



International Whaling Commission's Bycatch Mitigation Initiative

Bycatch - the accidental capture and entanglement of non-target species in fisheries- is a global conservation and fisheries management issue and threatens the survival of several cetacean populations and species. Although well recognised in the scientific literature as both a major conservation and welfare concern, only limited global progress has been made in tackling the problem.

For more than forty years the IWC, as the leading global body addressing cetacean science and conservation has acknowledged the significance of bycatch as a threat to cetaceans. This recognition led to an agreement by the IWC Commission at its 66th meeting to establish the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI).

The BMI is made up of three interrelated components;

- a Bycatch Coordinator in the IWC Secretariat
- the Standing Working Group (SWG) on Bycatch under the IWC's Conservation Committee (CC)
- a multi-disciplinary Expert Panel to advise the Coordinator and the SWG.

The overall aim of the BMI is to raise awareness on the need for action on cetacean bycatch at both national and international levels and to promote the use of effective tools to understand and tackle the issue. To be fully effective the BMI will need to work closely with experts from multiple disciplines and other international frameworks and organisations which have established the mandate to manage fisheries.

The initiative's Strategic Plan (2018-2028) and workplan (2018-2020) were endorsed at the IWC's 67th meeting in 2018 and implementation is now underway.

2018-2020 Plans

The BMI will first focus on developing its in-house capacity through collaborations with experts, participation in pilot projects and involvement in technical work on bycatch reduction technologies and strategies. Priority for on the ground work during this period will be on small scale/artisanal fisheries in developing countries' coastal areas (particularly focused on gillnets and pots/traps). Tackling cetacean bycatch within the world's small-scale/artisanal fishing sector is needed due to the prevalence of problematic gears, the overlap with coastal cetacean populations and the magnitude and distribution of the fishing sector. Priority will also be given to exploring opportunities to work on bycatch evaluation in the high seas (Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction- ABNJ), due to the broad lack of knowledge on bycatch in multiple commercial fishing gears and the 'niche' identified for the IWC, as an IGO, to work on the issue in the ABNJ.

The BMI will then move towards scaling-up the initiative into an active advisory body, providing information and knowledge transfer through awareness raising programmes, technical advice, capacity development/ training and input through regional and international fora. Technical advice will be made available to countries (including those with endangered cetacean populations) and fisheries management bodies upon request.