



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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Agenda Item 22.1

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF SMALL CETACEANS OF THE BALTIC, NORTH EAST ATLANTIC, IRISH AND NORTH SEAS (ASCOBANS)

1. The Secretariat is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species, the report provided by the Secretariat of the **Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS)**. It complements information on the implementation of CMS instruments provided in UNEP/CMS/COP11/Doc.22.1.
2. The Report is provided unedited in the format and language that it was submitted.



**Report of the joint CMS/ASCOBANS Secretariat
to the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS**

1. This document contains a report on recent progress made by the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS). Further details can be found in CMS/StC40/Inf.21.d and CMS/StC41/Inf.18.c, both available on the CMS website.

A. Status of Ratifications / Agreement Area Extension

2. An extension of the ASCOBANS Agreement area south-westwards entered into force in 2008. The official title of the Agreement thereby, for those countries that accepted the amendment, changed from Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas to **Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**. The acronym stays unchanged. Seven of the ten Parties to ASCOBANS have so far ratified the Amendment, and others are in advanced stages of the ratification process.

B. Institutional Bodies

3. The 7th Meeting of the Parties (MOP7) was held in Brighton, United Kingdom, from 22-24 October 2012. The report of the meeting is available on <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meeting/MOP7>. The following Resolutions were adopted:

- **Resolution 7.1: Conservation of Harbour Porpoises and Adoption of a Conservation Plan for the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat**

This resolution adopts a new Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat and therefore closes a geographical gap between the existing Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises and the Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea. It aims to intensify research and conservation efforts in this heavily used sea area shared by Denmark, Germany and Sweden, in order to reduce threats, particularly bycatch in fishing nets, support research and monitoring as well as safeguard suitable habitats for the harbour porpoise and its prey species. The Resolution also calls for further action to implement the two above-mentioned action plans for the North and Baltic Sea harbour porpoise populations.

- **Resolution 7.2: Activities of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee and the Work Plan**

A work plan for the coming intersessional period was adopted, setting the tasks for the Advisory Committee and the Secretariat. Priorities remain addressing bycatch and underwater noise, as well as strengthening cooperation and synergies with other relevant organizations. The work plan also reinforces the need to keep monitoring developments related to threats such as pollution, marine debris, vessel strikes or

climate change, and adds new work areas such as adverse effects of underwater unexploded ordnance or appropriate responses to individuals or groups of small cetaceans at risk.

- **Resolution 7.3: Research and Conservation Actions in the Extension of the Agreement Area**

Focusing on the westward extension area of the Agreement comprising the Irish Sea and the European North Atlantic, which was decided in 2003 and has been in force since 2008, this resolution addresses the scarcity of knowledge of the abundance and distribution of the many cetacean species in these waters, as well as the magnitude of different threats they face. Parties in the region therefore agreed to collaborate closely to enhance data collection in order to close these knowledge gaps.

- **Resolution 7.4: Impacts of Chemical Pollution on Small Cetaceans**

As chemical pollution, primarily from PCBs, continues to affect marine mammals, new types of contaminants are also entering the seas, with poorly understood effects on marine life. The resolution identifies priority research areas in order to improve the understanding of how lesser-studied contaminants or those of particular concern affect individuals and populations. Parties also stress the need to limit the introduction of chemical substances into the marine environment.

- **Resolution 7.5: Management of Expenditures between 2009 and 2011**

This resolution discharges and approves the expenditures for the years 2009, 2010 and 2011.

- **Resolution 7.6: Financial, Budgetary and Administrative Matters for the Forthcoming Financial Period**

Despite the difficult financial times, a modest increase of 3.45 per cent compared with the previous triennium (2010-2012) was agreed for the financial period starting in 2013. The Secretariat arrangement is to remain as at present, with CMS providing Secretariat services for ASCOBANS. In principle, an extension of the period between MOP7 and MOP8 to four years was also decided, pending the official confirmation of the two Parties not present at the meeting (see Resolution 7.7 below).

- **Resolution 7.7: Application of Article 6.1 of the Agreement**

Since Article 6.1 of the Agreement requires an interval of no more than three years between Meetings of the Parties, it was necessary to apply the Agreement explicitly in a way allowing the extension of the intersessional period. The resolution serves that effect; accordingly the 8th Meeting of the Parties will take place in 2016 and the budgetary period will be 2013-2016.

4. The 19th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee was held from 20-22 March 2012 in Galway, Ireland and the 20th Meeting in Warsaw, Poland, from 27-29 August 2013. Reports of both meetings can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meetings/advisory-committee>.
5. The 21st Meeting of the Advisory Committee was held in Gothenburg, Sweden, from 29 September to 1 October 2014. The report is currently under preparation. A list of action points and decisions of AC21 can be accessed on the [ASCOBANS website](#).

C. Implementation of the Work Programme 2013-16

6. The Work Plan adopted by MOP7 for 2013-2016) covers all areas of the Agreement's work, as laid out in the Conservation and Management Plan: a) Habitat conservation and

management; b) Surveys and research; c) Use of bycatches and strandings; d) Legislation; c) Information and education.

Working Groups

7. The following working groups operate under the Advisory Committee:

- **Jastarnia Group** (Steering Group for the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises, as well as the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat): Reports of the Group's annual meetings can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/jastarnia-group>. Ten meetings have been held to date.
- **North Sea Group** (Steering Group for the Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea): Reports of the Group's annual meetings can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/north-sea-group>. Four meetings have been held to date. The report of the last one is still under preparation.
- **Bycatch Working Group**: Reports produced by the Group can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/bycatch-working-group>.
- **Joint CMS/ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Noise Working Group**: Reports produced by the Group can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/underwater-noise-working-group>.

In 2013, the Terms of Reference of this working group, which until then had only been operated by ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS, were amended in order to allow CMS to join this initiative as a full partner. CMS also has a mandate to work on this issue, and this enables the Convention to avail itself of the significant expertise united in this group. Accordingly, the CMS Scientific Council at its 18th Meeting expressed its unanimous support for accepting the offer of the ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS Parties.

- **Pollution Working Group**: Reports are published as Annexes to the reports of the Advisory Committee Meetings, which can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meetings/advisory-committee>.
- **Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Marine Strategy Framework Directive Working Group**: Reports produced by the Group can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/marine-strategy-framework-directive-working-group>.
- **Extension Area Working Group and Informal Working Group on Large Cetaceans**: Joint reports produced by the Groups can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/extension-area-working-group>.
- **Marine Debris**: This Working Group was temporarily put on hold. Specific Action Points on this issue were agreed by AC21 in order to progress the Agreement's work stream on this subject in collaboration with other relevant fora, including CMS.

Support to Conservation Activities

8. Savings made on the ASCOBANS Trust Fund were redirected to the support of conservation projects. Based on prioritization done by the Advisory Committee, since 2012 the Secretariat was able to fund ten projects with a direct significance towards supporting the goals of the Agreement. Final reports of the following projects are available on the ASCOBANS website, while the other projects are ongoing:

- Inventories of harbour porpoise *Phocaena phocaena phocaena* presence in Russian territorial waters of the Baltic Sea (Biologists for Nature Conservation, Russia, final report [AC19/Doc.6-03](#))
 - Effects of contaminants on reproduction, Phase II (University of St. Andrews, UK, final report [AC19/Doc.6-04](#))
 - Feasibility study on the creation of a web-accessed strandings database covering Agreement Party and Range States within the ASCOBANS region (Zoological Society of London, UK, final report [AC19/Doc.6-05](#))
 - Understanding harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) and fisheries interactions in the north-west Iberian Peninsula (University of Aberdeen, UK, final report [AC20/Doc.6.1.b](#))
 - Distribution and relative abundance of harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) over Dogger Bank and surrounding waters, Southern North Sea (Marine Conservation Research International, final report [AC20/Doc.6.1.c](#))
 - Enhanced detection of harbour porpoises prior to ramming, seismic blast and ammunition clearance: design and construction of a PAL-porpoise detector (PPD) (Forschung. Fakten. Fantasie. F³, Germany, final report [AC21/Inf.6.1.a](#))
9. Four projects are currently being implemented. Details can be accessed in [AC21/Doc.6.1](#).

Workshops

10. The Secretariat was co-host or organizer of a series of workshops in the margins of the Annual Conferences of the European Cetacean Society:
- 2012: ECS/ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Workshop on the EU Habitats Directive & its implementation in relation to cetaceans
 - 2013: Joint ECS/ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Workshop on the challenge of spatially managing cetaceans - a highly mobile animal group ([report](#))
 - 2013: Joint ECS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Workshop on Cetacean Population Structure ([report](#))
 - 2013: ECS/ASCOBANS/WDC Workshop towards a Conservation Strategy for White-beaked Dolphins in the Northeast Atlantic ([report](#))
 - 2014: ECS/ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Workshop on Introducing Noise into the Marine Environment – What are the requirements for an impact assessment for marine mammals? ([report](#))

Communication, Education and Public Awareness

11. Awareness-raising is seen as one of the key tools for the achievement of the conservation targets of the Agreement. Accordingly, the development of outreach and educational material and outreach events are seen as a priority. Details on recent activities, such as the development of information material, the revision of the ASCOBANS website (www.ascobans.org), the creation of an ASCOBANS Facebook page (www.facebook.com/ascobans) and outreach events can be found in [AC21/Doc.5.2](#).
12. The annual outreach event “International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise” continues to be celebrated in institutions around the Baltic Sea on the third Sunday in May. Reports of celebrations in [2012](#), [2013](#) and [2014](#) are available online.