

2020 Report



Randall Reeves



Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara



Gianna Minton



Gill Braulik

Chair

Randall Reeves (1)

Deputy Co-Chairs

Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara (2)

Gianna Minton (3)

Gill Braulik (4)

Red List Authority Coordinator

Barbara Taylor (5)

Location/Affiliation

(1) Okapi Wildlife Associates, Hudson, Quebec, Canada

(2) Tethys Research Institute, Milano, Italy

(3) Megaptera Marine Conservation, Netherlands

(4) Sea Mammal Research Unit, University of St. Andrews, Scotland

(5) Southwest Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, La Jolla, California, US

Number of members

135

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 subspecies and 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 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, other national government agencies, and 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 in partnership with Conservation Planning Specialist Group; (2) ramp up conservation planning for cetacean species and populations.

Policy: (1) establish link with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (Ninth Session, co-led by Emirates Nature-WWF); (2) maintain ongoing links with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission; (3) maintain ongoing involvement in the work of the International Whaling Commission's Scientific and Conservation Committees; (4) serve on an independent expert panel to review New Zealand's Threat Management Plan for the two endemic subspecies of Hector's Dolphin,



A Critically Endangered Vaquita, *Phocoena sinus*, being tracked within the Zero Tolerance Area in the inner Gulf of California, Mexico, and a panga with a buoy for a set gillnet in the background on 17th October 2019. (See <https://iucn-csg.org/new-estimate-of-vaquita-status-improved-through-elicitation-of-expert-knowledge/>) Photo: Todd Pusser

Cephalorhynchus hectori hectori (Endangered) and *C. h. maui* (Critically Endangered); (5) provide support for relevant IUCN World Conservation Congress Motions; (6) advise the Food and Agriculture Organization 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: (1) maintain ongoing involvement in work of the Society for Marine Mammalogy's Conservation Committee; (2) help to prevent extinction of the Vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*); (2) support development of WWF's Global River Dolphin Strategy.

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*; see iucn-csg.org/index.php/csg-special-projects/eastern-taiwan-strait-humpback-dolphins/); (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/); (2) respond to requests for advice and feedback (e.g. regarding 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.

Scientific meetings: (1) attend the SSC Leaders' Meeting and present a poster report in Abu Dhabi; (2) participate in the biennial conference of Society for Marine Mammalogy and associated workshops.

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

Activities and results 2020

Assess

Red List

i. Twenty-five new or updated cetacean species Red List assessments were published in 2020, one of which was for a baleen whale and 24 were toothed whales (for details see <https://iucn-csg.org/22-updated-cetacean-red-list-assessments-published-in-december-2020/>). (KSR #1, 2)

Plan

Policy

i. Multiple members of the CSG participated in the 2020 IWC Scientific Committee Meeting, ensuring synergy between many of the targets listed here and the work of the IWC. Also, multiple IWC workshops and 'pre-meetings' were attended. (KSR #26, 27, 29)

ii. CSG members took part in the IOTC's Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch, also attending and supporting a joint pre-meeting of the IOTC and IWC to identify areas for collaboration. (KSR #26)

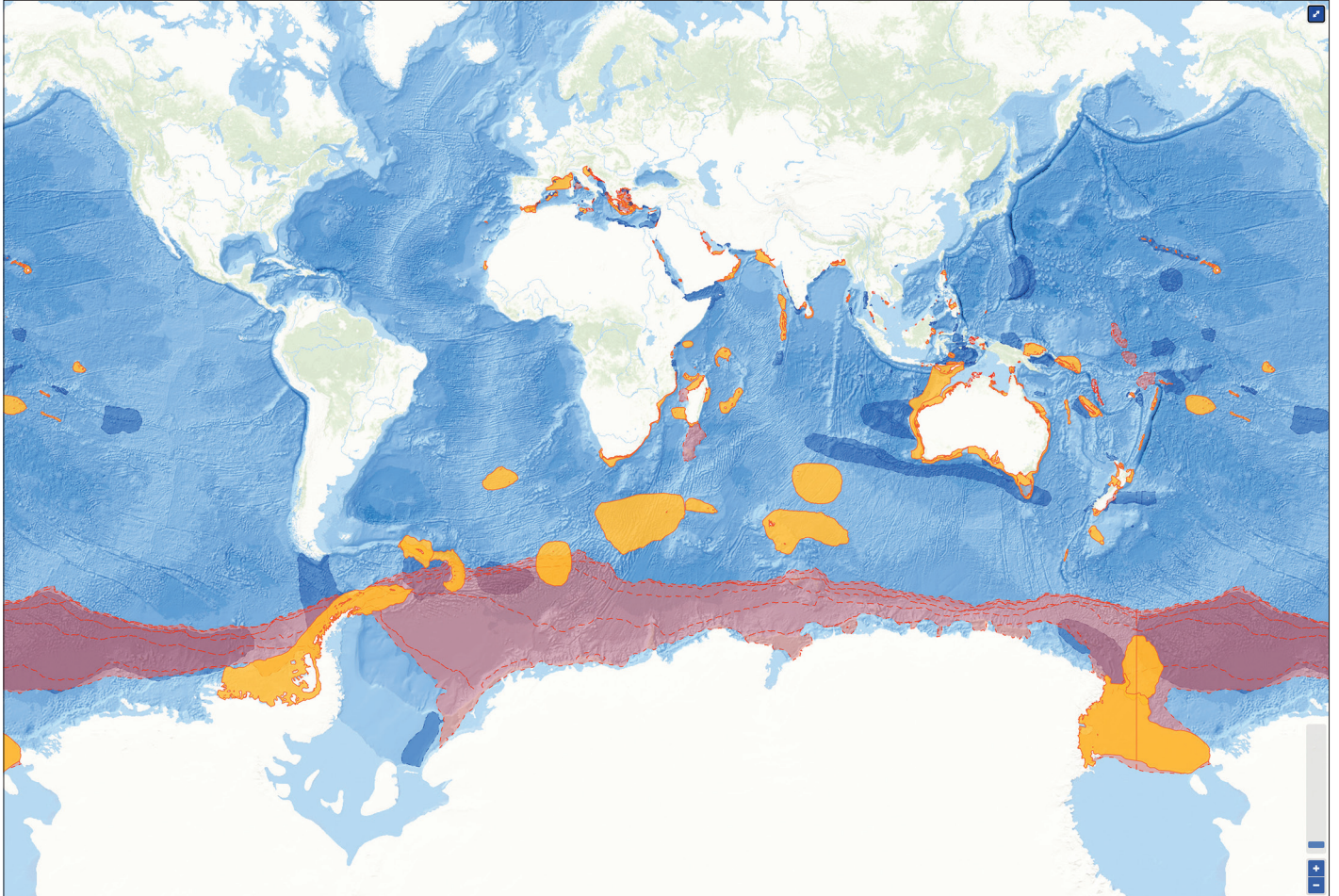
iii. CSG members played a leading role in the development of IUCN World Conservation Congress Motion 027 – Reducing impacts of incidental capture on threatened marine species, and Motion 110 – Safeguarding the Endangered narrow-ridged finless porpoise (*Neophocaena asiaeorientalis*) in the Yellow Sea. (KSR #26)

Act

Conservation actions

i. An expert workshop organised in Perth (Australia) from 10 to 14 February by the Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force proposed consideration of 45 candidate Important Marine Mammal Areas (cIMMAs) identified within the Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean region. Of these, 31 were accepted by reviewers for full IMMA status, with two remaining as cIMMAs and 13 becoming Areas of Interest (AoI). Twenty-five of the cIMMAs were deemed likely to fulfil the criteria including thresholds for KBAs. (KSR #26, 27, 43)

ii. CSG members helped to form the Consortium for the Conservation of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (CCAHD), an informal



e-Atlas showing the currently identified Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs - in orange), candidate IMMAs (light red), and Areas of Interest (dark blue)
Photo: <https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/>



An Endangered Arabian Sea Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*, Arabian Sea sub-population), entangled in a fishing net in Oman, Arabian Sea. This individual was released and has been resighted as recently as 2017
Photo: Rob Baldwin

network involving nearly 70 scientists and NGOs. The CCAHD has a trilingual website (souseateuszii.org) and held over 20 virtual meetings of working groups to conduct a systematic review of priority actions for conservation of the species. One website, one report and three grants were secured. The report resulting from this review is available for download here: <https://www.souseateuszii.org/2021/03/05/new-report-highlights-priority-actions-for-sousateuszii-conservation/>. (KSR #26, 27, 43)

Policy

i. Presidential letters from Society for Marine Mammalogy were sent on Vaquita, Taiwanese Humpback Dolphins and Irrawaddy Dolphins, all of which are species of CSG concern. (KSR #26)

ii. One report focusing on the 2019 abundance estimate of the Vaquita was posted on the CSG website, and one letter was sent from the SSC Chair to Government of Mexico officials. (KSR #26)

Technical advice

i. Continued leadership and participation in the IUCN Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel in collaboration with IUCN Global Marine and Business and Biodiversity Programmes, which began in 2004. Results included one meeting of the full Panel, two meetings of the Noise Task Force, one published paper, and five new recommendations. (KSR #26, 27, 28, 43)

ii. A virtual meeting was held on prevention of extirpation of Mekong River dolphins, hosted by WWF with assistance from the CSG Chair and other CSG members, from 1–4 December 2020; the scope was expanded to include Myanmar and Indonesia freshwater populations of Irrawaddy Dolphins; a report is available at: <https://www.mmc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020-Trinational-Irrawaddy-Workshop-Report.pdf>. (KSR #26, 27, 43)

iii. A conference and stakeholder workshop (virtual) was held on reduction of the massive bycatch of Endangered Narrow-ridged Finless Porpoises (*Neophocaena asiaorientalis*), hosted by WWF-Korea, on 25 November 2020; see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4_1_9j2asl. (KSR #12, 26, 27, 37)

iv. During the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS (February 2020), the Concerted Actions for Arabian Sea Humpback Whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) and Atlantic Humpback Dolphins (*Sousa teuszii*) were both extended for a new triennium. Three new proposals – one for freshwater populations of Irrawaddy Dolphins, one for Ganges River Dolphins (*Platanista gangetica gangetica*), and one for threatened European populations of Harbour Porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) – were proposed and endorsed (see <https://www.cms.int/en/document/concerted-action-irrawaddy-dolphin-orcaella-brevirostris>, <https://www.cms.int/en/document/concerted-action-ganges-river-dolphin-platanista-gangetica-gangetica>, and https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/cms_cop13_doc.28.2.7_rev.1_ca-harbour-porpoise_e_0.pdf). (KSR #18, 21, 26, 27, 29)

Network

Membership

i. Two new members were added, one from New Zealand and one from North America.

Synergy

i. Despite pandemic-related travel restrictions during 2020, the CSG was able to work closely with a range of organizations engaged in cetacean conservation through the following specific activities: 1) technical support and amplification of the Arabian Sea Whale Network and helping work toward a regional conservation management plan under the IWC and CMS; 2) participation in

the 2020 virtual meeting of the IWC Scientific Committee and pre-meetings; 3) technical support for WWF’s River Dolphins Initiative; 4) participation in the December 2019 SMM biennial conference; and 5) provision of ad-hoc advice to other IUCN bodies and CITES in relation to cetacean conservation issues. (KSR #29)

Communicate

Communication

i. Eleven news articles were posted on the CSG website (<https://iucn-csg.org/>) providing updates on many topics, including Red List updates, the Vaquita and other conservation issues. The website received on average 2,000 hits per month in 2020. (KSR #28)

Acknowledgements

During 2020, the CSG benefitted greatly from project support provided by Tiergarten Nürnberg and YAQU PACHA e.V., US Marine Mammal Commission, National Marine Mammal Foundation, WWF, and from administrative support by The Marine Mammal Center.

Summary of activities 2020

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 5/5

Assess	1	
Plan	3	
Act	8	
Network	2	
Communicate	1	

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

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

KSR: Key Species Result