Resolution 2018-4](#) on underwater anthropogenic noise was adopted at IWC67. The Resolution called on both the SC and CC to work on aspects of underwater noise and its impacts on cetaceans and their prey, as well as mitigation and management (Resolutions CO1880 and CO1881). Ongoing initiatives developed by the Conservation and Scientific Committees include reviewing the effects of underwater noise on beaked whales (jointly with CMS) and implementing global reviews of seismic surveys.

IWC also collaborates closely with IMO. In 2022, the IMO established a correspondence group, coordinated by Canada, to work on updating the IMO guidelines on reducing underwater noise from commercial shipping in order to address adverse effects on marine life, as well as identify next steps. The correspondence group includes IWC. The revised guidelines were reviewed in



September 2023 and were formally considered for adoption at the Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Construction (SDC) convened at the IMO in London in January 2024.

Paragraphs 285-287

IWC sent a letter of support and will continue to engage with the IMO GloNoise project. The objective of the project is to establish a global partnership to engage, and assist developing countries to raise awareness, build capacity, define baselines and promote international policy dialogue on mitigation of underwater noise from shipping. This project began at the end of 2023 and will specifically look at creating a partnership of Lead Pilot Countries (LPCs) and support them, via engagement with IMO, private sector and strategic partners from developed countries, to tackle the major environmental issue of underwater noise pollution from the shipping sector.

4. Marine Science

Section XI of Resolution 78/69, paragraph 288 addresses the continued need to *“improve understanding and knowledge of the oceans and the deep sea, including, in particular, the extent and vulnerability of deep-sea biodiversity and ecosystems, by increasing their marine scientific research activities.”*

Ongoing IWC work directly contributes to the section's priorities, including recent Scientific Committee recommendations on deep sea mining (subject to Commission endorsement in September 2024). In addition, reviews of the Indian Ocean Sanctuary would include a compilation of research on cetaceans in the area.

Paragraph 290 calls for coordinated research on human related threats to prevent and reduce impacts. The IWC works on many of the threats listed (as outlined above), with an international group of scientists passing on recommendations for prevention and mitigation to member countries.

Paragraph 310, IWC is in discussion with the UN Ocean Decade (Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission) for possible collaboration as there are numerous areas of common interest and synergy between the UN Ocean Decade priorities for the Southern Ocean and the work of the IWC-SC.

5. Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects

Finally, paragraph 314 *“Reiterates the need to strengthen the regular scientific assessment of the state of the marine environment in order to enhance the scientific basis for policymaking.”*

Each Scientific Committee meeting receives a report on the State of the Cetacean Environment (SOCER). These environmental updates were first requested by the Commission in 1997 and have



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been produced annually since 2003 to help inform IWC discussions. Reports are available [online](#). We also have the [Ship Strikes Database](#), that is used as a repository for data and to assess spatial and temporal patterns in vessel strikes.

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Vice-Chair: Nick Gales (Australia)

Executive Secretary: Marth Rojas Urrego



Infographic (2021) summarising current major threats to cetaceans and ongoing IWC work to address themes

