

Report from 2017 meeting of the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission

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Bycatch – new IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative in construction:

- IWC 66 agreed to establish this new workstream, including establishing a Standing Working Group, an expert panel and a coordinator.
- The advert for the coordinator has just been made public (see IWC website).

Strandings – new IWC Strandings Initiative is being established. A Steering Group, expert panel and coordinator are being established. The initiative will consider both rescue aspects and investigation best practice.

French strandings -

- Two recent unusual multiple stranding events of common dolphins that occurred in February-March 2017 along the French Atlantic coast were discussed. Around 800 dead common dolphins stranded (dead) from January 1st to March 31st 2017, mostly during two distinct events. By-catch in fisheries was reported to be the primary cause of death given for 119 individuals of the 134 carcasses necropsied before mid-March. The Committee noted that these events highlighted the need for accurate estimates of bycatch following on from discussions of a study by Peltier et al. (2016). In short, that study incorporated modelling of the drift of carcasses to estimate bycatch numbers from stranded animals
- The Committee established an expert group to be established to evaluate the methods used in Peltier et al. (2016) to estimate total bycatches from strandings data in the Bay of Biscay. [The terms of reference for that group are provided in Annex J (Item 2.4)]

New USA Bycatch Rule:

- A new rule requiring countries exporting seafood to the USA to demonstrate that their fisheries comply with the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) has been passed. Countries will be given a (maximum) 5 year grace period to achieve and document compliance before import restrictions come into force. The Committee will seek further information.

Other small cetacean issues:

- Note was made of and recommendations provided on a range of issues including relating to Hector's and Maui dolphins, the vaquita, the Franciscana (an IWC Conservation Management Plan, the first for a small cetacean species, has been established), Asian and Amazon river dolphins.

Other ongoing work areas of relevance:

- Shipstrikes
- Whale disentanglement (focused on larger species)
- Whale watching
- Chemical pollution, including oil spills and marine debris
- Harmful algal blooms – new workshop report available
- Marine Noise
- Climate change – now to be integrated into future work and planning for a future workshop initiated