

Annex S

Scientific Committee Use of the IWC Database of Recommendations

Following initial discussion of SC/68A/01 a small working group was convened, comprising Iñíguez, Palka, Parsons, Rose, Rojas-Bracho, Scheidat, Simmonds, Slooten, Smith (Convenor) Suydam and Zerbini, to discuss potential uses of the Database of Recommendations by the Scientific Committee and bring back proposals to Plenary. This Annex summarises the group's discussions and proposed next steps.

Discussion focused on use of the database by the Scientific Committee, whilst noting its utility for other stakeholders within and beyond the IWC community. The Working Group on Operational Effectiveness and Conservation Committee will be discussing objectives and use of the database at meetings later in the year.

Overall the group enthusiastically welcomed the database, and its potential value as a tool to assist the Scientific Committee in its work, including improving how recommendations are drafted and communicated, tracking progress on implementation of recommendations, identifying follow up actions and setting priorities for workplans.

The database has the potential to be very helpful but finding a realistic solution to entering and updating recommendations and managing the database while keeping demands on Scientific Committee officers and the Secretariat manageable is necessary. This relates in particular to data entry by Convenors or rapporteurs, for which an easy-to-use entry system is required.

1. Collation and communication of recommendations

Several people noted the challenges and benefits of previous work done to collate Scientific Committee recommendations. Collating recommendations involves reviewing previous Scientific Committee reports, which can be time consuming and the database has the potential to provide an automated generation of these outputs.

The database would help the Secretariat, Scientific Committee members, and others to communicate Scientific Committee recommendations to the Commission and other Commission subgroups – thus informing their work. Once openly accessible (from the IWC webpage) it would also inform wider audiences such as the wider research community (to which Scientific Committee recommendations are sometimes directed), other IGOs as well as NGOs.

Review and (where useful) recall of previous recommendations could help with evaluating the efficacy of previous recommendations and identifying and drafting new recommendations. This process would help ensure consistency in language (e.g. not inadvertently downgrading level of urgency), improve the wording and effectiveness of Scientific Committee recommendations over time, and helping it build on rather than duplicate existing recommendations.

A numbering system for recommendations would assist their recall and referencing.

2. Review of implementation

The database can be used to help track and update the Scientific Committee work plan and assist administrative actions by the Secretariat. The Secretariat could help intersessionally with related updates to the recommendations (rather than taking up time in Scientific Committee meetings). More substantive recommendations would require a more detailed review by Scientific Committee sub-committees and further thought is needed on how this would be achieved. The group felt that reviewing the implementation of all 'open' recommendations at one meeting (and associated data entry) would be too time consuming and instead this could potentially be done by topic or species, guided by the Scientific Committee work plan and by the request/need for such a review. Review of recommendations could also occur by Intersessional Correspondence Groups.

Such a review could assess effectiveness and appropriateness of previous recommendations, recognising that more information (e.g. provided by relevant contracting governments, IGOs, etc. in advance) might be needed to undertake this review. It may be difficult to definitively attribute success to a Scientific Committee recommendation; but it should be possible in many cases to confirm progress. Where difficulties in implementation have been or are encountered, the review could look at reasons why. Doing so would help identify further actions and refine future recommendations on the topic in question.

With this in mind, there would be value in evaluating some case studies to demonstrate the use of the database in reviewing implementation. Suggestions included two examples, the Franciscana and entanglement of large whales.

It was noted that the database only contains recommendations from 2017 and 2018. Entry of older recommendations would greatly enhance its utility for reviewing recommendations. However, this will require resources that are not currently available at the Secretariat.

The group further discussed how information from review of implementation could be captured in Scientific Committee reports and subsequently the database. Current database fields (progress, outcome, further action) might need further refinement; as will decisions on what type of information should be captured in the database from implementation review.

Next steps

To progress the use of the database of recommendations, it is proposed that the Scientific Committee makes the following suggestions.

- (1) Request that the Secretariat produce the following outputs from the database:
 - as soon as possible after each Scientific Committee meeting, an output of all recommendations for each sub-committee to help Convenors plan intersessional work and prepare for the following Scientific Committee meeting;

- in advance of each meeting, an output of all Scientific Committee recommendations (by sub-committee) and a summary report to Plenary on the extent and type of recommendations made at the last Scientific Committee meeting. This output should reflect updates on progress of recommendations; and
 - any additional outputs requested by Convenors, which should be submitted to the Secretariat at least two months before the Scientific Committee meeting.
- (2) Encourage sub-committees to use the database and its outputs in preparation for and during the 2020 (and subsequent) meeting/s including to help with:
 - (i) reviewing progress of previous recommendations;
 - (ii) identifying and drafting of new recommendations (building on or replacing recommendations made previously); and
 - (iii) conducting more in-depth work, as needed, on particular topics or species (including in the planning of workshops). This would be guided by each sub-committee's work plan.
 - (3) Propose one or more case studies to show the utility of the database in collating, communicating and reviewing implementation of recommendations and request the Secretariat, with relevant members of the Scientific Committee, to identify and undertake these in the next year. Possible case studies include: Franciscana and entanglement of large whales.
 - (4) Request sub-committee Convenors to provide the Secretariat with any previous compilations of recommendations they have undertaken and which may be of use for back data entry.
 - (5) Request the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat to consider how the database can facilitate the communication of Scientific Committee work and recommendations to the Commission. This should be included in the Scientific Committee report to the Commission for the 2020 meeting.
 - (6) Request the Secretariat to further consider and plan for how past recommendations can be entered into the database.
 - (7) Encourage Scientific Committee members, on an ongoing basis, to give feedback on the database including, in due course, further consideration of the database fields capturing progress and implementation; and encourage interested Scientific Committee members to join the Commission's intersessional group on database development.
 - (8) Request the Secretariat to establish a numbering system for recommendations in the database.
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