



**CONVENTION ON
MIGRATORY
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Manila, Philippines, 23 - 28 October 2017

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

Summary:

The Secretariat is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the 12th 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.

The Report is provided unedited in the format and language that it was submitted.



**Report of the joint CMS/ASCOBANS Secretariat
to the 12th 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 [UNEP/CMS/StC44/6.2.5](#) and [UNEP/CMS/StC45/Doc.6.2.2](#), both available on the CMS website.

A. Status of Ratifications / Agreement Area Extension

2. Seven of the ten Parties to ASCOBANS have so far ratified the Amendment, and others are in advanced stages of the ratification process. There has been no change since CMS COP11.

B. Institutional Bodies

3. The 8th Meeting of the Parties was held in Helsinki, Finland, from 30 August to 1 September 2016. All related documents including the final resolutions are available at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meeting/MOP8>, where the final report will also be published shortly. The following resolutions were passed:
 - **National Reporting** (Resolution 8.1), changing the reporting procedure so that only one comprehensive report in the four-year cycle would be required, with shorter topic-related reports in the other years, which will be reflected in the agenda for the Advisory Committee Meeting in the year in which the report is received
 - **Work Plan for the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee and Secretariat 2017-2020 and Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023** (Resolution 8.2), outlining the activities of the AC and Secretariat as well as adopting the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023, which is based on the Aichi Targets and intended for migratory species conservation in general
 - **Revision of the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan)** (Resolution 8.3), which had been developed in consultation with the Jastarnia Group in the light of new data, and following a template agreed by ASCOBANS Parties in 2015, based on the format used by the IWC
 - **Conservation of Common Dolphins** (Resolution 8.4), setting out a series of desirable actions and mandating the development of a fully-fledged conservation plan for common dolphins
 - **Monitoring and Mitigation of Small Cetacean Bycatch** (Resolution 8.5), identifying and agreeing ASCOBANS positions and recommendations regarding the requirements of legislation to address bycatch monitoring and mitigation effectively

- **Ocean Energy** (Resolution 8.6), specifically focussing on tidal and wave energy devices on the impacts of which only limited data are available, but which seem to be some risk to species covered by ASCOBANS
 - **Impacts of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)** (Resolution 8.7), setting research priorities and encouraging measures to avoid further input of PCBs into the marine environment
 - **Addressing the Threats from Underwater Munitions** (Resolution 8.8), outlining the concerns related to conventional and chemical weapons and the threats from noise from explosions and poisoning from leakages of chemicals, and calling on UNEP and NATO to take the lead in addressing this issue
 - **Managing Cumulative Anthropogenic Impacts in the Marine Environment** (Resolution 8.9), identifying measures aimed at minimizing the exposure of animals and impacts on the wider marine environment
 - **Small Cetacean Stranding Response** (Resolution 8.10), encouraging the establishment of effective national strandings response networks and recommending that updated necropsy protocols and best practice guidelines for stranding responses and necropsies be developed collaboratively with the IWC, ACCOBAMS and the European Cetacean Society
 - **CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities** (Resolution 8.11), welcoming the progress made in developing this document and inviting the CMS Conference of the Parties, following some further consultations, to consider their adoption
 - **Management of Expenditures between 2012 and 2015** (Resolution 8.12), approving the financial statements
 - **Financial and Administrative Matters 2017-2020** (Resolution 8.13), adopting a budget with a 2.75 per cent increase over the current quadrennium, maintaining the current staffing structure but applying the Bonn standard salary costs, and proposing that in consultation with CMS the staffing arrangements be reviewed to ensure the long-term viability of the Agreement
4. The **22nd Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee** (AC22) met from 29 September to 1 October 2015 in The Hague, Netherlands. This meeting was the last AC meeting before the 8th Meeting of the Parties and served to prepare the substantive inputs to MOP8. The report of the meeting as well as relevant documents can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meeting/AC22>.
 5. The **23rd Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee** (AC23) met from 5 to 7 September in Le Conquet, France. This meeting was the first one after the adoption of [Resolution 8.1 on National Reporting](#), focussing on underwater noise, ocean energy, unexploded ordnance and marine spatial planning in line with the 2016 national reports, which targeted these four subjects. The meeting documents and report can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meeting/AC23>.
 6. AC23 established intersessional work streams focusing on:
 - Two joint workshops organized by the European Cetacean Society, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS on stranding schemes and noise impact hotspots.
 - Close engagement in the finalisation and regional implementation of the [Regulation on the Conservation of Fishery Resources and the Protection of Marine Ecosystems through Technical Measures \(2016/0074\(COD\)\)](#), including through a newly established Coordinator for ASCOBANS' three action plans on harbour porpoises.
 - A second follow-up workshop on Bycatch and "Unacceptable Interactions" in 2018.

- The development of a new national reporting form for 2017 covering bycatch, strandings, resource depletion, marine debris and biological and monitoring information (for review by AC24 in 2018) based on Resolution 8.1, including a small meeting in December 2017 hosted by the UK.
 - The development of a data request to Parties and Non-Parties on white-beaked dolphin for presentation at AC24.
7. The **24th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee (AC24)** is tentatively scheduled for 25 to 27 September 2018 (place to be determined). All relevant information and meeting and information documents will be made available at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meeting/AC24> in due course.

C. Implementation of the Work Programme 2017-20

8. The Work Plan adopted by MOP8 in [Resolution 8.2](#) for 2017-2020 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) Information and education; e) institutional issues. An update on progress made to date can be found in document [AC23/Doc.1.3](#).

Working Groups

9. The following standing working groups report to the Advisory Committee:
- **Jastarnia Group**
This group was established in 2003 to carry forward the Agreement's Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan). Reports of the annual meetings, which contain recommendations to the Advisory Committee of the Agreement, can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/jastarnia-group>. The most recent meeting (JG13) was held in June 2017 in Wilhelmshaven, Germany, back-to-back with the 6th North Sea Group Meeting.
 - **North Sea Group**
This group was formed to facilitate the implementation of the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea and started operating in late 2010. Reports of the annual meetings can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/north-sea-group>. The most recent meeting (NSG6) was held in July 2017 in Wilhelmshaven, Germany, back-to-back with the 13th Jastarnia Group Meeting.
 - **Bycatch Working Group**
Created in 2010, this group has been set specific tasks by each AC meeting and reported back to the following one. Its progress reports are all accessible through <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/bycatch-working-group>.
 - **Joint CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Noise Working Group**
This working group jointly serves the needs of the two cetacean Agreements, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS, as well as of the CMS Scientific Council. Established in 2009 with the terms of reference updated several times, the annual progress reports of the group can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/underwater-noise-working-group>. The most recent report is available [here](#) from AC23.
 - **Extension Area Working Group & Informal Working Group on Large Cetaceans**
First established in 2011, the experts supporting this activity produce joint reports, mainly related to the western extension of the Agreement Area, which came into force

in 2008. This working group also considers the issue of ship strikes. Since ASCOBANS only covers small cetaceans, the work relating to large cetaceans aims to identify major issues likely to be having a negative effect upon large cetacean populations in the Agreement Area, assessing the extent to which they can be addressed alongside small cetaceans, and making informal recommendations of appropriate mitigation measures. Reports can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/extension-area-working-group> and <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/informal-working-group-large-cetaceans>.

- **Pollution Working Group**

This working group is formed ad-hoc at relevant Advisory Committee Meetings, producing a compilation of recently published articles related to chemical pollution to be annexed to the meeting report as a resource for the Parties. More information can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/pollution-working-group>.

Support to Conservation Activities

10. While annual calls for project proposals have been suspended, ASCOBANS still had the opportunity to fund a few **research and conservation projects**. Three projects have been finalized since 2014 and their final reports published at AC22 and AC23:

- Pollutant exposure in coastal top predators: assessing current levels of exposure and toxic effects ([AC22/Inf.8.1.a](#))
- Preparations for SCANS-III ([AC22/Inf.8.1.b](#))
- Approaches to an Impact Indicator in the Light of Descriptor 11 (MSFD) ([AC22/Inf.8.1.c](#))
- Web-accessed database for marine mammal stranding and necropsy data ([AC23/Inf.9.1.a](#))

Workshops

11. The Secretariat was co-host or organizer of a series of workshops in the margins of the Annual Conferences of the European Cetacean Society:

- 2014: ECS/ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Workshop on Introducing Noise into the Marine Environment – What are the requirements for an impact assessment for marine mammals? ([report](#))
- 2015: ECS/ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Workshop on Marine Mammals Pathology: Update of the Necropsy Protocol on Dissection Techniques and Tissue Sampling
- 2016: ECS/ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Workshop on Conserving Cetaceans in the Seas Around Europe Through Synergy-building Between the Relevant Legislative Frameworks
- 2017: ECS/ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Best Practice Workshop: Fostering inter-regional Cooperation in underwater noise monitoring and impact assessment in waters around Europe, within the context of the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive ([report](#))

Communication, Education and Public Awareness

12. 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 [AC22/Doc.7.1 Rev.1](#) and [AC23/Doc.7.1](#).

13. At MOP8, the ASCOBANS Outreach and Education Award was given for the fifth time. The jury formed by AC22 had unanimously decided that Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) be given this recognition for its dedicated efforts in many countries to educate and inspire people so they can support efforts to protect cetaceans.
14. In 2017 ASCOBANS celebrated 25 years since the Agreement was first open for signature at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 17 March 1992. The Secretariat issued a [special video by the Executive Secretary Bradnee Chambers](#) to mark this milestone, as well as a press release and a statement by UN Environment Executive Director Erik Solheim. A series of special articles were launched on the ASCOBANS website covering issues such as the birth of the agreement to current problems, including bycatch. In addition those critical people from across the region that have made ASCOBANS what it is today are being featured in the ongoing “People behind ASCOBANS” series available both on the facebook (www.facebook.com/ascobans) and homepage (www.ascobans.org).
15. 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. The lead video of the “Hello, little whale” campaign from 2017 is available [here](#).