

**TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE EXPERT WORKING GROUP  
ON ANIMAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL LEARNING**

*(as approved by COP15)*

**Background**

The Animal Culture Expert Working Group (ACEWG) was established through Resolution 11.23 to assist the Parties of the Convention on Migratory Species and its associated instruments with understanding the conservation implications of culture and social complexity. Following an initial focus on cetaceans, since 2017 it has considered the conservation implications of social learning and animal culture for all taxonomic groups covered by the Convention.

**Purpose**

- A. The primary objective of the ACEWG is to support the delivery of relevant tasks contained in the Programme of Work of the Sessional Committee (POW).
- B. In addition, the ACEWG will support the implementation of relevant Resolutions and Decisions directed to the Scientific Council, as well as provide advice to Parties on the application of the increasing knowledge about animal culture and social learning in conservation management.
- C. The ACEWG will provide a platform to discuss and exchange information and scientific findings on animal culture-related matters with a specific focus on their relevance for conservation efforts. Mandates will be given through Decisions at each COP.
- D. The ACEWG will further, as capacity allows:
  - a) promote the practical application of the increasing knowledge about animal culture and social learning in conservation management, e.g. by:
    - i) reviewing updates on culture-related Concerted Actions and providing guidance as required;
    - ii) considering whether further culture-related Concerted Actions should be brought forward and developing proposals as appropriate;
    - iii) developing ongoing guidance for engagement with stakeholders to illustrate why and how animal culture and social learning are relevant to conservation;
  - b) support research on animal culture and social learning, e.g. by:
    - i) disseminating guidance on methodologies for detecting social learning;
    - ii) incorporating a variety of 'lines of evidence' on social learning and animal culture, including from local communities, and traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples;

- c) promote synergies and collaboration with CMS instruments, as well as the IUCN, e.g. by:
  - i) engaging with CMS Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, and Initiatives and any relevant work streams they may establish;
  - ii) working closely with the IUCN CEESP-SSC Conservation of Animal Cultures Task Force;
  - iii) continuing to engage with the relevant IUCN bodies to develop synergies for integrating social learning and cultural processes into management activities.

### **Membership**

- A. Membership of the Expert Working Group includes members of the Scientific Council and external experts considered leaders in the fields of social learning, sociality or animal culture. Membership is only upon invitation or agreement of the leadership of the ACEWG, i.e. Chair, responsible Councillor and the Secretariat.
- B. The ACEWG strives to maintain a balance of gender, regional representation and areas of expertise.
- C. The involvement of ACEWG members is entirely on a voluntarily basis.
- D. If and when needed, experts external to the ACEWG and interested in contributing to its objectives may occasionally be invited to join meetings or to support specific tasks.

### **Organization of Work**

- A. The ACEWG will elect a Chair from among its members and will operate by seeking consensus among the group. If not a member of the Scientific Council, the Chair will be supported by the COP-appointed Councillor for Connectivity to ensure close alignment with the Scientific Council's work and procedures. If the Chair has to leave her/his position, a new Chair will be appointed from among its members.
- B. The ACEWG will mainly operate electronically by communicating via a dedicated workspace in MS Teams, and email if needed. Meetings (in-person or virtual) will be held as required and, for in-person meetings, depending on funding.
- C. The Chair of the ACEWG will report on progress to the Sessional Committee.
- D. The CMS Secretariat will support and facilitate the coordination of the activities and the organization of meetings of the ACEWG.

### **Duration**

The ACEWG will remain in place until the Sessional Committee decides that its work is complete or an alternative arrangement is made.