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Progress report on the activities of the Western Indian Ocean Cetacean network for research and conservation (IndoCet)

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Progress report on the activities of the Western Indian Ocean Cetacean network for research and conservation (IndoCet)

Violaine Dulau[1], Salvatore Cerchio[2], Julie Martin[1], Alexander Vogel[3], Elisa Seyboth[4], Ted Cheeseman[3], Anjara Saloma[5], Michel Vely[6], Mduduzi Seakamela[7], Ken Findlay[8], Sabrina Fossette[6], Peter Heide Jørgensen[9], Laurene Trudelle[5, 10], Howard Rosenbaum[11],Stephanie Plön[12], Angie Gullan[13], Els Vermeulen[4], Shanan Atkins[14], Michael Meÿer[15], , Gwenith Penry[4], Gill Braulik[16], Audrey Cartraud[17], Jean-Marc Gancille[1] , Paul Tixier[18], Claire Garrigue[19], Alexandre Zerbini[20], Timothy Collins[11]

1. Globice, Réunion Island,
2. African Aquatic Conservation Fund (AACF), Senegal/Madagascar
3. Happywhale, Santa Cruz, CA, USA
4. Mammal Research Institute Whale Unit, University of Pretoria, South Africa
5. Cetamada, Sainte Marie, Madagascar
6. Megaptera, France
7. Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, 8002 Cape Town, South Africa
8. AfriSeas, c/o 96 De Villiers Way, Glencairn 7975, Simon's Town, South Africa
9. Greenland Institute of Natural resources Copenhagen, Denmark
10. Institut des Neurosciences Paris-Saclay, Université Paris Sud, 91405 Orsay, France
11. Wildlife Conservation Society, Global Conservation Program
12. Stellenbosch University & Bayworld Centre for Research and Education (BCRE), Gqeberha, South Africa.
13. Dolphin Encountours Research Center, Mozambique
14. HuDoNet
15. International Whaling Commission and South Africa Whale Disentanglement Network
16. Saint Andrew University, UK
17. CEDTM, Réunion Island
18. IRD/MARBEC, Sète, France
19. Opération Cétacés, New Caledonia
20. Marine Mammal Laboratory, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NOAA Fisheries, USA

Contact: violaine.dulau@globice.org

I. Background and general objectives

The Indian Ocean Cetacean Network (IndoCet) Consortium is dedicated to the research and conservation of all cetacean species that occur in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO). The general aim of the network is to improve the available knowledge on cetaceans in the WIO and promote their conservation. Initiated in 2014 and officially launched in 2017, IndoCet works as a network of individual researchers and/or people actively involved in cetacean conservation in the WIO. The network currently comprises 65 members, all of whom are actively involved in cetacean research in seven WIO countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Madagascar, Réunion/Mayotte, Mauritius) and 10 associate members who support regional cetacean research in other ways. The structure and operating rules of the Consortium are described in a Memorandum of Understanding which encourages members to share the same general goals and ambitions and to work together under a common understanding. The primary goals of the network and the respective specific objectives are to:

1. Advance the understanding of the biology of cetaceans that occur in the WIO, and more specifically to:
    a. Foster research on the biology of cetaceans in the WIO

   b. Promote exchanges of expertise and experience
   c. Facilitate/encourage publication of peer-reviewed papers
   d. Develop online platforms for reporting information/archiving/data exchange
2. Foster collaboration between research groups
   a. Collate existing datasets and share metadata
   b. Facilitate sharing of data, experience and tools
   c. Facilitate prioritization and development of future common research projects
3. Develop capacity in WIO range states for cetacean research and conservation, through e.g., workshops, conferences, training internships, and staff exchanges.
4. Promote conservation of cetaceans and mitigation of anthropogenic impacts in the WIO
5. Facilitate communication regarding research activities:
   a. Within the consortium, among members
   b. As a common voice on cetacean conservation, research, and management across the WIO
6. Promote the use of internationally recognised guidelines on research ethics and professional conduct in the WIO.

The overall perspective is to establish a coordinated, regionally led scientific framework in which IndoCet generates, integrates, and applies robust evidence on cetacean distribution, ecology, and threats in order to support effective conservation and management across the Western Indian Ocean, and contribution to the evolution of the Indian Ocean Sanctuary under the International Whaling Commission into a scientifically informed, ecosystem-relevant framework for cetacean protection.

II. Activities performed and achievements

Several regional activities and projects have been implemented since the creation of the network, some of which were described in SC69a/SAN/02 and are updated below.

1. Fostering collaboration through workshops and meetings

The IndoCet Consortium has managed to meet in person six times since 2014 (see Annexe 1). The meeting reports are available on the IndoCet Website. The most recent in-person meeting occurred during the WIOMSA Scientific Symposium in 2025.

In addition to in-person meetings, online discussions are convened and are planned to be held regularly during 2026 in order to keep the group as connected and engaged as possible. This includes a planned webinar with the IWC strandings team.

2. Network communication

2.1 IndoCet website

The IndoCet website is an interactive platform and serves as a source of information for IndoCet members and for the broader scientific community. IndoCet members have their own user account/login through which they can update their metadata, report strandings (see section below), up/download publications, etc. The ambition for the website is to provide a living and useful repository that allows centralisation and visualisation of cetacean data available from the region and to foster collaboration. The site includes the following pages:

- Publication repository

The publication page of the website centralises existing literature (published and unpublished) on cetaceans from the WIO region and is regularly updated by the members. The aim is to increase the accessibility of literature to all members and researchers from within and outside the region. To date, 156 publications have been uploaded, most of them peer-reviewed, but also IWC papers and other reports. IndoCet members have direct access to papers when logged in to their account, whereas the public can only see the list of publications and the link to journals.

- Metadata

The IndoCet website centralises information on existing datasets on a "metadata" page. Metadata are organised by data type, including telemetry, photo-identification, biopsy, and acoustic recordings.

- "Report a Stranding"

The IndoCet website includes a dedicated strandings page where IndoCet members can report stranding events (see *Stranding network* below).

2.2 Communication tools

An IndoCet Newsletter is routinely produced, enabling members to share information about current and future projects being developed in the region. Articles also inform the News section of the website. A WhatsApp group and mailing list are used to share instant news, while a Facebook page has been created for external communications. A dedicated WhatsApp group (with a wider membership) is used to provide guidance for strandings response and species identification and to share information quickly and effectively on regional stranding events.

3. Cooperative initiatives

3.1. Stranding network

- Collating metadata on strandings

A multi-author partner publication (Plön *et al.,* 2023) compiled data on stranding events between 2000–2020 from the SWIO region. This work highlighted the utility of the IndoCet strandings platform which facilitates collation of stranding data from the region as well as providing guidance for more systematic data collection and reporting.

From 2020 onwards, IndoCet members have been encouraged to report cetacean stranding events on the IndoCet website using the **"**report a stranding" link. This provides a way to report and centralise information on stranding events. Contributed data includes stranding location, species identification, contact person and other relevant information. An interactive regional

map allows visualisation of the locations of strandings, with an option to filter the data by family, species, year, and location (Figure 1). Currently, the map does not update automatically but is manually updated once a year.

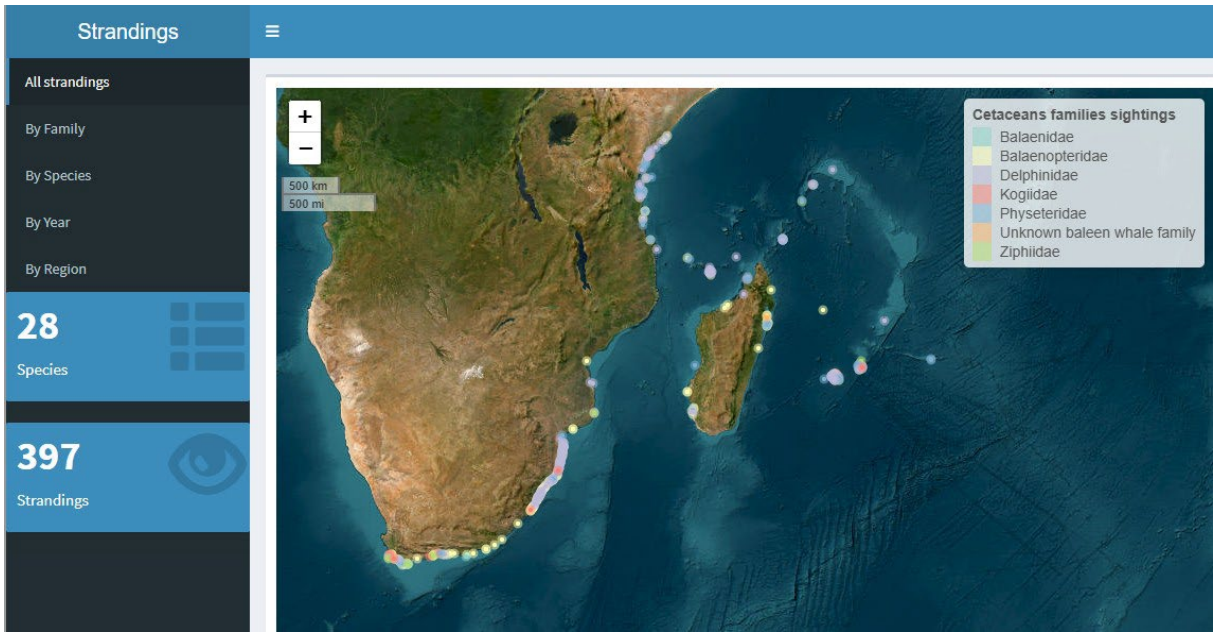


Figure 1: Interactive map showing stranding data collated in the WIO between 2000-2020 (from Plön et al., 2023) available on the IndoCet website (indocet.org/en/strandings/report-a-stranding/).

- Providing training, support and guidance in the WIO

Guidance regarding species identification and stranding response is provided via a stranding WhatsApp group. Existing protocols for responding to both dead and live animals are available on the website, together with a hands-on manual that provides basic guidance and instructions for sampling. These are publications from different sources, and it has been proposed that a simplified standardised spreadsheet and protocol to collect samples (tissue, teeth, etc.) on stranded animals should also be made available. Disentanglement training workshops from the IWC were held in Kenya in 2019, and in Réunion and Mayotte in 2023. Researchers from other WIO countries have expressed interest in co-organising training for their regions (Madagascar, Mauritius) if funding is available.

3.2. NeMMO -Network of Marine Mammal Observers

The "Network of Marine Mammal Observers" (NeMMO) is an IndoCet initiative with the primary aim of enhancing the collection of marine mammal data during opportunistic vessel-based work in the oceanic waters of the south-western Indian Ocean. The goal of NeMMO is to significantly increase the quality, quantity, and availability of useful and standardized data on cetaceans in the oceanic waters of the region through a network of MMO's working onboard platforms of opportunity. The specific objectives are to:

- Identify suitable vessels and partnerships that maximize the geographic coverage and frequency of cetacean observations from platforms of opportunity in the WIO,

- Develop a network of experienced, regional MMOs that can embark on identified platforms to collect systematic data on cetaceans, provide training opportunities, and foster collaboration among researchers and organizations,
- Centralise data on cetacean distribution into a regional database, to ensure such data are standardized, referenced, safely stored, and readily available for research and conservation initiatives.

So far, data has been collected from 25 surveys (Annex 2). The main partnership has been with French vessels (15 surveys on the patrol vessel Osiris II and 5 surveys on the research vessel Marion Dufesne out of 20 surveys). Partnerships have also been developed with the private sector, including two surveys with the cruise company Noble Caledonia. The data are collated into a regional database that currently includes 1,629 cetacean sightings across 25 species which are shared on the IndoCet website as an interactive map. Data on other marine megafauna and marine litter are also collected as part of the protocol. The ambition for the NeMMO initiative is to further develop partnerships with other platforms of opportunity to expand the programme's temporal and spatial coverage and associated data collection. In the long-term, this dataset will be valuable for assessing species distribution and overlaps with human activities.

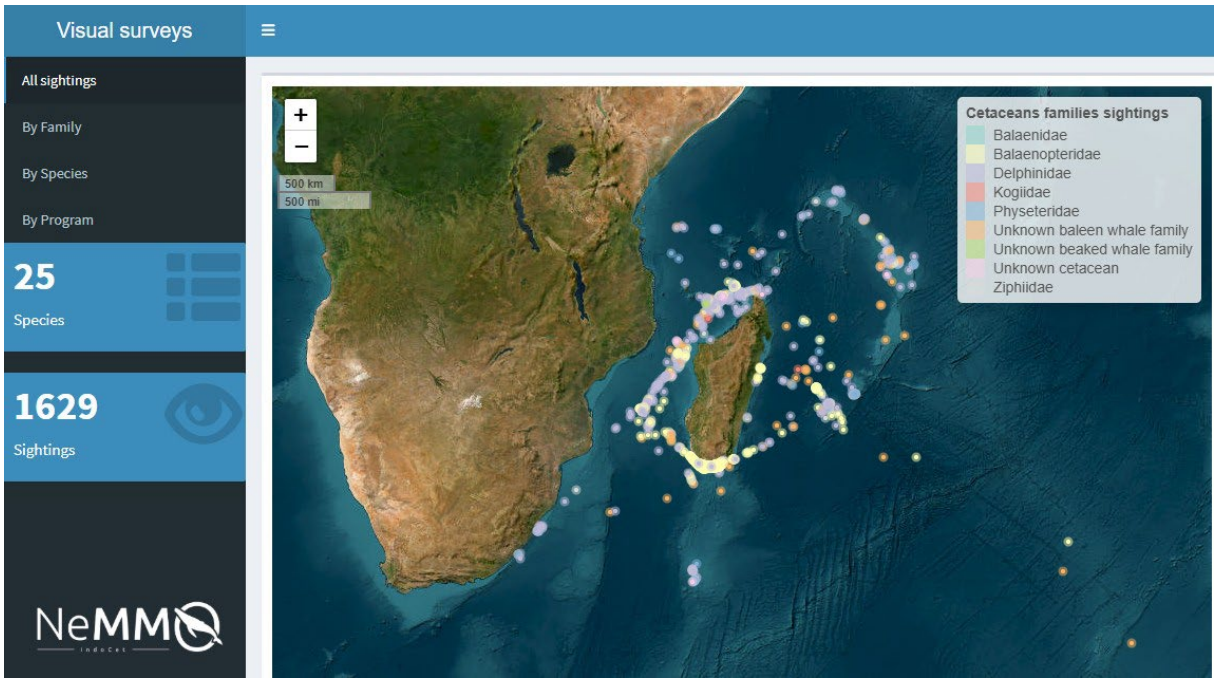


Figure 2: IndoCet interactive platform showing cetacean sightings collected by Marine Mammal Observers on-board platforms of opportunity in 2021-2025 (RESILIENCE survey, OSIRIS surveys, Monaco Expedition WIO) (indocet.org/en/collaborations/nemmo/)

3.3. Dedicated humpback whale work

Humpback whales have been a focus of IndoCet since the consortium's inception, particularly as photo-identification data were being collected by many organizations across the region. One

of the priority actions that was identified in past meetings was to identify a platform that could facilitate data sharing and matching these data. This priority has been developed over the years, together with other collaborative initiatives.

- Photo-identification data in Happywhale

Several IndoCet members have been working closely with Happywhale[1] to upload and match regional WIO humpback whale photo-identification data on this online platform (Cheeseman *et al.*, 2022). As part of IWC-SORP theme 5 (SC/70/SH/08, SORP report, this meeting), which focusses on migration and connectivity of humpback whales in the African region and Southern Ocean, researchers have worked together to develop a common strategy (in the form of a concept note) for the analysis of humpback whale photo-identification data and gain a better understanding of the interchange among sub-stocks of Breeding stock (BS) C and B and linkages to adjacent IWC breeding regions. For this broader initiative, other researchers and organisations working on Indian Ocean and African sub-stocks were invited to contribute to the SORP initiative by uploading humpback whale fluke images to the Happywhale platform. At the same time, Happywhale is also gathering images from citizen science. The general ambition is to increase data availability for IWC BS-B and BS-C, with the aim of conducting a regional assessment of connectivity within and between BS-B and BS-C. As several recaptures have been identified between BS-C and BS-A or BS-D, collaborations with researchers across the broader region are planned. Ultimately, the aim is to use these data to produce estimates of population abundance and exchange rates, which will be relevant to the next IWC Southern hemisphere humpback whale in-depth assessment.

The number of identification photographs from the region uploaded to Happywhale has substantially increased over the last six years, and, consequently, the number of confirmed matches has also increased. In 2018, there were 89 encounters, representing 73 individuals from BS-B and BS-C uploaded to Happywhale. As of March 2025, the number of encounters had increased to 14,017, representing 8,172 individuals. BS-C data includes a total of 9,095 encounters, representing 8,843 unique individuals, with contributions from C1 (South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya), C2 (Comoros, Mayotte), C3 (Madagascar) and C4 (Réunion,Mauritius). The details of the number of encounters and the number of between-year recaptures per region are presented in Table 1.

A total of 161 matches were found among sub-stocks of BS-C and are reported in Table 2 and Figure 3. For a broader review of the status of among BS matches, see SC/70/PH/04, this meeting.

Table1. Summary of the number individual identified

Sub-stock	Country	Total Nb of individual encounters	Nb of ind. ID per region (without within-year recaptures)	Nb of between-year recaptures

[1] https://happywhale.com/home

C1	Eastern South Africa	1,633	1629	38
	Mozambique	677	670	3
	Tanzania	133	132	1
	Kenya	9	9	0
C2	Mayotte	9	9	0
C3	Madagascar	3,749	3741	226
C4	Réunion	2,827	2786	129
	Mauritius	40	36	0
TOTAL		9,095	9,012	

Table 2. Summary of the number of matches between sub-stocks of Breeding Stock C, from data collected from 1988 to 2025 and submitted to Happywhale prior to March 2025. The diagonal represents between year recaptures for a given region.

		C1				C2	C3	C4	
		Eastern SA	Moz.	Tanzania	Kenya	Mayotte	Madagascar	Réunion	Mauritius
C1	Eastern SA	38	14	1	0	0	26	9	0
	Mozambique	14	3	1	1	0	13	1	0
	Tanzania	1	1	1	0		7	2	0
	Kenya	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
C2	Mayotte	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
C3	Madagascar	26	13	7	1	0	226	84	0
C4	Réunion	9	1	2	1	0	84	129	11
	Mauritius	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

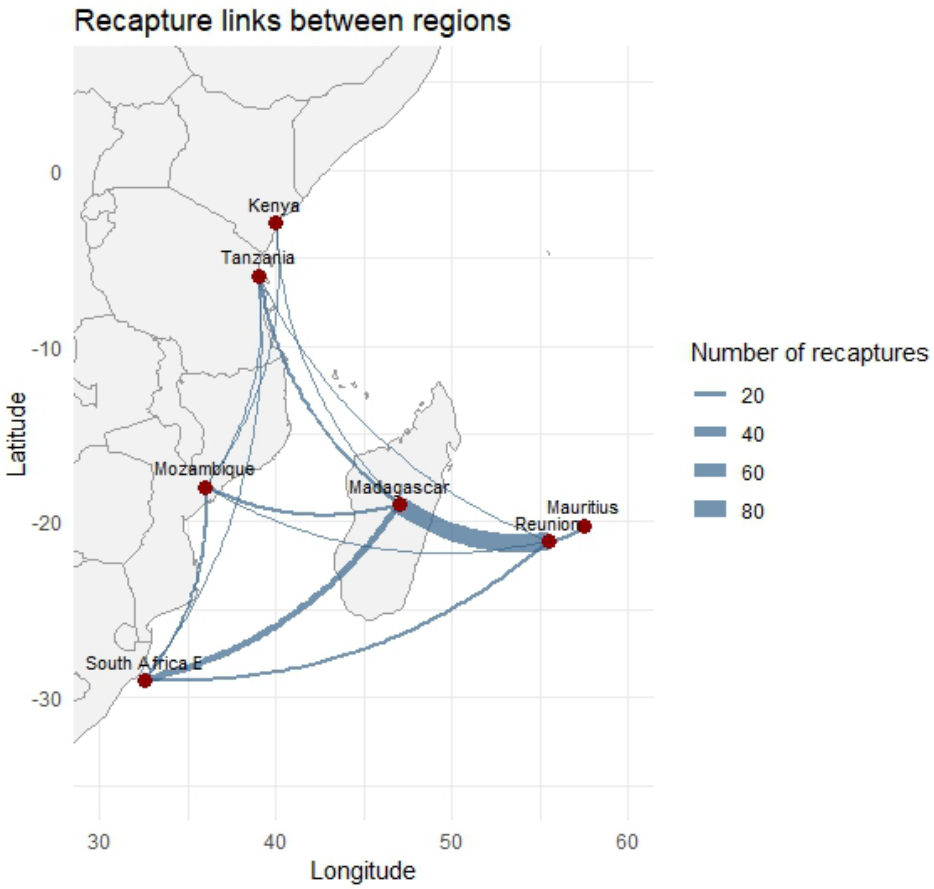


Figure 3: Maps representing the recaptures within BS-C (data uploaded in HappyWhale before March 2025).

- Satellite tracking

Several tagging projects on humpback whales have been implemented in the WIO region since 2011, in Mayotte and the Comoros in 2011-2012 (Fossette et al., 2014), Madagascar in 2012-2013 (Cerchio et al., 2016, Trudelle et al., 2016), Réunion island in 2013 (Dulau et al., 2017), 2019 and 2022, South Africa in 2015-2019 (Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, DFFE, unpubl. data), Tanzania in 2023 and 2025 (WCS, unpubl. data) and Mauritius in 2024 (Globice and Attitude Foundation, unpubl. data).

Regional collaborations have been established to facilitate collation of the data into a regional interactive platform, available at: indocet.org/en/collaborations/satellite-tagging/ (Figure 4). The platform currently includes satellite tracking from 71 individual humpback whales (> 3 days deployment), and can be filtered by country of deployment, year, and individual sex and name (Figure 3).

This collective dataset has also contributed to the Protecting Blue Corridors initiative and is currently being used to assess interactions with marine traffic (see Section 5, Collision Risk Assessment) and contributes to contribute to the Vessel Strike working group of the IWC.

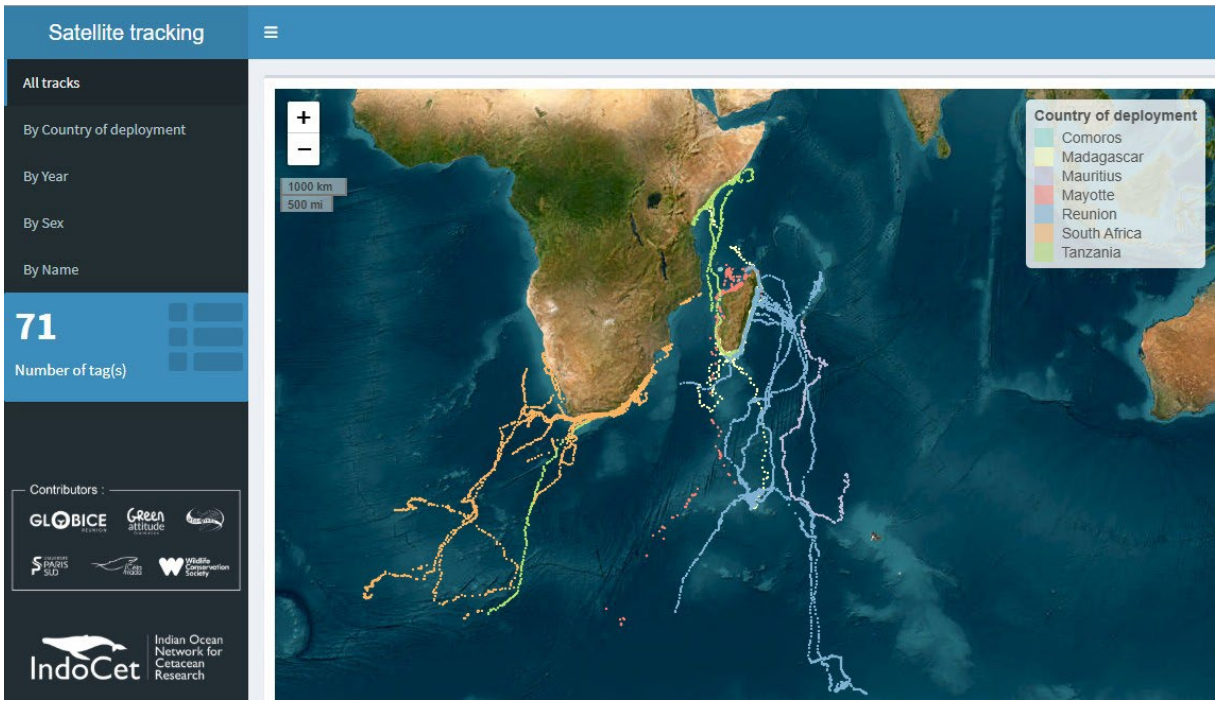


Figure 4: IndoCet interactive platform showing humpback whale satellite tracks collected in 2011-2025 by IndoCet research organizations from the WIO. (indocet.org/en/collaborations/satellite-tagging/)

- Song structure analysis

A regional effort involving patterns from most countries of the WIO is being conducted to assess temporal distribution and humpback whale song structure and provide insights into population structure and connectivity in the region. This effort is based on recording from autonomous recorders deployed at several breeding sites of BS-C, including Réunion, Mauritius, Madagascar, Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Mayotte, Mauritius during the austral winters 2016–2025. Recordings from western South Africa, Namibia and Western Australia were also contributed allowing comparison of songs among BS-B, C and D. The results showed that four different songs and 15 different phrase types were identified. Three of the songs spread eastward, from the eastern African coast to western Australia, over the years. A publication presenting the results from the 2016-2021 period is in preparation, while data collected during the 2022-2025 period are currently being analysed.

- Synchronised counting day

The Synchronised Whale Watching Day (SWWD), initiated in 2008, is an annual coordinated survey of humpback whales conducted across the East African coast (Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and South Africa) and recently extended to the islands of the west Indian Ocean (Madagascar, Réunion, Mauritius). Its primary objective is to promote public awareness and local engagement while contributing to the scientific understanding of humpback whale seasonal movements and interannual variability in occurrence. Between 2009 and 2025, a total of 17 surveys were conducted, yielding 4,826 sightings (mean = 284 sightings per year). In 2025 alone, 447 sightings were recorded, including 196 adults and 27 calves, based on approximately 76 hours of observation by 85 participants. Discussions during recent IndoCet meeting highlighted methodological considerations, including the management of potential double counts, optimisation of survey timing (e.g., weekend vs weekday), and improved data

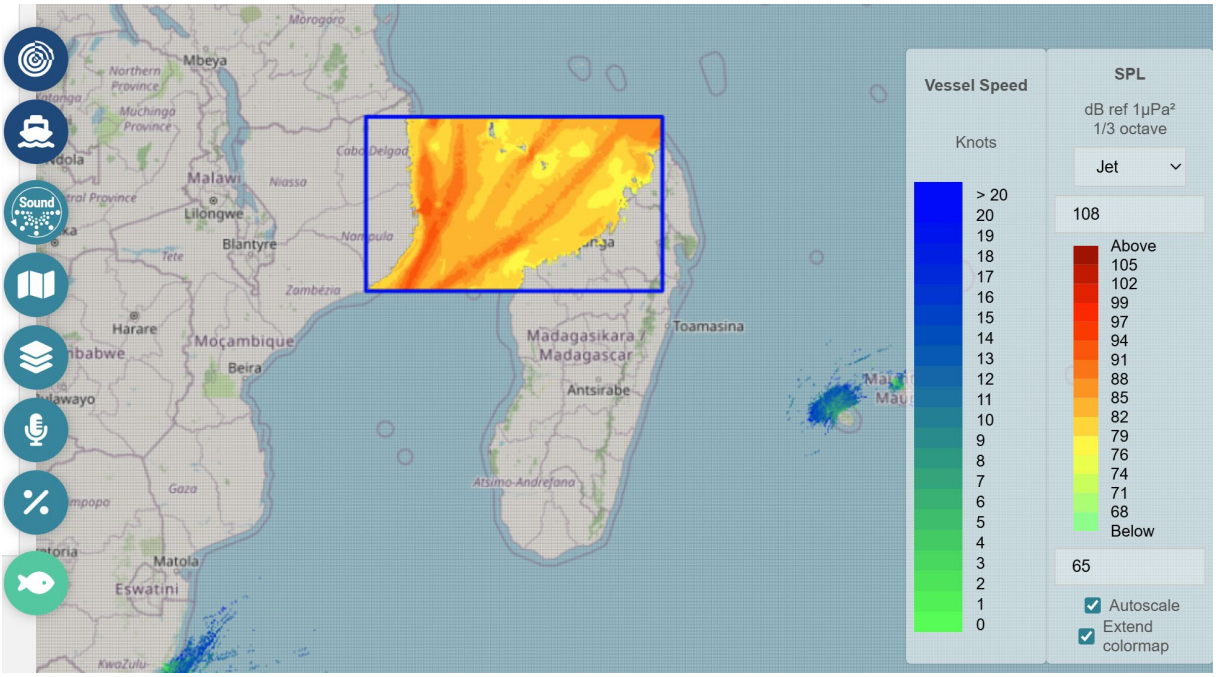
submission workflows. Future coordination meetings with IndoCet and regional stakeholders are planned to refine and expand the SWWD framework.

3.4. Other regional research programs

Several collaborative initiatives have been established in the WIO region. These regional research programs are not led by IndoCet but are based on partnerships and contributions among several IndoCet members and their institutions. These include:

- QWIO (Quieter Western Indian Ocean): led by WCS and funded principally by FFEM (Fond Français pour l'Environnement Mondial) as well as matching contributions from several project partners. The project is working to carry out a scientific assessment of threats associated with shipping in the Western Indian Ocean, including underwater radiated noise and ship strikes and to assess their effects on a suite of focal species, including large whales (baleen whales and sperm whales).

A major focus of work has been the deployment of hydrophones in the Mozambique Channel, including the waters of Mozambique and along the West coasts of Madagascar, around La Reunion, the La Perouse seamount, Mauritius, the Soudan Bank and St Brandon. These units are providing an extensive record of cetacean detections across multiple species, as well as providing data that has been used to calibrate regional soundscape models generated using the Quonops platform (Quiet Oceans), an example of which is provided below.



Vessel strikes are among the most serious anthropogenic threats to large whales globally, and the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) is a region of particular concern given the convergence of major international shipping lanes with critical whale breeding and migratory habitats. Building on the collective humpback whale satellite tracking dataset assembled through IndoCet, a spatial analysis of collision risk between humpback whales and vessel traffic in the south-western Indian Ocean has been developed (Dulau et al., in prep.). The analysis integrates

fourteen years of satellite tracking data from 71 humpback whales tagged at multiple WIO breeding sites and along migratory corridors (2011–2025) with Automatic Identification System (AIS) vessel traffic data provided by Global Fishing Watch.

Whale space use was characterised through a relative humpback whale density metric (HWD), derived from continuous-time correlated random walk state-space modelling of the tracking data, weighted by a movement persistence index to distinguish localised, low-speed behaviour (indicative of breeding activity) from directed transit movements. Vessel traffic was assessed using monthly raster data for all vessels exceeding 300 gross tonnage, divided into 2-knot speed bins and weighted by the probability of a lethal collision as a function of vessel speed, following the logistic function of Conn & Silber (2013). A Collision Risk index (CR) was computed as the product of relative whale density and lethality-weighted vessel density in each 0.1° grid cell across the south-western Indian Ocean.

Humpback whale high-use areas were identified on the southern Madagascar shelf, where whales from multiple WIO breeding sites converge and engage in localised movement patterns, as well as around Réunion, La Pérouse seamount, north-east Madagascar, and eastern South Africa (Figure 5). The highest lethality-weighted vessel densities were associated with commercial shipping at speeds of 10–14 knots, accounting for approximately 60% of total vessel distance in the region during the July–November 2022 analysis period. These routes predominantly link the Atlantic Ocean via the Cape of Good Hope to South-East Asia and to the north-western Indian Ocean through the Mozambique Channel. The spatial overlap of whale high-use areas with these shipping routes produced elevated CR values along the southern shelf of Madagascar, the eastern South African coast, and around Réunion (Figure 6). Notably, all identified high-risk areas fall within designated Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs; Notarbartolo di Sciara et al. 2016; Tetley et al. 2022), reinforcing the conservation significance of these zones.

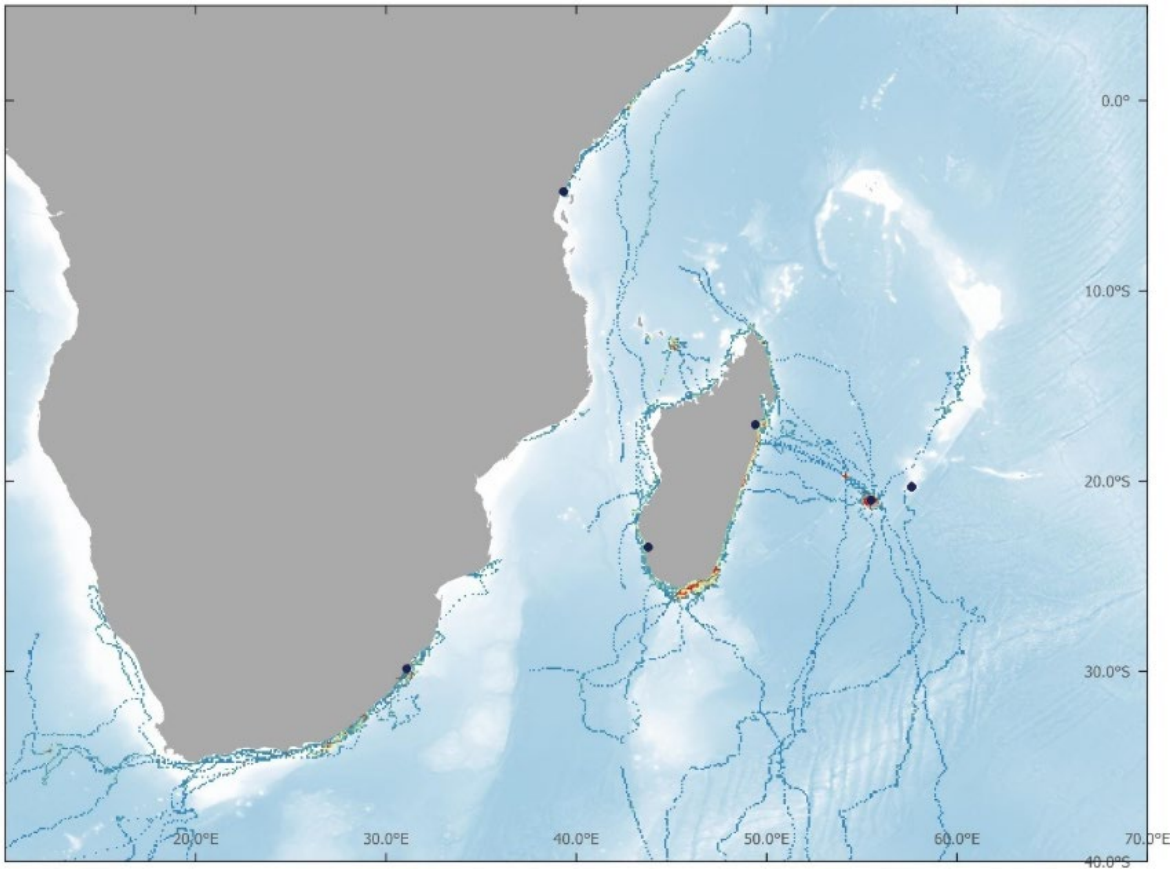


Figure 5: Humpback whale density index (HWD) across the south-western Indian Ocean, derived from satellite tracking data (n = 71; 2011–2025). HWD represents the number of locations per 0.1° grid cell weighted by the mean movement persistence index, and is normalised to a 0–1 scale. Black dots indicate tagging locations. From Dulau et al., in prep.

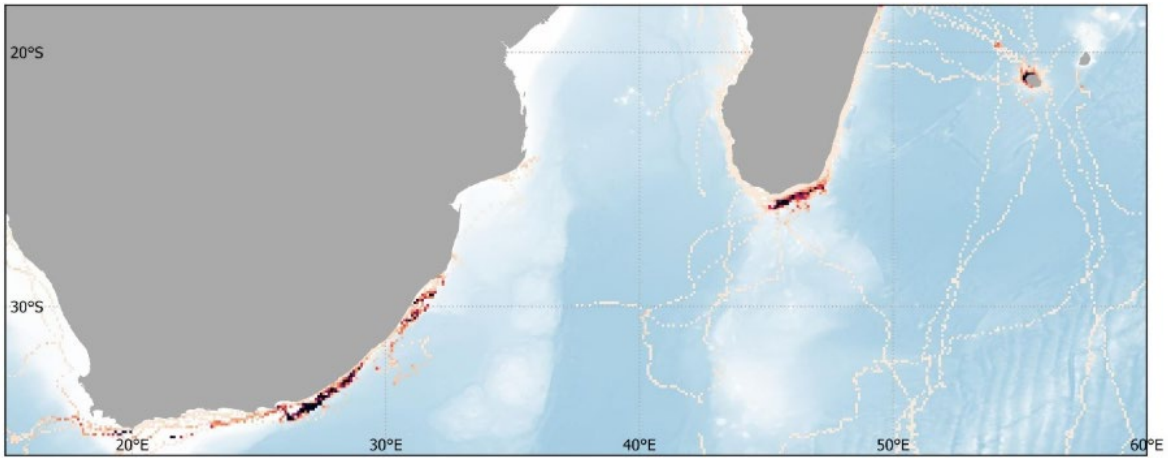


Figure 6: Humpback whale collision risk index (CR) across the south-western Indian Ocean, derived from satellite tracking data (n = 71; 2011–2025) and AIS vessel traffic data (2022). CR represents the product of relative whale density and lethality-weighted vessel density in each 0.1° grid cell, normalised to a 0–1 scale.

Two mitigation scenarios were modelled for the highest-risk area identified off southern Madagascar, which covered a surface area of approximately 7,800 km² (Figure 7). First, a spatial exclusion, equivalent to an Area to be Avoided (ATBA), in which vessel traffic was displaced 40 km to the south-east along a bearing of 158°, perpendicular to the main axis of shipping traffic. This resulted in a complete reduction of collision risk within the high-risk area, and an increase in median CR of 52.5% in the immediately adjacent zone. However, CR levels in the adjacent zone after displacement remained substantially lower than baseline CR levels

within the high-risk area, indicating a net conservation benefit. Second, a speed reduction scenario was modelled within the high-risk area which targeted vessel classes most likely to reduce lethality-weighted vessel density with a view to assessing whether this could be applied more broadly across the region without requiring traffic rerouting. Comparison of the two scenarios indicated that spatial displacement produced a greater reduction in collision risk within the delineated high-risk area; the speed reduction is only effective below 10 knots but has the advantage of not concentrating traffic elsewhere (which may affect other species). The study underscores the importance of timely management action given the ongoing growth in vessel traffic in the WIO, and particularly in habitats that are heavily used by traffic (including South Africa). A paper with more details of these and other analyses is being prepared (Dulau et al., in prep).

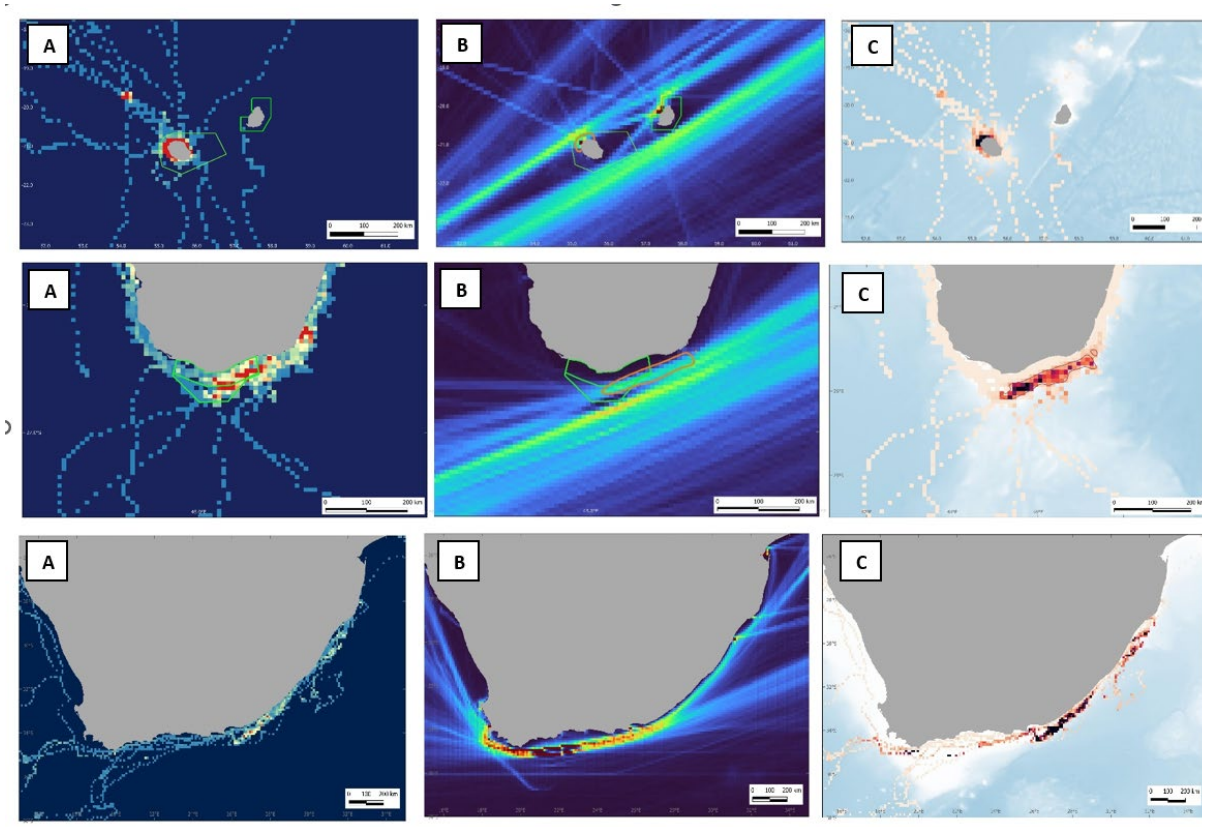


Figure 7: Spatial distribution of (A) humpback whale relative density, (B) lethality-weighted vessel density and (C) Collision Risk index in the Mascarene Island (top row), off southern Madagascar (middle row) and and eastern South Africa (bottom row). From Dulau et al., in prep.

- COEXISTENCE and INTOP projects: led by IRD/MARBEC and based on ANR/NRF/AFD funding, COEXISTENCE is a 4-year (2025-2028) project that aims at understanding the socio-ecological mechanisms of fisheries - large marine predator conflicts in the Mozambique Channel in order to identify sustainable solutions. It involves 21 collaborators (several of who are part of the Indocet Consortium) from 5 countries (France, South Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar, Comoros). It focuses on the main shark and odontocete species involved in direct and indirect interactions with fisheries such as bull/tiger/hammerhead sharks,

killer whales, false killer whales and short-finned pilot whales. It is structured into 4 Work Packages: 1) Spatial Connectivity (assessing animal movements through biologging), Genetic Connectivity (population structure and gene flows through genetic analyses on tissue samples), 2) Overlaps between fisheriesand predators (mapping and modelling the nature and severity of interactions), 3) Human dimensions of the conflicts (analyzing costs-benefits of adjustments in fishing practices and social representations), and 4) Solutions (developing mitigation solutions through an integrative approach). Activities on killer whale interactions with longline fisheries in southern Africa have already started through PhD and Masters projects. IRD/MARBEC also lead the INTOP project (2025-2027) funded by the European Union which aims at understanding and assessing interactions between Réunion pelagic longline fisheries and odontocetes in the SW Indian Ocean. This project is conducted mainly on Réunion fisheries, and in partnership with GLOBICE. In complement to COEXISTENCE, it will i) identify the odontocete species involved in depredation through acoustics (Deployment of acoustic recorders on fishing lines in collaboration with Globice), develop a database of odontocete depredation in the SW Indian Ocean, implement protocols for detailed data collection on odontocete depredation, and model the distribution of depredating odontocetes.

- CET'IZEN project: CET'IZEN is a three-year regional project led by GLOBICE and funded by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). It aims to develop educational tools and awareness activities on cetaceans across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO). The AFD funding will also support the refurbishment of the IndoCet website as part of the CET'IZEN project.

4. Collaboration with other networks

IndoCet is collaborating with other networks and regional and global initiatives, including:

- The Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin Conservation Network (HuDoNet)

IndoCet links with the HuDoNet consortium, dedicated to the protection of the Indian Ocean humpback dolphin (*Sousa plumbea*). A species dedicated Action Plan has been developed by HuDoNet to improve the conservation of the species throughout its range (see IWC paper SC/69B/SM/05, SC/70/SM/03 and SC/70/ForInfo/10). This effort extends beyond the boundaries of IndoCet.

- Important Marine Mammal Areas

The process of identifying IMMAs for the Western Indian Ocean (and Arabian Seas) was launched in 2019, during a regional workshop held from 4-8 March 2019, in Salalah, Oman. A total of 20 IMMAs were identified in the WIO and links to the IMMA eAtlas and factsheets are provided on the IndoCet website, as resources for the region.

IMMAs have been used to guide the development of conservation measures in the WIO:

- In Réunion: the IMMA of the "Mascarene and associated features" was used to support the submission of an Area To Be Avoided by large transiting vessels to the Internation Maritime Organisation.

- TAAF: the IMMAs were used to support the creation of an MPA in the French sub-Antarctic territories.

Given the new process allowing for areas to be added between workshops dedicated workshop, the underwater bank of Saya de Malha bank could be proposed as an Area of Interest, based on new data being collected in this remote region (Webber et al., 2023).

- IORA Whale Watching Network

Since 2017, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) has been developing a regional network for sustainable whale and dolphin watching tourism in collaboration with the IWC. The objective of the IORA programme is to enhance regional cooperation in sustainable whale and dolphin watching tourism in the Indian Ocean through a collaborative approach, including private sector, local communities, governments, NGOs, scientists and other stakeholders. Memberships are open to all IORA Member States on a voluntary basis through focal points. The coordination of the network takes turns between members on a voluntary basis. Since 2023, the IORA network is coordinated by France (Réunion), via CEDTM, also making the link with IndoCet.

In partnership with the IWC, extensive work was completed at the start of the network to encourage IORA countries to develop profiles for the IWC Whale Watching Handbook, to develop whale watching guidelines or adopt international ones, and to engage across both IORA & IWC organizations. The network operates through information sharing, capacity building, and the provision of expertise, primary via annual webinars and newsletters.

III. Perspectives and follow-up actions

Building on the discussions and outcomes of the 2025 in-person meeting, that was held as part of a special session of the WIOMSA Symposium (3rd October 2025, Mombasa, Kenya), several priorities, actions and strategic directions were identified to guide the development of IndoCet activities over the coming years. These actions aim to strengthen the network's coordination and engagement, enhance data sharing, and promote collaborative research and conservation efforts for cetaceans across the Indian Ocean region.

1. Strengthening collaboration and engagement
    - Maintain network momentum through active member engagement and regular communication.
    - Encourage member contributions: publications, metadata updates, stranding reports, and newsletter items.
    - Promote the development of tools to facilitate data sharing and visualisation
    - Establish thematic working groups within IndoCet to address key priority actions and develop IndoCet collaborative activities (NeMMO, synchronized whale counts, stranding network, communication, etc.).

2. Enhancing communication and visibility
    - Refurbish and revamp the IndoCet website to function as both a research portal and public outreach hub.

- Expand communication tools (newsletter, webinars) to maintain member interaction and visibility.

3. Advancing research and monitoring effort
    - Further develop the IndoCet stranding network and promote systematic data collection on stranded animals, as well as cetacean–human interactions (e.g., bycatch, vessel strikes, disturbance). This includes outreach to colleagues in Somalia and the Horn of Africa.
    - Consolidate and expand ongoing collaborative activities such as synchronized counting days and other regional monitoring programs.
    - Support the NeMMO initiative by fostering partnerships with "platforms of opportunity" to extend offshore data collection. Encourage the deployment of trained marine mammal observers aboard vessels following standardized protocols.
    - Development of a common publication describing humpback whale connectivity between breeding stocks across the sub-Saharan Africa region, to be presented at the next IWC SC (April/May 2026).
    - Revise the methodological protocol of the regional "Synchronised Whale Counting Day"

4. Developing a regional conservation framework
    - Build consensus for the creation and structure of a Regional Cetacean Action Plan, aligning with international conservation frameworks, regional and national priorities.
    - Encourage researchers to initiate new regional projects in collaboration with other IndoCet members, with the goal of centralizing and analyzing data under a common methodological and analytical framework.

5. Strengthening institutional partnerships
    - Explore the establishment of a more formal link between IndoCet and WIOMSA, including the possibility of holding future IndoCet meetings within the framework of the WIOMSA Scientific Symposium, as well as supporting regional initiatives that focus on marine mammal science. This could also include having a respected regional marine mammal researcher on the editorial board of the WIOMSA journal.
    - Maintain and strengthen relationships with regional and international organizations such as the IWC and SORP, ensuring IndoCet activities are recognized through annual updates presented to the IWC Scientific Committee.
    - Identify key areas for collaboration and data sharing with other regional initiatives, fostering synergies that enhance scientific understanding and management effectiveness.

The continued growth of IndoCet depends on the collective engagement of its members and the consolidation of partnerships within the wider WIO conservation and research community. By implementing these activities, IndoCet can strengthen its role as a platform for cetacean research and conservation in the region.

Roadmap for 2026:

- Formalise an agreement between IndoCet and WIOMSA to support regional initiatives that focus on marine mammal science and conservation and provide support to the WIOMSA scientific journal.
- Prepare a concept note for a regional marine mammal status report and associated outreach to partners such as the Nairobi Convention, IOC, IWC, and WIOMSA for endorsement and collaboration and explore funding opportunities.
- Ensure effective coordination with IWC-SORP and prepare updates on IndoCet activities for presentation at IWC SC meetings. Facilitate contributions from IndoCet members, and work to ensure the process is transparent and participative.
- Create a working group to advance the development of a manuscript on humpback whale connectivity using Happywhale.
- Propose a new organization and design for the IndoCet website and develop tools to facilitate metadata updates and visualization, in collaboration with Happywhale (funded by AFD).
- Continue facilitation of the IndoCet webinar series to maintain member engagement, share project updates, and encourage capacity-building within the network.
- Plan for the next IndoCet regional meeting, tentatively scheduled in conjunction with a future WIOMSA or the Humpback Whale World Congress.

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ANNEXE 1.

List of Indocet Meetings since 2015. These meetings were funded as part of regional programs, including MIROMEN, Et.Cet.R.A[2]., COMBAVA[3] (led by Globice and funded by European funding), the Quieter Western Indian Ocean Project[4] (QWIO, led by the Wildlife Conservation Society and funded by FFEM), MiMUNOPS (Mise en valeur et Mutualisation des connaissances de la biodiversité marine et terrestre lndian Océanique, Patrimoine à Sauvegarder), led by the University of Réunion (EU funding), and in conjunction with Scientific conferences, such as the Humpback Whale World Conference, conferences of the Society for Marine Mammalogy (SMM), the Island Biology Conference and the WIOMSA (Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association) Scientific Symposium.

Meeting	**Date**	**Location**	**Associated meeting**
In-person Founding meeting	2014	Réunion	Miromen Tagging workshop
In-person Steering group	2015	Sainte Marie, Madagascar	Humpback Whale World Conference (HWWC)
In-person Inception meeting	2017	Réunion	HWWC
In-person	2019	Réunion	Island Biology Conference
In-person	2019	Barcelona, Spain	SMM/ECS
In-person/online	2022	Gqeberha/Port Elizabeth	WIOMSA
In-person	2025	Mombasa, Kenya	WIOMSA

[2] https://www.globice.org/campagne/programme-et-cet-r-a/
[3] https://www.globice.org/campagne/programme-combava/
[4] https://programs.wcs.org/qwio/About

ANNEXE 2. Details of surveys conducted by Marine Mammal Observers onboard platforms of opportunity in the WIO and included in NeMMO database

Survey	Vessel	Date	Leading organisation	MMO	Duration (days)	N Cetacean sightings	N Cetacean species
NeMMO_OSIRIS_1	OSIRIS II	Jul/Aug 2021	GLOBICE	Globice, University Réunion	31	117	8
NeMMO_OSIRIS_2	OSIRIS II	Sep/Oct 2021	GLOBICE	Globice, MMCO	21	55	5
NeMMO_OSIRIS_3	OSIRIS II	Jan 2022	GLOBICE	Globice	14	4	3
NeMMO_OSIRIS_4	OSIRIS II	May/Jun 2022	GLOBICE	Globice, WMA-KMMREC	19	8	5
NeMMO_OSIRIS_5	OSIRIS II	Jul/Aug 2022	GLOBICE	Globice	39	91	11
NeMMO_OSIRIS_6	OSIRIS II	Oct 2022	GLOBICE	Globice	28	199	11
NeMMO_OSIRIS_7	OSIRIS II	Jan 2023	GLOBICE	Globice, MMCO	25	29	6
NeMMO_OSIRIS_8	OSIRIS II	Mar/Apr 2023	GLOBICE	Globice, Cetamada, CetaMaore	34	36	8
NeMMO_OSIRIS_9	OSIRIS II	Jul/Aug 2023	GLOBICE	Globice, GAF	34	517	14
NeMMO_OSIRIS_10	OSIRIS II	Jan 2024	GLOBICE	Globice	22	24	8
NeMMO_OSIRIS_11	OSIRIS II	April 2024	GLOBICE	Globice	39	20	5
NeMMO_OSIRIS_12	OSIRIS II	July/Aug 2024	GLOBICE	Globice	31	35	8
NeMMO_OSIRIS_13	OSIRIS II	Jan/Feb 2025	GLOBICE	Globice	19	11	5
NeMMO_OSIRIS_14	OSIRIS II	April/May 2025	GLOBICE	Globice	27	15	6
NeMMO_OSIRIS_15	OSIRIS II	Aug/Sept 2025	GLOBICE	Globice	19	260	11
NeMMO_OSIRIS_16	OSIRIS II	Dec 2025	GLOBICE	Globice	20	39	11
NeMMO_RESILIENCE	MARION DUFRESNE II	Apr/May 2022	NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY (NMU)	NMU, Globice	34	36	8
NeMMO_MONACO_EXPLORATIONS	S A AGHULAS II	Nov 2022	EXPEDITIONS DE MONACO	Globice	21	3	1
NeMMO_PONANT	JACQUES CARTIER	Feb/Mar 2023	GLOBICE	Globice	6	9	5
NeMMO_MAYOBS_25	MARION DUFRESNE	Sep 2023	GLOBICE	Globice, University of Réunion	14	20	5
NeMMO_MAYOBS_30	MARION DUFRESNE	Sep 2024	GLOBICE	Globice	24	12	3
NeMMO_MAYOBS_33	MARION DUFRESNE	Sep 2025	GLOBICE	Globice	19	6	4
NeMMO_MASC	MARION DUFRESNE	July 2024	GLOBICE	Globice	31	13	3
NeMMO_Walter Shoals	MARION DUFRESNE	April 2017	IRD	Cetamada	16	18	2
NeMMO_Noble Caledonia	M/V Hebridean Sky	21 Nov-2 Dec 2024	MRI Whale Unit	MRI Whale Unit	12	25	7*

*2 species were seen in the Atlantic (Heavisides and Dusky dolphin). 5 species confirmed in WIO + 10 sightings of undetermined baleen whale, 2 of undetermined blackfish and 2 of undetermined delphinids.