



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

CMS/PIC/MOS4/Doc.2.2

Date: 20 July 2021

Original: English

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*

REPORT FROM SPREP

ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE CMS MOU ON PACIFIC ISLAND CETACEANS 2012-2021

Stranding and Disentanglement Training

A short course on how to manage whale strandings was conducted in Vava'u, Tonga in 2013, followed by a 3-day training in the safe handling of large whale entanglements, conducted by David Mattila of the IWC. NGOs and government agencies from Vanuatu and Tonga took part in the training. With the assistance of the South Pacific Whale Research Consortium, SPREP supported the establishment of a regional database for strandings reports (apodstrandings.org). This platform has recently been upgraded, thanks to the support of the NZ Department of Conservation <https://www.sprep.org/ioe/strandings-of-oceania-database>

Year of the Whale – themes

SPREP designated 2016/17 as the Year of the Whale, with the theme Protect Our Ocean Voyagers, which became the platform for broader advocacy for the protection of oceans as well as whales throughout the region, with several notable events.

Whales (*Les balaenes et les hommes*) exhibition

In collaboration with the Pew Charitable Trusts, the New Zealand Arts Council and the French Government, a major exhibition of whale-related art created by Pacific artists was displayed at the prestigious Tjibaou Gallery in New Caledonia. Another notable event of the Year of the Whale was

CMS participation support

SPREP supported one delegate from Samoa to attend the CMS COP 12 meeting that was held in Manila, the Philippines in 2017. We also convened a side event on the “Year of the Whale in the Pacific Islands – Whales in a Changing Ocean”.

Whales in a Changing Ocean, Nuku'alofa 2017

This 3-day conference, hosted by the Government of Tonga, was the first major inter-governmental conference on whales ever held in the region and was supported by a wide range of funders, including the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, Auckland Institute of Studies, Okeanos, Humane Society International, International Fund for Animal Welfare and the Animal Welfare Institute. Government delegates adopted the Year of the Whale Declaration, which now has 14 Signatories. <https://www.sprep.org/whales-in-a-changing-ocean-conference-2017/outcomes>

UN Oceans Conference – Launch of Whales and Climate Change

SPREP played a leading role in co-ordinating Pacific Island attendees to the UN Ocean Conference and supporting Pacific Island Governments. The Year of the Whale was a prominent feature of the region's profile at UN Ocean, and a report on Whales and Climate Change, which was developed through a Fonds Pacifique grant, was released at a side event sponsored by SPREP.

Fonds Pacifique funding for climate change research

Fonds Pacifique funding also supported a postgraduate student (Dr Solene Derville) in New Caledonia to travel to the Year of the Whale Conference in Tonga, and later to Oregon State University to study with experts in the impacts of climate change on cetaceans. Her work has resulted in a definitive paper in *Polar Biology* on the likely changes in store for whales in a changing and warming ocean (Derville, *et al* Whales in warming water: Assessing breeding habitat diversity and adaptability in Oceania's changing climate, *Glob Change Biol.* 2019;25:1466–1481) (Inf 2.3)

Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs)

Under the auspices of the IUCN Marine Mammal Task Force, a global set of IMMAs has been developed which delineate globally significant discrete areas important for marine mammals which may merit place-based protection and/or monitoring. In 2017 the second IMMA Regional Workshop was held in Apia and focused on the Pacific Islands region. This workshop was supported by the Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative (GOBI) within the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the Government of Germany. The workshop report can be downloaded [here](#). Despite significant data gaps and after review by an independent review panel, 18 IMMAs were accepted and five candidate IMMAs which need further investigation. Nineteen Areas of Interest were also identified which require further monitoring and survey effort to assess their potential to become IMMAs. An interactive database allows users including governments to find information including boundaries of the sites that have been identified.

Management of whale-watching

SPREP has supported the Ministry of Tourism in Tonga with technical advice on how to improve the management of whale-watching in Tonga, including a meeting with the Ministry of Tourism Officials in 2019. Covid 19 has effectively shut down the whale-watch industry in Tonga and other Pacific Island breeding grounds. SPREP is committed to supporting its members with advice on how to achieve the best international standards in the future and has collaborated with the South Pacific Regional Tourism Organisation to promote guidelines on sustainable marine wildlife-watching.

Engagement at WCPFC on by-catch issues and compliance with CMMs

Through the By-catch and Integrated Ecosystem Management Initiative of the EU-Pacific Marine Partnership, SPREP is actively engaging in the activities of the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, including on cetacean by-catch in longline and purse-seine tuna fisheries. SPREP is supporting efforts by governments to improve data collection, including through electronic monitoring, and to work with countries and the fishing industry to mitigate by-catch. SPREP is also actively engaged in efforts to monitor and improve the management of fisheries-related waste and gear, including Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs). SPREP contributed data analysis on fishing-related marine waste [link here](#), which contributed to the development of the WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure on Marine Pollution. [link to CMM on Marine Pollution here](#)

Collaborations in the PEUMP programme

SPREP is working to highlight the potential threat to populations of cetaceans in the Pacific from by-catch including in the WCPFC. This should result in more efforts to understand the level of by-catch through collaborations with SPC and WCPFC. Future collaborations with CMS Aquatic Mammals

Group and the IWC Scientific Committee could be very valuable in estimating by-catch with only a limited amount of data.

Collaboration with SPWRC

The South Pacific Whale Research Consortium has collaborated with SPREP throughout the past decade. Some Consortium members are active in Pacific Islands waters throughout the year. The Consortium has consistently provided valuable management advice to SPREP and is a collaborating organisation to the MoU, for example, some advice was provided to assist advising on noise impacts from the development of the wharf extension at Nukualofa, Tonga.

Collaboration with CMS including MOS 4

The CMS Guidelines for Safe Handling of Small Cetaceans along with other comments have been provided by SPREP to contribute to the drafting of guidelines for the Safe Handling of Cetaceans guidelines for WCPFC. This work is being led by the United States through NOAA. The revitalisation of the MoU through MOS 4 is expected to provide a number of opportunities for CMS and SPREP to increase their collaborations in other areas relevant to the MoU, such as whale-watching and climate change.

Review of WDAP – Process

Every 5 years SPREP publishes a Regional Action Plan to protect threatened marine species – which are grouped into dugong, turtles, sharks and rays, seabirds and whales and dolphins. The Whale and Dolphin Action Plan will be the basis for the Action Plan for the MoU. To facilitate this, the WDAP review will immediately precede MOS 4.

Much has been happening since the last Meeting of Signatories and it is now timely to review that progress and chart the direction for the future conservation of whales in the Pacific Islands region.

International Whaling Commission

SPREP has been increasing its engagement with the IWC. This year is the 75th anniversary of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling. SPREP has assisted the Commission in holding a Pacific Commissioners meeting (April 2021) to discuss intersessional progress and in particular the governance review that is currently taking place. In addition, SPREP took part in the Scientific Committee online meetings. The IWC has expert panels who can provide advice on such issues as By-catch, Entanglement and Strandings and reviews scientific information on issues that are a threat to whales and dolphins such as climate change, marine debris, noise, and drive hunts.