

IWDG 3 Year Plan (2019-2021)

To increase engagement with IWDG members and the public, to share our knowledge and enthusiasm and to promote our conservation actions and priorities.

Strategic Plan of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group

To be reviewed annually



December 2018

IWDG 3 Year Plan (2019-2021)

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) was established in December 1990 and is an All-Ireland group “dedicated to the conservation and better understanding of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) in Irish waters through study, education and interpretation”. In December 1999, the IWDG were granted charitable status (CHY 11163) and became a Limited Company in October 2000. Since 2000, the IWDG has grown into a credible, effective NGO with a growing membership and increasing influence on government policy and actions. In June 2001 the IWDG published its first five-year development plan to cover the period 2001-2005. Three more plans followed covering the period 2006-2018. These plans have led to reviews of IWDG Structures and Procedures, resulting in significant changes to its operation and Articles of Association. A number of protocols for good governance were adopted by the IWDG and incorporated into the Standing Orders. IWDG have appointed new officers to key positions in 2013 and their contribution is essential for successful delivery of the current plan. IWDG will review current protocols and procedures and revise accordingly.

This is the fifth IWDG Plan, and this current plan will direct the IWDG through to 2021. This plan is very important as the IWDG is going through a period of transition as the IWDG has expanded considerably over the past few years, especially its *Consulting* wing. The IWDG are committed to developing capacity in Ireland to ensure conservation policies, surveys and recording can be maintained in the long term and the necessary experience be sourced in Ireland. In the third plan (2013-2015) we wished *to use the data generated by the recording schemes to support and develop conservation policies and actions and to ensure financial security* which was largely achieved. The priorities for the last plan was to *encourage and empower new people to get involved in the IWDG, to increase participation in IWDG recording schemes and establish and use the Shannon Dolphin Centre in Co Clare*. While some of this were achieved, more could have been achieved regarding biological recording and public engagement. The main theme in the current plan is to improve communication within the IWDG and externally. To ***increase engagement with IWDG members and the public, to share our knowledge and enthusiasm and to promote our conservation actions and priorities.***

Proposals and Actions presented have been prepared by the IWDG Officers and presented at the 2018 AGM. They have been prioritised using:



New, or existing, members wishing to get more involved with the IWDG can look at this plan and see how they can contribute to the plan, which will be reviewed annually.

1 IWDG Structure

IWDG have made significant changes to its structure with the appointment of a range of officers to deliver the work programme contained in the IWDG plans. Standing Orders will be updated regularly to reflect any new changes.

1.1 Officers

Key positions (Book-keeper, Stranding and Sighting Officers, Membership) will continue to be supported but resources must be made to develop other areas. IWDG will streamline some officer positions in order to appoint new officers to key positions. The priority new officer position is an:

- Outreach and Education Officer.

High Priority

1.2 Website

The website is the main source of communication between IWDG and its members. However with the rise of social media, digital platforms are diluted with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other media, making it more difficult to capture stranding and sighting records and communicate with the general public and members. The IWDG website will be revised and developed to freshen up the IWDG's look and embrace a wider range of social media platforms as well as provide more information on IWDG activities and policies.

To improve communication between IWDG and the public, IWDG should use social media more effectively by minimizing the time people spend there and direct users onto the IWDG website where our sponsors, products and membership forms are available.

1. Rebrand IWDG to assist in communicating our message.
2. Build new website to reflect changing social media trends.
3. Create an app for reporting sightings and strandings on mobile phones.
4. Integrate new social media platforms (e.g. Instagram).

High Priority

1.3 Local Groups

IWDG have identified the development of Local Groups as a priority. Some groups exist already (North Kerry, West Clare, Galway, Donegal, Northern Ireland) while others are still in the early stages of development (West Kerry, West Cork, North Mayo). A guide to establishing and running a Local IWDG Group was prepared but this needs to be developed and promoted. The guide contains a discussion on the relationship between local groups and the IWDG but

this will develop as the network grows. A key role of an Outreach and Education Officer will be to support local groups.

- Support for the Development of a Network of Local Groups.

High Priority

2 Promotion and Fundraising

IWDG require additional funding streams to ensure resources exist to deliver this plan. Increasing membership has been identified as an important contributor to this objective as well as increasing core funding and sponsorship, especially for specific conservation actions. Currently IWDG Consulting provides most funds to run the IWDG and our funding streams need to be diversified.

2.1 Increase IWDG Membership

IWDG have a Membership Officer who manages the membership database. Potential exists to promote membership further and increase retention of new members, which is poor. In order to achieve this IWDG should:

- Create a membership strategy and action plan based on existing IWDG studies.
- Create a subscribe option to receive free newsletter to build interest in IWDG work.
- Provide more opportunities that are only available to IWDG members
- Provide more cruises on *Celtic Mist* for members.
- Develop an Adopt-a-Whale or Adopt-a-Dolphin Scheme to encourage new members.
- Create boosted posts to translate some of the social media follower to members.

High Priority

2.2 Core and Corporate Sponsorship

Core funding is an important source of finances. Currently we receive core funding from the Department of Environment through the Irish Environmental Network (IEN) and from *Inis* as our Core Sponsor. Corporate sponsorship could be a much more important source of support, though historically we have not been very successful. The partnership between IWDG and Apple Computers has been very successful. IWDG will identify and seek additional corporate sponsorship.

High Priority

2.3 Maintain IWDG Consultancy Services

IWDG established IWDG Consultancy in 2015 to manage and promote its commercial contracts including the provision of MMOs, EIAs and Marine Mammal Risk Assessments. It has established a web presence (<http://consulting.iwdg.ie>) and profits are now a major contribution to IWDG funds at a time when funding from government or private sources is poor.

It is important to maintain and expand IWDG Consulting to ensure this important revenue stream continues and retain some independence from state funding.



High Priority

2.4 Celtic Mist

IWDG launched *Celtic Mist* after an extensive refit in 2012 followed by a second major refit during the winter of 2017-18. *Celtic Mist* is a valuable asset to promote the IWDG while supporting research and conservation. *Celtic Mist* needs to be utilised more and IWDG will:

- Survey inshore waters .
- Provide instruction in survey techniques and species recording .
- Provide more opportunities that are only available to IWDG members.
- Provide more cruises on *Celtic Mist* for members.
- Maintain and build partnerships with Glen Nua.
- Participate in key maritime events.



High Priority

3 Education and Communication

The IWDG needs to develop a Communication Strategy to tie in with an Education Programme. A number of protocols have been developed in recent years but IWDG need to increase its profile amongst the public and especially with younger people.

3.1 E-zine and Annual Report

IWDG aims to circulate bimonthly news e-zines but will also produce a biannual E-magazine which may be printed for circulation. IWDG will publish the Annual Report as an Annual Review in a formatted and attractive format.

High Priority

3.2 Promotion

IWDG will draft a list of national and local events, which IWDG should attend each year over the life of this plan. This will ensure good coverage and good use of resources.

Medium Priority

3.3 Vlogs

IWDG has many stories to tell and has the opportunity to tell them through video logs (vlogs), especially with the strong visual background that whales and dolphins provide. IWDG have developed a successful relationship with Tony Whelan of Canola Pictures and should seek to develop this relationship on a more formal basis. Vlogs are an excellent means to engage with members and should be used more on regular surveys and occasions.

Medium Priority

3.4 School Visits

There is a lack of awareness of Irish whales and dolphins throughout the island of Ireland. Visiting schools, both primary and secondary, to talk about whales and dolphins and the knowledge we are gaining would help resolve this. A focus on schools involved in schemes such as the Tidy NI scheme or Green Schools may be more effective. The Local Agenda 21 grant scheme (administered by the local authorities) could be used to cover costs of visits to schools and to get more schools involved.

Medium Priority

3.5 Irish Language

IWDG respects the Irish language and wishes to ensure all relevant and important literature and some resources are available through Irish.

- An Irish language version of major press releases by the IWDG.

Medium Priority

3.6 IWDG Resources

IWDG printed resources are becoming more limited as we turn to more digital media. However, we need to maintain a certain level of these resources. Over the course of the last plan we printed *Welfare Policy* and *Offshore Policy* documents. We also revised and published the third Edition of *Face to Face with a Beached Whale*.

- IWDG will publish an updated **Review of Whales and Dolphins in Ireland**.
- IWDG will produce a publication **Whales and Whale Watching in Ireland**, stories told by people from around the country who have interesting anecdotes about whales and dolphins.

Medium Priority

4 Cetacean Stranding and Sighting Scheme

The co-ordination of an All-Ireland cetacean stranding and sighting scheme continues to be a core function of the IWDG. IWDG will continue to support these schemes to ensure as much data is collected on cetacean strandings and sightings in Ireland, and that these data are validated and stored and made available to support relevant research, conservation and welfare issues. Better participation in recording schemes is essential and the Shannon Dolphin Centre in Kilrush, Co Clare provides a very useful resource.

4.1 Increase participation in recording schemes

- Identify areas with poor coverage to target resources.
- Maintain and develop the current relationship with the National Biodiversity Data Centre.
- Enable online reporting of records through mobile phones.
- Organise day and weekend courses and events around coast.
- Explore the opportunity to provide longer courses at the Shannon Dolphin Centre.

High Priority

4.2 Irish Cetacean Genetic Tissue Bank

The Irish Cetacean Genetic Tissue Bank was established in 2006 through collaboration between the IWDG and the National Museum of Ireland (Natural History). Tissue samples from over 1000 individual animals are now stored and students from around Europe are regularly requesting access to these samples. The scheme has faltered in recent years but the IWDG will continue to support and develop the Irish Cetacean Genetic Tissue Bank.

Low Priority

5 Research

IWDG believe that research is important to support conservation initiatives and policy. A strong scientific base to IWDG activities has been essential to build a credible and respected organisation. IWDG research over the next three years should be focused on supporting Conservation Actions and new Policy initiatives while complementing the Cetacean Sighting and Stranding Schemes.

5.1 Ferry Surveys

Maintain the status quo on current ferry routes with surveys from Dublin - Holyhead, Belfast – Cairnryan and Rosslare - Pembroke.

- Carry out a review of ferry survey data since surveys began
- Organise a meeting of ferry and ship surveyors to share experiences and facilitate more dialogue.

Medium Priority

5.2 Aerial Surveys

Joining Maritime patrols especially outside of targeted seasons by DCENR aerial surveys to gather sightings in the offshore environment.

Low Priority

5.3 WhaleTrack

IWDG have recently received support from Ryanair customers for their WhaleTrack project to obtain funding for an inshore large-whale project. Efforts will be made to secure multi-annual funding for a 2-3 year duration. Giving IWDG members unique access to research cruises has proven very popular. A continuation of this model would be optimal. Further, engaging with third level institutes will be beneficial as post-graduate or post-doctorate researchers with research deliverable deadlines can provide additional impetus required to drive this project.



Medium Priority

5.4 Photo-ID Catalogues

Photo-ID is a powerful technique in improving our understanding of the movements, behaviour and site faithfulness of whales and dolphins. To date IWDG have substantial photo-id catalogues of bottlenose dolphins, fin and humpback whales as well as smaller ones on other species. IWDG have recently taken ownership of the bottlenose dolphin images collected since 2000 and formally held by the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation resulting in one of the longest running bottlenose dolphin photo-id studies in Europe (since 1993). IWDG have built a database on *FinBase* for all photo-ID data from the ***Shannon Dolphin Bottlenose Dolphin Population*** and the ***Coastal Bottlenose Dolphin Population*** in order to be a useable scientific resource. IWDG will continue to collect high quality photo-id images suitable for photo-id and to encourage these images to be sent to the IWDG.

IWDG will:

- Continue to monitor the resident bottlenose dolphin population in the Shannon Estuary.
- Continue to maintain the coastal bottlenose dolphin catalogue on *Finbase*
- Populate the Irish Humpback Whale Photo-ID database onto *FinBase*, or similar software to improve access to data for conservation management.
- Populate the Irish Fin Whale Photo-ID database onto *FinBase* to improve access to data for conservation management
- Build photo-ID databases for Risso's dolphins, Killer whales and other species suitable for photo-ID.

Medium Priority

6 Conservation

The IWDG needs to use data and information collected to support conservation actions and policies. The IWDG will prioritise using the data collected by their recording schemes to inform and develop conservation actions over the life of this plan.

6.1 Fisheries Management

IWDG have been involved in fisheries management issues in Ireland for many years. IWDG are re-presented on the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee (CSHMAC) and have prepared submissions for fisheries consultation including a policy document. IWDG are concerned with unregulated fishing of sprat which is a critical food source for large whales

- Organise a workshop on sprat to engage all stakeholders and initiate a conversation about sprat fishing and their importance in coastal ecosystems.
- Continue to be represented on the CSHMAC.

High Priority

6.2 Marine Conservation Areas

There is an increasing interest in the role of marine conservation areas to protect critical habitats. This has increasing relevance under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which requires member states to create a network of MPAs. The IWDG have good data to identify potential areas, which are important for whales and dolphins. The IWDG will review all data available to draft a list of potential MPAs for whales, dolphins and porpoise to submit to government for action.

Medium Priority

6.3 Planning submissions

IWDG are frequently consulted on planning applications. IWDG comment if there is a potential for disturbing cetaceans or degrading their habitat. A review of these planning applications post-decision showed that IWDG's concerns were taken on board on nearly all those that we commented on. This is a proactive means of providing effective conservation actions for cetaceans and their habitats. IWDG will continue to comment on relevant planning applications

Medium Priority

6.4 Monitor mitigation plans

IWDG have been reviewing MMO Reports from oil and gas exploration and inshore coastal works for a number of years and are concerned that many are not compliant with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Guidelines. In the absence of an effective official review mechanism, IWDG will continue to review these reports and provide advice to licensing authorities. IWDG need to actively promote better regulation either through dialog or publication.

Low Priority

6.5 IWDG Whale Conference

IWDG have organised two international conferences: Miol Mór 2004 and Muc Mhara 2008. It might be time to deliver another conference to provide a platform to show case some of our research as well as inviting international experts to share their experiences. Such an event could be combined with the AGM to make it a full day, which represents the broad spectrum of work IWDG are involved with.

Medium Priority

7 Welfare

IWDG published a comprehensive Welfare Policy document in 2014 and reprinted Face to Face with a Beached Whale in 2017, outlining key areas of relevance to the welfare of Irish cetacean populations. Priority action areas identified for further work over the next three years are:

- Assist in the development and implementation of a live and mass stranding scheme.
- Update best practice guidelines for whale watching tourism and promote the implementation and oversight of these guidelines in Irish waters.

7.1 Training in live stranding response

IWDG have been running training courses in how to deal with a live stranded cetacean for many years. IWDG have two whale pontoons and one training whale and dolphin. IWDG should continue to offer this service to members and response organizations and organize four live stranding courses per annum. One course should be carried out in each province, per annum.

Medium Priority

7.2 Disentanglement training

Entanglement in fishing gear, especially surface pot ropes is an increasing global issue. With a growing humpback whale population in Irish coastal waters, the risk of entanglement is high and increasing. IWDG received sponsorship in 2017 from Syderco who supplied four disentanglement blades.

- IWDG will organise a disentanglement workshop and exercise with key partners to prepare better for such events.

High Priority