

Outcome statement

Side Event: Towards a Cetacean Management Plan for the Western Indian Ocean

Twelfth Conference of the Parties to the Nairobi Convention, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania [9th October 2026].

Led by IndoCet (Indian Ocean network for cetaceans) with WCS

Focal points: Tim Collins (tcollins@wcs.org); Violaine Dulau (violaine.dulau@globice.org)

Funded by: Agence Française de Développement, as part of the Cet'izen program led by GLOBICE

Key discussions

The session set out the case for a regional framework for the management and research of cetaceans. It reviewed the principal threats: bycatch, particularly in gillnets, and shipping, including underwater noise and vessel strike, compounded by gaps in data and in impact assessment. It considered how the proposed IWC Indian Ocean Sanctuary Management Plan, CMS, the IOTC and the IMO could support regional action. The session also referenced the workshop held at the WIOMSA Symposium in Mombasa in 2025 where attendees supported the development of a plan, as well as the WIOMSA special issue on marine mammals, which clearly demonstrated regional concerns and efforts for cetaceans.

Tim Collins presented on the options for a regional management plan, and the linkages and commitments under other agreements and conventions. Dr Shanan Atkins presented the HuDoNet Action Plan, for the Indian Ocean humpback dolphin, a highly threatened nearshore species occurring in most Nairobi Convention states, and Dr Andrew Willson the CMS/IWC Conservation Management Plan for Arabian Sea humpback whales, as models for regional planning and frameworks.

Main outcomes

- Participants supported developing a WIO Cetacean Action Plan as a shared framework linking science to management. [Confirm level of support.]
- Among conventions and agreements that are regionally relevant, the Nairobi Convention appears to offer the broadest coverage in the region in terms of commitments of its



member states, and could therefore provide an institutional host and pathway for regional endorsement and implementation of a WIO cetacean Action Plan

- The HuDoNet and Arabian Sea humpback whale plans provide strong examples of existing regional frameworks, and the WIO plan should be linked to them.
- The plan should link to the next global cetacean action plan of the IUCN, issuance of which is planned for 2027. This includes ensuring that regional plans are nested within a global framework, but not defined by it.
- A regional plan should draw on existing networks and local expertise. IndoCet, as a regionally based network uniting researchers and organisations working on cetaceans across the WIO, is well placed to lead the initiative.

Recommendations

1. Develop the Action Plan under the Nairobi Convention, aligned with existing commitments under the IWC, IOC, CMS, IOTC, IMO and Pan-African frameworks.
2. Promote cetacean population assessment in the Nairobi Convention range states, identify knowledge gaps and priorities regional research needs.
1. Develop an improved and functional framework for improving bycatch monitoring and reporting, including for small-scale and coastal fisheries, in collaboration with the IOTC (Indian Ocean Tuna Commission) and national fisheries agencies.
3. Develop guidance on assessing and managing threats to cetaceans, and other marine fauna from underwater noise, shipping and vessel strikes including within Environmental Impact Assessments and marine spatial planning. This should include specific dialogue with lenders to ensure that conservation targets are being met, and where data are absent, to specifically acknowledge these gaps.

Proposed follow-up actions

- Secure dedicated resources and funding for the development of the Action Plan.
- Form a drafting group (membership to be confirmed).
- Prepare a draft Action Plan and roadmap for consideration at the next Nairobi Convention Science to Policy meeting with a view to presentation at COP13.
- Identify funding for the implementation of the Action Plan