



Report of the joint CMS/ASCOBANS Secretariat to the 45th Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee

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) since reporting to CMS StC44 ([UNEP/CMS/StC44/6.2.5](http://www.unep.org/cms/stc44/6.2.5)).

A. Institutional Bodies

Meeting of the Parties

2. 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

Advisory Committee

3. The **21st Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee** (AC21) met from 29 September to 1 October 2014 in Gothenburg, Sweden. The report of the meeting as well as relevant documents can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meeting/AC21>.
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 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 (JG12) was held in April 2016 in Hel, Poland.
 - **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 (NSG5) was held in September 2016 in The Hague, Netherlands.
 - **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>.

- **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>.
 - **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>.
 - **Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Working Group on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)**
This group was established in 2011 and is being co-chaired to cover the unique situation in the ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS Areas while allowing for synergies. Its reports and more information on its terms of reference are available at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/marine-strategy-framework-directive-working-group>.
 - **Pollution Working Group**
This working group is formed ad-hoc at each Advisory Committee Meeting, 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>.
6. AC22 further established steering groups for intersessional work streams focusing on:
- A joint workshop organized by the European Cetacean Society, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS on synergies between the cetacean-relevant legislative frameworks for the seas around Europe
 - The finalization of an ASCOBANS position on the requirements of legislation to address, monitor and mitigate small cetacean bycatch (see <http://www.ascobans.org/en/species/threats/bycatch> for results)
 - The Agreement's work relating to "Unacceptable Interactions"
 - The development of a new national reporting form based on the outline adopted by MOP8
 - The revision of the terms of reference for the coordination of the Harbour Porpoise Action Plans
7. The **23rd Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee** (AC23) will meet in autumn 2017 (time and place to be determined). All relevant information and meeting and information documents will be made available at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meeting/AC23> in due course.

B. Implementation of the Work Programme

8. At each meeting of the Advisory Committee, the Secretariat produces an overview of progress made in the implementation of the **Work Plan** adopted by the MOP, which focuses on tasks for the Advisory Committee, its Working Groups and the Secretariat. The AC Meetings also make recommendations on actions to be taken by Parties. The most recent progress report is available as [AC22/Doc.1.3 Rev.1](#).

9. ASCOBANS continues to place great emphasis on **outreach- and education**-related activities. Details can be found in the most recent report of the Secretariat on outreach and education activities, published as [AC22/Doc.7.1 Rev.1](#). 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.
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:
 - 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](#))
11. Cooperation with relevant International Organizations remains a priority for the Agreement. Representation at their meetings is one important way in order to facilitate close contacts, and reports both by the Secretariat and members of the Advisory Committee are presented annually to the AC.
12. The Secretariat submits a joint progress report with CMS and ACCOBAMS to each meeting of the International Whaling Commission. ASCOBANS benefits from cooperation between CMS and the IWC, e.g. through the possibility of occasional representation at the Commission Meetings and the good working relationship between the Secretariats, which since 2000 have had a Memorandum of Understanding. The Secretariats are regularly in touch, and areas for cooperation have been identified, with both sides making efforts to collaborate closely.
13. There is also mutual exchange of information as opportunities and needs arise with the HELCOM Secretariat, the OSPAR Secretariat, the NAMMCO Secretariat and the European Commission. Given the limited time and financial resources available for cooperation, ASCOBANS has especially benefited from the participation of the CMS Secretariat in many conferences and meetings.
14. The Secretariat continues to collaborate with a number of NGOs, such as Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme (CSIP), Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB), Humane Society International (HSI), NABU, OceanCare, Sea Watch Foundation, Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), Wild Migration, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL). Representatives of other NGOs so far not directly involved with the Agreement have agreed to participate in working groups when approached by the Secretariat.
15. Many NGO representatives play a key role in the implementation of the work plan of the Advisory Committee, chairing and participating in ASCOBANS working groups, taking part in drafting groups, organizing or supporting workshops, developing and submitting reports and papers, and engaging in important outreach and education activities. Without this support, much less progress would have been possible on many tasks assigned to the Advisory Committee and Secretariat.
16. Further, close links with the European Cetacean Society are maintained, including regular attendance at their meetings and organization of joint workshops.

C. Synergies with CMS

17. A number of the activities and achievements mentioned above are carried out in direct collaboration with CMS, showing the benefit to the Agreement Secretariat of being part of the Aquatic Species Team. Noteworthy examples related to the outcomes of ASCOBANS MOP8 include:

- the adoption of the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023 through ASCOBANS Resolution 8.2, as well as the substantive contributions the ASCOBANS Secretariat made to the development of the Companion Volume
 - the joint development of the CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities
18. In addition, related to ASCOBANS MOP8, the Joint CMS + AEWA Communications, Information Management and Outreach Team provided excellent support. Starting six weeks before the meeting, a weekly news article was published on the CMS and ASCOBANS websites, highlighting one of the key topics to be discussed at the meeting: PCBs, underwater noise, underwater munitions, ocean energy and bycatch. On the first day of the meeting, when the ASCOBANS Outreach and Education Award was given to Whale and Dolphin Conservation, an article about this was also published (all available [here](#)). A few days before the meeting, an overview article summarized the expected outcomes of the meeting, followed by a [press release](#) afterwards which communicated the wide range of topics covered by the decisions made. Besides these written communications, the Outreach Team also successfully engaged UN Environment (UNEP) and the UN Patron of the Oceans, Lewis Pugh, resulting in a stirring video message to ASCOBANS Parties (available [here](#)) and articles both on the UNEP website and in the UNEP in Europe Newsletter. All this would have been far beyond the capacity of the ASCOBANS staff, and is a great example how through collaboration within the CMS Family we can achieve greater specialization and far better outcomes.
19. Another benefit of the integration of ASCOBANS into the CMS Aquatic Species Team and the CMS Secretariat as a whole is that it facilitates representation at meetings of mutual interest, and often cost sharing for the travel. Examples include missions to meetings of the sister Agreement ACCOBAMS, the European Cetacean Society conferences, or in October 2016 to the meeting of the International Whaling Commission.
20. In April 2016, the CMS Family met for an internal workshop entitled "Exploring Synergies for Addressing Bycatch throughout the CMS Family", organized by the Aquatic Species Team of CMS. It was an opportunity for the exchange of experiences with addressing the threat of bycatch to the marine mammals, sea turtles, fish and seabirds that our treaties and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) were set up to conserve. Representatives of the legally-binding Agreements ACAP, ACCOBAMS, AEWA and ASCOBANS, as well as colleagues servicing the MOUs on Sharks, Dugong, IOSEA Turtles, Atlantic Coast of Africa Turtles, Pacific Island Cetaceans, Western African Aquatic Mammals and Mediterranean Monk Seals, and the Pacific Loggerhead Turtle SSAP, were present. They explored commonalities as well as differences in terms of species of concern and their protection status, relevant fisheries and gear types, availability of mitigation measures and their uptake by fisheries management organizations. Discussions focused on the potential for synergies between the CMS Family instruments, considering topics such as the development of technical solutions, data collection protocols, mutual support and attendance at meetings of regional fisheries management organizations, sharing of resources such as guidelines and best practice mitigation fact sheets, as well as legislative approaches.