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**Update from the Conservation Committee Working Group on Cetaceans and Ecosystem
Functioning – March 2024**

Barbara Galletti Vernazzani



INTERNATIONAL
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Submitted by the Chair of the CC Working Group on Cetacean and Ecosystem Functioning

ABSTRACT

The Commission endorsed at IWC68 the socio-economic workshop recommendations and the ICG was tasked to work on the development of initial steps before pilot project could be endorsed. An advisory group was established, candidates' populations have been identified, and ToR for pilot project have been discussed. Economic experts attended the 2023 IWC-CMS workshop on cetacean and ecosystem functioning. It was considered of greatest importance that the pilot project should center around creating a research framework to assess the economic role of cetaceans in supporting marine ecosystem services. In addition, the pilot project could then apply some of these models (with available ecological and economic data) to a specific population/area as a general case study. It was also agreed that the framework should provide general guidelines on how these economic valuations can be used to influence whale conservation and management, either through market or policy developments. The draft consultancy tender should be reviewed by de ICG and the Secretariat to reflect the workshop agreements and be submitted at IWC69 for consideration.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2016, the IWC Conservation Committee has been directed to review the “ecological, management, environmental, social and economic aspects related to the contributions of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning for people and natural systems, as a matter of importance” (IWC, 2016).

The IWC has conducted two workshops, one led by the IWC Scientific Committee on cetaceans and ecosystem functioning (IWC, 2021) that reviewed concepts on nutrient circulation, ocean fertilization, whale falls and cetaceans as predators and another led by the IWC Conservation Committee on the socio-economic values of the contribution of cetaceans to the ecosystem functioning (IWC, 2022a). More recently, the IWC-CMS hosted a new workshop inviting both ecological and economical scientists (IWC, 2024).

At IWC68, the IWC agreed to a workplan that included the development of initial steps before any consultancy could be endorsed and that a proposal should be submitted at IWC69 (IWC, 2022b). Last year, the ICG established an advisory group to advance on drafting ToR and selecting candidate populations to be assessed based on available data. These included the North Pacific humpback whale; the Southern Ocean whale species assemblage (humpback, blue, fin, and minke whales); the Southwest Atlantic southern right whales; and the North Atlantic minke whale (IWC, 2023a).

PROGRESS/UPDATES

The Advisory group met virtually four times during 2023 and have also discussed on pilot project ToR.

Discussions on ToR considered topics such as the valuation of ecosystem services that could be accurately obtained (carbon sequestration within biomass), understanding the link between other ecosystem functions and ecosystem services, the impact of economic valuation between the current population size and the pre-exploitation population size, the development of a framework for what data inputs are needed for an economic model of a particular ecosystem service; a state of the art on the existent financial mechanisms at international forum that could be helpful to support cetacean conservation in the future.

Four economists representing different expert groups attended in-person the joint IWC-CMS workshop in Bonn, November 2023. This was the first workshop with participation from economists and ecological scientists.

During the workshop, it was considered of greatest importance that the pilot project should (a) center around creating a research framework to assess the economic role of cetaceans in supporting marine ecosystem services. This framework would explore all potential ecosystem services supported by cetaceans and identify what data gaps can be addressed in the future to allow economic valuation of these ecosystem services.

In addition, the pilot project could then (b) apply some of these models (with available ecological and economic data) to a specific population/area as a general case study.

Furthermore, the group agreed that the framework should (c) provide general guidelines on how these economic valuations can be used to influence whale conservation and management, either through market or policy developments. (IWC, 2024).

The workshop agreement set therefore the priorities and objectives for a pilot project which set of ToR been extensively discussed at the advisory group.

ICG TERMS OF REFERENCE

As part of the IWC68-WGOE process, the Conservation Committee was tasked with standardizing all of the SWG and ICG Terms of Reference.

Based on the 2018 Committee report (IWC, 2018) and resolution 2016-3, the following terms of references are proposed for the Ecosystem Functioning WG:

To make recommendations on how the Conservation Committee could address IWC 2016-3 on Cetaceans and their Contributions to Ecosystem Functioning:

- a) To propose options to undertake the review on the ecological, management, environmental, social and economic components of the contribution of cetaceans to the functioning of healthy ecosystems.
- b) To propose options to further incorporate into the work of the Conservation Committee the contributions made by live cetaceans and cetacean carcasses to ecosystem functioning.

Furthermore, at IWC68, the IWC endorsed the report of the Workshop on Socio-economic Values of Cetaceans to Ecosystem Functioning in principle, but agreed that the proposed pilot project requires further discussion and development before the CC could recommend it is taken forward (IWC, 2022b). Therefore, a short-term objective for the working group in conjunction with the IWC Secretariat should also include 1) to advance intersessionally on the development of tender for pilot project consultancy and; 2) monitor the proper implementation of pilot project

NEXT STEPS

The ICG and the IWC Secretariat will have to review and edit the draft tender on pilot project to reflect the recent workshop agreements.

The draft tender will have to be submitted at Conservation Committee and IWC69 for consideration.

It must be noted that contracting the pilot project consultancy will not require a budget from the Scientific Committee Research Fund.

The Terms of Reference for the ICG should be reviewed and adopted at IWC69.

REFERENCES

International Whaling Commission. IWC. 2016. Resolution 2016-03 on Cetaceans and their Contribution to Ecosystem Functioning

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