



**Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species
Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**

Joint Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



CMS/StC36/Inf.6

**Report of the joint CMS/ASCOBANS Secretariat
to the 36th Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee**

1. This document contains a progress report updating the information provided to CMS Parties at the 9th Meeting of the Conference of Parties in Rome in December 2008 (UNEP/CMS/Inf/9.15.2). In this final year of the triennium, ASCOBANS made substantial progress in the implementation of the Work Plan for the Triennium 2007-9.

Meeting of the Parties

2. The 6th Meeting of Parties took place at the UN Campus, Bonn, Germany from 16-18 September 2009. A total of five Resolutions were adopted concerning administrative and budgetary matters as well as key conservation issues.

3. With Resolution No. 1, Parties adopted two action plans for harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*), with specific provisions for the situation and conservation status of the species' populations in the Baltic Sea and North Sea, respectively. The Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan), which was updated in 2009, establishes conservation measures for the remaining ca. 600 individuals in the central Baltic Sea. Through this plan it is hoped that the population will be restored to healthy levels by reducing bycatch, supporting research and public awareness and establishing a network of marine protected areas. A new Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise in the North Sea addresses many of the threats to this species through the intense use of the North Sea area for activities such as fishing, shipping, hydrocarbon extraction, discharges, construction or military activities. Actions related to management, monitoring, mitigation and research are designed to reduce these threats.

4. Resolution No. 2 deals with Adverse Effects of Underwater Noise on Marine Mammals during Offshore Construction Activities for Renewable Energy Production. For example, offshore construction of wind farms throughout the North Sea, Baltic Sea and North East Atlantic region is expected to increase exponentially in the coming years. The pile driving necessary for constructing most types of wind farms creates sound pressure levels so high that it can even cause physical injury to individuals present at relatively close range. The Resolution requests Parties to introduce precautionary guidelines on measures and procedures for all activities surrounding the development of renewable energy production in order to minimise risks to populations, and mitigate possible effects to small cetaceans following current best practice.

5. The Meeting also adopted a new Triennial Work Plan for 2010-12 and endorsed a strategy paper that establishes clear priorities to guide the work of the Contracting Parties, the Advisory Committee and the Secretariat (Resolution No. 3). With a view to focusing the work of the Agreement, two priority issues are identified: bycatch and disturbance by noise.

6. The Meeting further adopted a revised format for the Annual National Reports required under ASCOBANS.

7. On the administrative and institutional side, MOP6 agreed on a budget for the triennium 2010-2012 and decided that the merger of the UNEP/ASCOBANS Secretariat with the UNEP/CMS Secretariat, which had taken effect on 1 January 2007, would continue for another triennium (Resolution No. 5). This arrangement would then be reviewed by the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee at its session in 2011, which would forward the results of this evaluation to the Conference of the Parties (COP) to CMS in 2011 as a contribution to the debate on the Future Shape of CMS. More detailed information on the Secretariat arrangements for ASCOBANS can be found in document StC36/12.

8. Two Awards were presented at the Meeting. Peter Evans (ECS and Sea Watch Foundation) received the 3rd ASCOBANS Outreach and Education Award, which was established to go to an individual or institution in recognition of the best cetacean conservation-related PR/educational initiative. Second, a new award category was established and Peter Reijnders (Netherlands) received the first ASCOBANS Lifetime Award for Outstanding Contribution to Cetacean Conservation.

Other ASCOBANS Meetings

9. The 16th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee (AC16) was held upon invitation of the government of Belgium from 20-24 April 2009 in Bruges. The main points on the agenda of the AC related to the preparation of the Meeting of Parties held in September.

10. The Baltic Sea Working Group (Jastarnia Group) met for the 5th time in February 2009 upon invitation of Finland. This group of experts from the environment and fisheries sectors of the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea was set up to discuss progress made and further implementation priorities for the Recovery Plan for the Baltic Harbour Porpoise. The Jastarnia Group reports to the Advisory Committee.

Correspondence Working Groups

11. The Advisory Committee established a number of intersessional working groups whose activities are either concluded or in progress:

- North Sea Working Group to support the implementation of the Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea
- Intersessional Working Group on the Assessment of Acoustic Disturbance (work concluded)
- Pollution Working Group to produce an annual synthesis of recent literature on chemical and acoustic pollution
- Public Awareness Working Group to revise and further enhance the Draft Communication, Education and Public Awareness Plan for the Agreement prepared by the Secretariat and suggest additional educational and promotional activities
- Intersessional Working Group for a Revised Format for ASCOBANS Annual National Reports (work concluded)
- Working Group on the Possible Inclusion of All Cetacean Species under ASCOBANS (work concluded)
- Intersessional Working Group on the Triennial Work Plan 2010-2012 (work concluded)
- Intersessional working group for an ASCOBANS Style Guide
- Intersessional Working Group on Future Arrangements of ASCOBANS (work concluded)
- Intersessional Correspondence Group on Fisheries Data

Research and Conservation Projects

12. Savings made on the ASCOBANS Trust Fund were redirected to the support of conservation projects. Based on prioritisation done by the Advisory Committee, the Secretariat is able to conclude funding agreements for research projects with a direct significance towards supporting the goals of the Agreement. So far, a project on an analysis of the risk of ship strikes, which will consider both AIS shipping and cetacean distribution data, as well as a study on the effects of contaminants on reproduction in small cetaceans have been supported. AC16 identified a further five projects for support through ASCOBANS, e.g. covering the investigation of population structure and management units for *Lagenorhynchus acutus*, for which a funding agreement was concluded in October 2009, an analysis of contaminant in samples from Baltic harbour porpoises and the production of a review of stranding trends.

Outreach Activities

13. Efforts to produce further translations of ASCOBANS information and exhibition material are ongoing. The Secretariat is also making use of its website and Wikipedia as well as a newsletter to distribute information on the Agreement.

14. On Sunday, 17 May 2009, for the seventh year running, institutions in countries around the Baltic Sea celebrated the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise (IDBHP). A report on IDBHP activities and suggestions for outreach events, the "IDBHP Handbook", is available on the ASCOBANS website.

15. CMS/ASCOBANS Secretariat staff was able to represent ASCOBANS at a number of meetings, increasing the visibility of the Agreement and networking with relevant organisations:

- Meeting on a Programme Support Cost Management Study, 12 January 2009, Geneva, Switzerland
- UNEP Governing Council, 16-20 February 2009, Nairobi, Kenya
- 23rd Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society (and associated workshops), 2-4 March 2009, Istanbul, Turkey
- "Blue Vision" Summit, 7-10 March 2009, Washington DC, USA
- 23rd Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society, 2-4 March 2009, Istanbul, Turkey
- Bonn Agreement Working Group on Operational, Technical and Scientific Questions concerning Counter-Pollution Activities, 26-28 May 2009, Rotterdam, Netherlands
- 61st Annual and Associated Meetings of the International Whaling Commission, 16-23 June 2009, Funchal, Madeira, Portugal
- Third HELCOM Fisheries/Environmental Forum, 13 October 2009, Copenhagen, Denmark

16. A detailed report on the activities of the Secretariat throughout the triennium 2007-9 can be found on the ASCOBANS website (<http://www.ascobans.org/index0501.html>) in MOP6/Doc.5-02.