

IUCN SSC Cetacean Specialist Group



2018 Report



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Number of members

125

Social networks

Facebook:

IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group

Twitter:

@IUCNCetaceanSG

Website:

<https://iucn-csg.org/>



Mission statement

The Cetacean Specialist Group (CSG) promotes and facilitates the conservation of cetaceans worldwide. It functions as a catalyst, clearing house, and facilitator for cetacean-related research and conservation action. Our guiding premise is that conservation ultimately depends upon good science, and the group's credibility and value are based on maintaining high standards of scientific rigour. The advice we provide relates mainly to the status of populations, abundance, trends, the effects of current or potential threats, and the efficacy of mitigation. Our emphasis is on the recovery of endangered species and populations, but we also recognise the importance of maintaining the full diversity of the Cetartiodactyla (cetaceans), which includes about 90 species and many populations.

Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Cetaceans are nominally protected under several international conventions and by national legislation in most countries, but they are incidentally affected by many human activities in marine and freshwater environments. Most of the conservation work by CSG members is linked, directly or indirectly, to that of other bodies or groups with shared objectives, and this makes it impossible in most instances to tease apart the influence or 'impact' made 'by the CSG' per se (other than in the case of Red Listing). It also means that the targets, activities and results reported here are only a sample of the many areas of ceta-

cean conservation work in which members are engaged, and are often leading or sharing the lead with others. The CSG regularly 'partners' with bodies like the International Whaling Commission (IWC), Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), US Marine Mammal Commission, national government agencies, and NGOs. Our group's traditional focus on Endangered and Critically Endangered small cetaceans, particularly those outside North America, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, continues.

Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Assess

Red List: (1) complete assessments and reassessments of all baleen whale species and selected subspecies and subpopulations; (2) complete assessments and reassessments of all toothed cetacean species and selected subspecies and subpopulations.

Plan

Planning: co-organise and co-convene a workshop (*Ex situ* Options for Cetacean Conservation) for marine mammal experts regarding a One Plan approach for the conservation of small cetaceans.

Policy: (1) establish link with Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (Ninth Session, co-led by WWF-UAE); (2) ongoing links with Indian Ocean Tuna Commission; (3) help to prevent extinction of the Vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*); (4) ongoing involvement in the work of the International Whaling Commission's Scientific and Conservation Committees; (5) serve on an independent expert panel to review New Zealand's Threat Management Plan for the two endemic subspecies of Hector's Dolphin – *Cephalorhynchus hectori hectori* (Endangered) and *C. h. maui* (Critically Endangered).



Omura's whale (*Balaenoptera omurai*) was recognized as a new species of large baleen whale in the early 2000s. It was not until the second decade of the 21st century that the appearance, behavior and ecology of these whales could be studied in detail, thanks to the discovery of what is believed to be a resident population on the shallow (mainly 10-80m) continental shelf of north-western Madagascar. Although the species has been documented in widely scattered locations, it remains classified as Data Deficient
Photo: Salvatore Cerchio

Act

Conservation actions: provide technical support for the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force (<https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/>)

Technical advice: (1) continue involvement in IUCN Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel (see <https://www.iucn.org/western-gray-whale-advisory-panel>); (2) assist efforts to prevent extinction of Taiwanese Humpback Dolphins (*Sousa chinensis taiwanensis*; see <https://iucn-csg.org/csg-special-projects/eastern-taiwan-strait-humpback-dolphins/>) (3) assist efforts (mainly by WWF-Cambodia) to prevent extirpation of Mekong River dolphins (*Orcaella brevirostris*; see <https://iucn-csg.org/mekong-dolphins/>)

Network

Capacity building: increase engagement with Conservation Planning Specialist Group to ramp up conservation planning for cetacean species.

Membership: increase CSG membership in South Asia and Africa.

Synergy: (1) help to expand and consolidate Arabian Sea Whale Network; see <https://iucn-csg.org/csg-special-projects/arabian-sea-humpback-whales/> (2) respond to requests for advice and feedback (e.g. CITES) to other IUCN bodies and Specialist Groups as requested.

Communicate

Communication: ongoing communication and outreach on all aspects of Vaquita conservation efforts.

Activities and results 2018

Assess

Red List

- i. All 14 baleen whale species as well as at least four subpopulation updates have been published. (KSR #1, 2)
- ii. Dozens of toothed cetacean species and selected subspecies and subpopulations were published in 2018, but still shy of reaching target of 74 species. Efforts are constantly ongoing. (KSR #1, 2)

Plan

Planning

- i. The workshop for marine mammal experts regarding a One Plan approach for the conservation of small cetaceans took place in December 2018, and resulted in planning of four tasks for conservation action, as follows: (1) workshop to review Yangtze Finless Porpoise (*Neophocaena asiaeorientalis asiaeorientalis*; Critically Endangered) conservation and write-up of a plan as the first cetacean subject to conservation planning under the One Plan approach; (2) workshop to develop conservation actions for Franciscana dolphins (*Pontoporia blainvillei*; Vulnerable), including field health assessments and capacity to rehabilitate stranded animals; (3) workshop to develop conservation actions for the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (*Sousa teuszii*; Critically Endangered), including methods to assess distribution of animals and threats through community surveys; (4) development of protocols to increase health data gathered from stranded Indus Dolphins (*Platanista gangetica minor*; Endangered) in Pakistan. This ongoing follow-up work is a high priority for our group in 2019. (KSR #15)

Policy

- i. Publication of cetacean identification guide for fisheries in the Indian Ocean. (KSR #26, 27,43)
- ii. Submission on cetacean bycatch in Pakistan fisheries prepared and presented at 14th Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission in Cape Town in September (Jeremy Kiszka). (KSR #26)
- iii. Numerous meetings attended, field efforts, coordination work by the core CSG Vaquita team led by Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho and including Jorge Urbán-Ramírez, Taylor, Bob Brownell, Jeff Moore, Andy Read, Peter Thomas and Reeves, throughout the year. (KSR #26, 27, 43)
- iv. Reeves and Justin Cooke attended May 2018 annual meetings of IWC Scientific Committee and Conservation Committee, and Cooke attended September 2018 meeting of the Commission. Both were extensively involved in intersessional activities, including a workshop on Gray Whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*) in April 2018 in California. (KSR #26, 27)
- v. Reeves and Taylor served as independent international experts on a panel convened by the New Zealand government, and co-produced a final report with recommendations (in collaboration with a third expert not affiliated with the Cetacean Specialist Group). The report was submitted to the New Zealand government in August (the New Zealand government's draft Threat Management Plan, along with the panel's report, will not be made public until the second quarter of 2019). (KSR #27)



An Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*) in Chilika Lagoon, India, apparently watching as a tourboat passes. This species was uplisted in 2017 from Vulnerable to Endangered in the IUCN Red List. Although it has an extensive near-shore distribution around the rim of the north-eastern Indian Ocean (which includes several rivers as well as continental and island coasts), the species is at high risk from entanglement in fishing gear in most of its range

Photo: Dipani Sutaria

Act

Conservation actions

- i.** Technical support provided to the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force for five regions of the world, but at least five more to reach full completion (please refer to Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force for results). (KSR #26, 27, 43)
- ii.** IUCN Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel: organised, led, reported on multiple meetings of the panel and task forces; publications completed including major paper on Gray Whale entanglement in Russia (Lowry, L.F., et al. (2018). Entanglement risk to western gray whales from commercial fisheries in the Russian Far East. *Endangered Species Research* 37:133–148. [DOI 10.3354/esr00914]). (KSR #26, 27, 43)
- iii.** Workshop in Vancouver in September attended by Reeves to work on several papers for journal submission focusing on main threats to Taiwanese white dolphins, and planning for a 2019 workshop to produce recovery and action plans for the Taiwan government. (KSR #26, 27, 43)
- iv.** Publication on demographic collapse and low genetic diversity of Mekong River dolphin population published in January [Krützen, M., et al. (2018). Demographic collapse and low genetic diversity of the Irrawaddy dolphin population inhabiting the Mekong River. *PLoS ONE* 13(1): e0189200. (DOI 10.1371/journal.pone.0189200)]. Teleconference in May on Sambor Dam in Cambodia on the Mekong. Preparation and submission of paper on impacts of electrofishing [Thomas, P.O., et al. (2019). Electrofishing as a potential threat to freshwater cetaceans. *Endangered Species Research* 39:207–220. (DOI 10.3354/esr00962)].

Training mission to Sarasota, Florida, for Cambodia dolphin team organised, hosted, sponsored and led by CSG members (Randy Wells, Lindsay Porter, Thomas) in November. Webinar on Sambor Dam led by Greg Thomas, National Heritage Institute, Sausalito, California, in December (co-organised by Thomas and Frances Gulland). Efforts led by Porter and Gulland throughout year to assist in necropsies of dolphins in Cambodia.

Network

Capacity building

i. Taylor completed the Conservation Planning Specialist Group Facilitation Course. (KSR #17)

Synergy

i. Northern Indian Ocean Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) data platform workshop held in Oman (Gianna Minton lead) in January, report finalised in March. Informal meeting of network members in May during IWC Scientific Committee annual meeting (Minton, Tim Collins, Sal Cerchio and others). Newsletter for the Arabian Sea Whale Network published in October. (KSR #29)

ii. Provided advice to the IUCN Global Species Programme on CITES COP Decision 17.149 (current status, etc. of Vaquita and Totoaba (*Totoaba macdonaldi*)) in February, on Animals Committee issue with Black Sea Bottlenose Dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus ponticus*) in June, and on Standing Committee issues concerning introduction from the sea specimens of North Pacific Sei Whales (*Balaenoptera borealis borealis*) by Japan in September. (KSR #29)

Communicate

Communication

i. The Vaquita reports were in addition to regular updates on all aspects of Vaquita conservation efforts. This service has made our website the go-to place for up-to-date documentation of Vaquita matters, used by individuals and groups in Mexico, elsewhere in North America and other parts of the world. (KSR #28)

Acknowledgements

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Summary of activities 2018

Species Conservation Cycle ratio: 5/5

Assess	2	■■
Plan	6	■■■■■
Act	4	■■■■
Network	3	■■■
Communicate	1	■

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 2, 15, 17, 26, 27, 28, 29, 43

Resolutions addressed: WCC-2016-Res-017

KSR: Key Species Result