

IWDG 3 Year Plan (2016-2018)

Strategic Plan of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group

To be reviewed annually



**Draft
October 2015**

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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 was 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. This was followed by a second plan covering the period 2006-2010. Following a review of IWDG Structures and Procedures, IWDG made significant changes to its operation and recently updated the Articles of Association. As part of this re-structuring IWDG have prepared a number of Protocols and have published Standing Orders. IWDG have recently appointed new officers to key positions and their contribution is essential for successful delivery of this plan. IWDG will review current protocols and procedures and revise accordingly. The Standing Orders will be updated regularly to reflect these changes.

This is the fourth IWDG Plan, and this current plan will direct the IWDG through to 2018. This plan is very important as the IWDG is going through a period of transition and the IWDG has expanded considerably over the past few years. 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 and most recent 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 new plan are to ***encourage and empower new people to get involved in the IWDG***, to ***increase participation in IWDG recording schemes*** and ***establish and use the Research and Education Centre in Co Clare***.

Proposals and Actions presented have been prepared by the IWDG Officers and presented at the 2015 AGM. They have been prioritised using:

High Priority

Medium Priority

Low Priority

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 at each AGM.

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 regularly updated to reflect any new changes.

1.1 Officers

IWDG will appoint new officers to key positions if the Board of Directors feels it will be advantageous to the IWDG. These include:

- Merchandising and Membership Officer

High Priority

1.2 Website– *time frame*

The website is main source of communication between IWDG and its members. A new IWDG website has been developed and launched during 2015 which should overcome some of the long term issues the IWDG has had with the site over the past few years. IWDG Facebook page proves very popular with over 8000 likes and regular postings.

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 IWDG where our sponsors, products and membership forms are available.

1. Create app for reporting sightings and strandings on mobile phones

High Priority

1.3 Local Groups – *time frame:*

IWDG have identified the development of Local Groups as a priority. Some groups exist already but need to be formalised (West Cork, west Kerry, Wexford) while others are still in the early stages (Donegal). 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.

High Priority

2 Promotion and Fundraising

IWDG require additional funding streams to ensure resources to carry out this plan. Increasing membership is seen as an important contribution to this objective as well as increasing core funding and sponsorship, especially for specific actions.

2.1 Increase IWDG Membership

IWDG have a Membership Secretary who manages the membership database. Potential exists for a Membership Officer, who could be on commission, who can promote membership and identify ways of achieving this.

- Provide more opportunities that are only available to IWDG members
- Develop an Adopt-a-Whale or Adopt-a-Dolphin Scheme to encourage new members
- Provide a “school membership” option

High Priority

2.2 Core and Corporate Sponsorship

Core funding and corporate sponsorship could be important sources of finances though historically we have not been very successful with only one long term core sponsor to date. IWDG will continue to encourage companies to take out these membership options.

Medium Priority

2.3 Build relationship with Apple Computers

A new partnership between IWDG and Apple Computers based in cork commenced in January through the Apple Matching Gift Programme 2015. The intention was to bring in revenue to support the IWDG cetacean sighting schemes. IWDG is currently Apple's most engaged environmental NGO in Europe there is scope to secure wider Apple funding outside of this programme to fund other projects.

High Priority

2.4 IWDG Consultancy Services

IWDG is to establish a wholly owned subsidiary called IWDG Consultancy Services to manage and promote its commercial contracts including provision of MMOs, EIAs and Marine Mammal Risk Assessments. It will establish a web presence and all profits will be given to the IWDG at the year end. This income is essential if IWDG are to continue to co-ordinate stranding and sighting schemes and initiate new projects. A management group will be appointed to oversee this initiative and report to the BoD.

High Priority

2.5. Supporting film companies and other mass media

IWDG should encourage high quality film and television programmes on cetaceans in Irish waters. These include independent companies and those commissioned by major national and international companies.

Low Priority

2.6 Celtic Mist

IWDG launched *Celtic Mist* after an extensive refit in 2012 and was run for three years 2013-2015. *Celtic Mist* can act as a major promotion of the IWDG and increase membership as well as supporting research, conservation and welfare policies and actions. Following three years of operation a new operation and business plan will be developed following this experience. Celtic Mist will be used for:

- members voyages aimed at surveying inshore waters and teaching survey techniques and species recording as well as how to run a research vessel
- targeted offshore shelf edge surveys
- building partnerships with other organisations/individuals with similar objectives
- participation in maritime events - harbour open days etc

High Priority

2.7 Whale trails

IWDG should encourage the establishment of Whale Trails around the coast of Ireland. IWDG are working with Cork Co. Council to develop a Cork Whale Trail, with a view to encouraging Fáilte Ireland to incorporate the concept into the wider Wild Atlantic Way.

2.8 Corporate Sponsorship for Research

Enter dialogue with some of the 43 licence applicants for Irish Offshore acreage, particularly the larger companies who will become known in the coming months (such as Exxon and Statoil). These companies have the capability to fund offshore sightings and acoustic programmes. IWDG will attempt to develop a series of programmes which they could choose to fund to gather more data on the Porcupine Bight. This will also feed into consultancy work area.

Low Priority

3 Education and Communication

The IWDG needs to develop a Communication Strategy to tie in with its 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 aim to circulate an E-zine at least every two months and continue to mail out an occasional printed publication.

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.

High Priority

3.3 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.

Medium Priority

3.4 Irish Language

IWDG also respect the Irish language and wish to ensure all relevant and important literature and some resources are available through Irish.

- An Irish language version of all press releases by the IWDG
- Carry out a study to identify Irish place names with a connection to cetaceans

Medium Priority

3.5 IWDG Resources

IWDG printed resources are becoming more limited as we turn to more digital media. We need to maintain a certain level of these resources. We recently printed an *Offshore Cetacean Atlas* in 2014 and an updated reprint of the IWDG *Guide to Whales and Dolphins in Ireland* in 2015. In addition IWDG also printed two new Policy Documents (**Welfare** and **Offshore**). Other resources which need to be reprinted include.

- Face to Face with a Beached whale
- Consider a new DVD on Whales and Dolphins of Ireland

Medium Priority

4 Cetacean Stranding and Sighting Schemes

The co-ordination of an All-Ireland cetacean stranding and sighting scheme continues to be the 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, that this data is validated and stored and made available to support relevant research, conservation and welfare issues. The use of the Research and Education Centre in Kilrush, Co Clare should be prioritised for running courses.

4.1 Increase participation in recording schemes

- Identify areas with poor coverage to target resources
- Enable online reporting of records through mobile phones
- Organise day and weekend land-based whale watching events around coast
- Organise day, weekend and maybe week long course based in Kilrush, Co Clare

High Priority

4.2 Post-mortem of stranded cetaceans - *time-frame: ongoing*

Promote the establishment of establishing cause of death in very fresh stranded cetaceans especially following a live stranding incident. This should be carried out by trained vets.

Medium Priority

4.3 Irish Cetacean Genetic Tissue Bank - *time-frame: ongoing*

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 400 individual animals of 12 species are now stored and studies from around Europe and now requesting access to these samples. The IWDG should continue to support the Irish Cetacean Genetic Tissue Bank.

Medium 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 and complimenting the Cetacean Sighting and Stranding Schemes.

5.1 Provide cetacean recorders on key fisheries surveys

IWDG will continue to commit to providing experienced surveyors on three fisheries acoustic surveys per annum. The surveys to be maintained are:

- The Northwest Herring Acoustic Survey / Boarfish Survey.
- Blue Whiting Survey.
- Southwest Herring Acoustic Survey.

These data to be incorporated into the IWDG Ship Survey database and make available to key partners. Additional funding sources to maintain these surveys will be sought and, dependent on funding, IWDG may also seek to place experienced surveyors on board during the EU Mackerel Egg survey every three years.

High Priority

5.2 Ferry Surveys - *time-frame: ongoing*

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

Medium Priority

5.3 Aerial Surveys – *Air Corps: ongoing*

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

Medium Priority

5.4 Baleen whale research

Attempt to obtain funding for inshore large-whale project. Efforts will be made to secure multi-annual funding of 2-3 year duration. Giving unique access to research cruises to IWDG members has proven very popular. A continuation of this model would be optimal. Further, engaging with third level institutes will be beneficial as postgraduate or post-doctorate researchers with research deliverable deadlines can provide additional impetus required to drive this project. The Cape Verde project should be continued in order to clarify the population structure and migration routes of humpback whales using both Cape Verdean and Irish waters.

Medium Priority

5.5 Photo-ID Catalogues - *time-frame: 2016-2018*

Photo-id is a powerful in improving our understanding of the movements, behaviour and site faithfulness of whales and dolphins. To date IWDG have substantial photo-id catalogues of fin and humpback whales and bottlenose dolphins as well as smaller ones on other species. In line with the creation of a single interactive database, IWDG intend to supervise an experienced photo-id research scientist to carry out much-needed work on the photo-id catalogue so that it becomes a reliable and useable scientific resource for the public and IWDG researchers in the future. This desktop project is estimated to involve c. 900 hours of work. When completed, a review of photo-id records through the analysis of the finished database will be produced.

The online photo-id catalogue will be refurbished using the new database, with all sighting records and individual photo-id pictures linked for every sighting.

- Continue to encourage photographs suitable for photo-id to be sent to the IWDG
- Collect high quality photo-id images especially of fin and humpback whales and bottlenose dolphins
- Create databases using FinBase or another appropriate software package to improve access to data for conservation management

Medium Priority

5.5 M6 Buoy Monitoring Station - *time-frame: ongoing*

Continue to collaborate with the Marine Institute to deploy static acoustic monitoring devices on the M6 Data Buoy mooring with a view to building multi-year acoustic monitoring data in deep offshore oceanic waters.

Low Priority

6 Conservation

The IWDG needs to use the data and information collected to support conservation actions and policies. The IWDG will prioritise conservation actions over the life of this plan.

High Priority

6.1 Ensure mitigation plans are practical and enforced

IWDG have been in dialog with NPWS and PAD over the many years and currently we have a system where there is no guarantee that a foreshore licence will be applied for inside the 12 mile limit for a geophysical survey and therefore no regulations applied. While oil and gas is different, report data is often missing, and no survey to date can be said to be compliant with current requirements. Outside the 12 mile limit and within the Irish EEZ Oil and Gas is regulated by PAD, Research by the Marine Institute or NPWS but other surveys for telecom companies would appear to have no regulation if not coming within the 12 mile limit. IWDG need to actively promote better regulation either through dialog or publication.

Low Priority

7 Welfare

IWDG published a comprehensive welfare policy in 2014 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.
- Develop an education and management strategy for resident sociable solitary dolphins.
- Update best practice guidelines for whale watching tourism and promote the implementation and oversight of these guidelines in Irish waters.

7.1 Satellite tag live stranded cetaceans

In order to assess the success of re-floating live stranded cetaceans, IWDG have long been promoting tagging of re-floated animals. IWDG in collaboration with GMIT have purchased three satellite tags and have a license to tag a sample of cetaceans considered good candidates for re-floating. If successful this will inform IWDG policy on re-floating animals in addition to gaining information on the movements of dolphins in Irish waters

Low Priority

7.2 Training in live stranding response - *time-frame: 4 x 1 day courses annually*

IWDG have been running training courses in how to deal with a live stranded cetacean for many years. IWDG have two whale pontoons and a 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