

IUCN SSC Cetacean Specialist Group

2019 Report



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Number of members

129

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 Cetacea, 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 cetacean conservation work in which members are engaged, and in which they 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, with national government agencies, and with NGOs responsible for conserving cetaceans. 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: (1) co-organise and co-convene a workshop for marine mammal experts regarding a One Plan approach for the conservation of small cetaceans and in partnership with *ex situ* Options for Cetacean Conservation (ESOCC); (2) increase engagement with the Conservation Planning Specialist Group to ramp up conservation planning for cetacean species. Policy: (1) establish link with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (Ninth Session, co-led by WWF-UAE); (2) maintain ongoing links with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission; (3) help to prevent extinction of the Vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*); (4) maintain 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); (6) provide support for relevant IUCN World Conservation



Endangered Hector's Dolphin, *Cephalorhynchus hectori*
Photo: Grant Abel

Congress (WCC) Motions; (7) advise the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on ways to reduce/mitigate cetacean bycatch in fisheries.

Act

Conservation actions: (1) provide technical support for the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force (<https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/>); (2) launch and maintain an initiative to improve the conservation status of the Critically Endangered Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (*Sousa teuszii*) in West Africa.

Policy: maintain ongoing involvement in work of the Society for Marine Mammalogy's Conservation Committees.

Technical advice: (1) continue involvement in the IUCN Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel (see <https://www.iucn.org/western-gray-whale-advisory-panel/>); (2) assist efforts to prevent extinction of the Taiwanese Humpback Dolphin (*Sousa chinensis taiwanensis*); (3) assist efforts (mainly by WWF-Cambodia) to prevent extirpation of Mekong River Irrawaddy Dolphins (*Orcaella brevirostris*; see iucn-csg.org/index.php/mekong-dolphins/); (4) provide support to South Korean conservationists to reduce massive bycatch of Endangered Narrow-ridged Finless Porpoises (*Neophocaena asiaeorientalis*); (5) collaborate with the Convention on Migratory Species to advance Concerted Actions for threatened cetaceans.

Network

Capacity building: increase engagement with the 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 the Arabian Sea Whale Network (see iucn-csg.org/index.php/csg-special-projects/arabian-sea-humpback-whales/; also

Endangered South Asian River Dolphin,
Platanista gangetica, Nepal
Photo: Grant Abel



whalenetwork.org/); (2) respond to requests for advice and feedback (e.g. CITES) from other IUCN bodies and Specialist Groups as requested; (3) participate in the biennial conference of the Society for Marine Mammalogy and associated workshops.

Communicate

Communication: maintain ongoing communication and outreach on all aspects of the Vaquita conservation effort.

Policy: support development of WWF's Global River Dolphin Strategy.

Scientific meetings: attend the SSC Leaders' Meeting and present a poster report in Abu Dhabi.

Technical advice: establish an Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphin (*Sousa chinensis*) photo-ID catalogue.

Activities and results 2019

Assess

Red List

i. In addition to the published assessments, a number of additional assessments were completed and submitted to the Red List in time for publication in 2019 but were not published. Also, work has continued steadily to complete assessments of the remaining taxa that need updating. Nine new species assessments, three new subspecies assessments, and one new subpopulation assessment were published; we made three website postings. (KSR #1, 2)

Plan

Planning

i. We co-organised a workshop for marine mammal experts regarding a One Plan approach for the conservation of small cetaceans. We are drafting and editing an ESOCC report for publication as an SSC Occasional Paper and working on report production. (KSR #15)

ii. CSG organised, chaired and co-sponsored two workshops: one in October in Wuhan, China, on Yangtze Finless Porpoises (*Neophocaena asiaeorientalis asiaeorientalis*), and one in November in San Clemente del Tuyú, Argentina. We worked on report production for both and gave a presentation at an Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) conference in New Orleans. (KSR #15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 27, 29)

Policy

i. We participated in the International Whaling Commission's Scientific and Conservation Committees. All meetings were attended in May by many CSG members, including a workshop on bycatch in the West Indian Ocean, annual meetings of both committees and associated workshops. (KSR #26, 27, 29)

ii. A workshop under IWC sponsorship in May led to a submission to the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission's Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch in September; several CSG members were heavily engaged in the IWC bycatch initiative. (KSR #26)

iii. Preventing the extinction of the Vaquita: A Recovery Team meeting was held in La Jolla in March; the Upper Gulf World Heritage Site (Islands and Protected Areas of the Gulf of California) was listed on the List of World Heritage in Danger due mainly to Vaquita endangerment (<https://iucn-csg.org/northern-gulf-of-california-world-heritage-site-listed-as-in-danger/>). One meeting of the Recovery Team was held, and we supported the World Heritage in Danger listing for the protected area. (KSR #26, 27, 43)

iv. Minton assisted development of several WCC Motions; Reeves helped with Motion 110 – Safeguarding the Endangered narrow-ridged finless porpoise (*Neophocaena asiaeorientalis*) in the Yellow Sea, and served as Facilitator for Motion 110 and Motion 024 – Restoring a peaceful and quiet ocean (noise mitigation). See

<https://iucn-csg.org/iucn-world-conservation-congress-motions-relevant-to-cetacean-conservation/>. (KSR #26)

v. We advised FAO on ways to reduce/mitigate cetacean bycatch in fisheries. Reeves participated in an Expert Meeting to Develop Technical Guidelines to Reduce Bycatch of Marine Mammals in Fisheries in Rome, in September 2019 (<http://www.fao.org/3/cb2887en/cb2887en.pdf>). (KSR #26)

Act

Conservation actions

i. Technical support was provided to the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force (<https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/immas/>). A workshop was held in March in Oman. Two workshops were held to document, map and designate Marine Mammal Protected Areas, followed by peer review provided by CSG. (KSR #26, 27, 43)

ii. Initiative to improve the conservation status of the Critically Endangered Atlantic Humpback Dolphin in West Africa: A meeting was organised by Tim Collins (CSG Africa Coordinator), with follow-up email correspondence led by Collins. One informal meeting was held (at the World Marine Mammal Science Conference in Barcelona in December 2019), with initial communications among the working group. (KSR #26, 27, 43)

Policy

i. We maintain involvement in the work of the Society for Marine Mammalogy. Letters from the Society are intended to influence government decision making (usually). (KSR #26)

Technical advice

i. We continued developing recommendations for oil companies operating on the Sakhalin Shelf, as well as engaging with government

bodies at Federal and Oblast level in Russia (<https://www.iucn.org/western-gray-whale-advisory-panel>). One Panel meeting took place, along with four task force meetings. (KSR #26, 27, 28, 43)

ii. An international workshop was held in London, Ontario, co-organised and led by CSG members; we produced a recovery plan for the Taiwanese Humpback Dolphin population that was presented to Chinese authorities (who were also represented at the workshop) and windfarm developers (<https://iucn-csg.org/critically-endangered-taiwanese-white-dolphin-international-collaboration-for-recovery-plan/>). We provided advice on negotiations in Taiwan. Some coordination took place with the IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme. One workshop was held, and one co-authored publication produced (in *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*). (KSR #26, 27, 43)

iii. Extensive support was provided in advising WWF-Korea to reduce massive bycatch of Endangered Narrow-ridged Finless Porpoises; Motion 110 – Safeguarding the Endangered narrow-ridged finless porpoise (*Neophocaena asiaeorientalis*) in the Yellow Sea, was proposed for the IUCN World Conservation Congress. (KSR #12, 26, 27, 37)

iv. Extensive support was provided to the Convention on Migratory Species by numerous CSG members; see <https://iucn-csg.org/cms-scientific-council-meeting-and-outcomes-relevant-to-cetacean-conservation>. Planning and discussions were held in 2019 in anticipation of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS CoP) in 2020; a website article was produced. (KSR #18, 21, 26, 27, 29)

Network

Membership

i. New members were recruited from Madagascar, La Reunion, South Africa, Pakistan, Oman, and other countries. We added 11 new members in 2019, of which seven live and/or work in Africa or South Asia.

Synergy

i. Support was provided to the Arabian Sea Whale Network. A fluke photo data platform was launched (for northern Indian Ocean Humpback Whales, *Megaptera novaeangliae*), and we provided advice to a United Nations Development Programme project with Seychelles and Mauritius to support the development of a marine spatial planning framework. One data platform launched. (KSR #29)

ii. We provided feedback to the Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group on their guidelines for exploitation of threatened species and to the Freshwater Conservation Committee on networking. We also advised the Global Species Programme on, e.g., Japanese resumption of commercial whaling (January 2019). (KSR #29)

Communicate

Communication

i. Communication and outreach on all aspects of Vaquita conservation efforts: We published articles covering net-removal efforts during Totoaba (*Totoaba macdonaldi*) season, finding of dead Vaquitas, fieldwork results, etc. Six articles were posted on the CSG website. (KSR #28)

Policy

i. WWF's Global River Dolphin Strategy: We participated in a workshop led by WWF (and CSG member Khan), as well as formal review of a draft document by Reeves, Braulik and Smith. The resultant strategy was finalized and publicly released by WWF in early 2019. (KSR #26, 28)

Scientific meetings

i. The 2019 Biennial Conference of the Society for Marine Mammalogy was organised in concert with the European Cetacean Society and called the World Marine Mammal Conference. Many CSG members were in attendance. (KSR #28)

ii. We presented a poster report in Abu Dhabi. Selected leaders were in attendance – Notarbartolo di Sciara, Hoyt, Taylor, Minton. (KSR #28)

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Summary of activities 2019

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 5/5

Assess	1	
Plan	7	
Act	7	
Network	3	
Communicate	4	

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 2, 12, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 37, 43

Resolutions addressed: WCC-2016-Res-017; WCC-2016-Res-067

KSR: Key Species Result