



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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FOURTH MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES TO
THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR
THE CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS AND THEIR
HABITATS IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS REGION

5-6 August 2021, *Online*

ABSTRACT: IWC STRANDINGS INITIATIVE

Prof Karen Stockin, Rutherford Discovery Fellow (2019-2023) and Research Leader for the Cetacean Ecology Research Group (CERG), Massey University, New Zealand.

At IWC66 the Commission of the IWC endorsed the recommendations of the Scientific Committee and the Whale Killing Methods and Welfare Issues Working Group (WKM&WI WG) with respect to an **IWC Strandings Initiative**. This included the establishment of a Strandings Expert Panel (SEP) and Strandings Co-ordinator post. Dr Karen Stockin held this position from April 2018 until Jan 2020 before stepping down to commence her Royal Society Te Apārangi Rutherford Discovery Fellowship. After that period, Dr Andrew Brownlow was enrolled as a consultant to support the SEP Chair and for the writing of the 4-year work plan and strategic document. After the IWC Scientific Committee in 2020, 8 new members accepted to join the Stranding Expert Panel increasing the possibility to cover key areas (Africa, Asia, Pacific and South America) and capacity of response (for new membership see [here](#)). Prof Sandro Mazzariol was confirmed as Chair for other 3 years (2020-2023).

As part of its four-year costed work programme, the Strandings Initiative including the interaction with the Global Stranding Network and in dialogue with other most relevant international organisations (e.g. ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS, CMS, CITES, IUCN Wildlife Health Specialist Group, OIE) will explore synergies in stranding response and capacity building. The global pandemic has affected the activities of the IWC Stranding Expert Panel limiting any training on site and possible support on the field in case of emergencies. However, despite these limitations, the request of assistance, advice and support increased in the last 12 months, as will be discussed in the presentation.



Prof Karen Stockin is a Rutherford Discovery Fellow (2019-2023) and Research Leader for the Cetacean Ecology Research Group (CERG), Massey University, New Zealand. Karen was the inaugural Strandings Coordinator (2018-2020) for the IWC and presently serves on the IWC Strandings Initiative Expert Panel. Additional international duties include membership of the ASCOBANS Prey Depletion and Beaked Whale working groups and IWC Extinction Initiative. Karen's research interests interface ethology, welfare science, ecology and veterinary pathology and are particularly focused on human

impacts that affect cetacean populations. Previous research has focused on the impacts of marine mammal tourism and persistent contaminants. Currently, Karen's Rutherford Discovery Fellowship focuses on the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI), innovative technologies and evolutionary theory to address the conservation-welfare nexus during human-wildlife interactions. This work commenced in late 2017 under the Bob Kerridge Animal Welfare Fellowship. Karen is on the Executive Committee of Women In Marine Mammal Science and is also the Professional Sponsor of the Australia/New Zealand Chapter of The Society for Marine Mammalogy.