



**Report of the joint CMS/ASCOBANS Secretariat
to the 40th 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 COP10 ([UNEP/CMS/Inf.10.18.2](http://www.unep.org/cms/inf/10.18.2)).

Institutional Bodies

2. The 7th Meeting of the Parties (MOP7) was held in Brighton, United Kingdom, from 22-24 October 2012. The report of the meeting is still under preparation. 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, decided in 2003 and 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

- 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 to the current 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 no more than a three-year interval 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 to that effect and requires the two Parties that were not present, Belgium and Lithuania, to give their consent to the Depositary of the Agreement by 23 January 2013 in order for it to enter into force.

If accepted, the 8th Meeting of the Parties will take place in 2016 and the budgetary period will be 2013-2016.

3. The 19th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee was held from 20-22 March 2012 in Galway, Ireland. The meeting report can be accessed [online](#).

Working Groups and Workshops

4. The Baltic Sea Working Group (Jastarnia Group) met for the eighth time in January/February 2012 (report available [online](#)). 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 priorities for the further implementation of the Recovery Plan for the Baltic Harbour Porpoise. The Jastarnia Group reports and makes recommendations to the Advisory Committee.

5. The North Sea Group, established to support the implementation of the Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea, held its second meeting in March 2012 (report available [online](#)).

6. Numerous working groups established by the Advisory Committee operate by correspondence only. They cover the following topics:

- Bycatch
- Underwater Noise (joint group with ACCOBAMS)
- Pollution
- Marine Debris

- Marine Strategy Framework Directive (joint group with ACCOBAMS)
 - Extension Area
 - Large Cetaceans (informal group)
7. A joint ECS/ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Workshop on the EU Habitats Directive and its implementation in relation to cetaceans was held in March 2012. The Committee also recommended organizing a joint workshop with ACCOBAMS at the ECS Annual Conference in 2013 on management of marine protected areas for cetaceans, and ACCOBAMS is taking the lead in organizing a joint workshop on population structure.

Project Support

8. Savings made on the ASCOBANS Trust Fund were redirected to the support of conservation projects. Based on prioritization decided by the Advisory Committee, the Secretariat was during the 2010-2012 triennium able to (co-)fund 16 projects with a direct significance towards supporting the goals of the Agreement:
- Effects of Contaminants on Reproduction in Small Cetaceans (SSFA/2008/01 with St. Andrews University, UK, final project report: [AC17/Doc.6-05](#))
 - Risk Assessment of Potential Conflicts between Shipping and Cetaceans in the ASCOBANS Region (SSFA/2009/01 and SSFA/2011/01 with Sea Watch Foundation, final project report has been published as [AC18/Doc.6-04](#))
 - Review of Trend Analyses in the ASCOBANS Area (Contract with Peter Evans, final report: [AC18/Doc.6-05](#))
 - Historic and present harbour porpoise populations in the Baltic region – geometric morphometrics analysis (SSFA/2009/02 with Aarhus University, Denmark, final project report: [AC18/Doc.6-03](#))
 - Genetic structure of white-sided dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*) in the Eastern North Atlantic (SSFA/2009/03 with Durham University, UK, final project report: [AC17/Doc.6-07](#))
 - Development of a co-ordinated reporting system and HELCOM/ASCOBANS database on Baltic Sea harbour porpoise sightings, by-catches and strandings (SSFA/2009/04 with HELCOM, final project report: [AC17/Doc.6-09](#))
 - Inventories of harbour porpoise *Phocaena phocaena phocaena* presence in Russian territorial waters of the Baltic Sea (SSFA/2010/01 with Biologists for Nature Conservation, final project report: [AC19/Doc.6-03](#))
 - Feasibility study on the creation of a web-accessed strandings database covering Agreement Party and Range States within the ASCOBANS region (SSFA/2010/02 with Zoological Society of London, final project report: [AC19/Doc.6-05](#))
 - Pollutant exposure in coastal top predators: assessing current levels of exposure and toxic effects (SSFA/2010/03 with Zoological Society of London, final project report to AC20)
 - Understanding harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) and fisheries interactions in the north-west Iberian Peninsula (SSFA/2010/04 with University of Aberdeen, UK, interim report: AC19/Doc.6-06, final report to AC20)
 - Effects of contaminants on reproduction, Phase II (SSFA/2010/05 with University of St. Andrews, UK, final project report: [AC19/Doc.6-04](#))

- Approaches to an Impact Indicator in the Light of Descriptor 11 (MSFD) (SSFA/2011/02 with the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS Germany), final project report to AC20)
- Preparation of a Draft Paper containing background information and proposed objectives and measures for the porpoise population residing in the “gap area” currently not covered by the Jastarnia Plan (SSFA/2011/04 with University of Aarhus, Denmark, final product of the project is the Draft Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the Western Baltic, Belt Seas and Kattegat produced for the Advisory Committee’s consideration as AC19/Doc.4-03)
- Distribution and relative abundance of harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) over Dogger Bank and surrounding waters, Southern North Sea (SSFA/2011/05 with Marine Conservation Research International, interim report: AC19/Doc.5-03, final report to AC20)
- Examine habitat exclusion and long-term effect of pingers (SSFA/2012/01 with Aarhus University, Denmark)
- Enhanced detection of harbour porpoises prior to ramming, seismic blasts and ammunition clearance: design and construction of a PAL-porpoise detector (PPD) (Contract with F³)

Outreach and Education / 20th Anniversary

9. Details of the information and exhibition material produced, as well as public information activities carried out, can be accessed in [MOP7/Doc.5-02 rev.1](#).
10. In collaboration with CMS, five exhibition banners dealing with threats to marine species were prepared, covering fisheries, underwater noise, vessel traffic, pollution and climate change. These were displayed for the first time at ASCOBANS MOP7 in Brighton as well as at the public event “WhaleFest 2012”, which took place shortly after the MOP and attracted around 6,000 visitors over two days. The banners can be used as additions to both the CMS and the ASCOBANS exhibitions.
11. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Agreement, a tailor-made roadshow featuring life-sized inflatable models of the majority of the species covered by ASCOBANS was offered to Parties. A first “anniversary roadshow” featuring also the ASCOBANS exhibition was shown in March 2012 in Galway, Ireland. The Whale Workshop then featured the ASCOBANS exhibition on all shows held in Europe, including the above-mentioned WhaleFest in Brighton.
12. Also related to the anniversary, a book is under preparation aiming to be the most authoritative review of northern European cetaceans and the threats they face, whilst also giving insights into how an international Agreement is created, can function and also meet obstacles to progress. Due to unforeseen delays of its publication, the launch is now foreseen to be tied to the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Agreement, which will take place in 2014.

Status of Ratifications / Agreement Area Extension

13. 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.

Secretariat Arrangements

14. The Executive Secretary of CMS continues to serve as Acting Executive Secretary of ASCOBANS, as had been the case since January 2007. However, the Agreement continues to be an independent and legally binding instrument, holding its own meetings and managing its own financial resources.
15. A Working Group comprising Belgium, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands was established to evaluate the Secretariat arrangements for the Agreement in 2011. The working group concluded that while the benefits of having a joint Secretariat with CMS had taken some time to come through, the Parties were receiving value for money from a hard-working Secretariat. The needs of Parties could be met with the current Secretariat arrangements and therefore no changes were being proposed. The report of the working group has been made available as [UNEP/CMS/Inf.10.32](#).
16. At MOP7, Parties noted that benefits were accruing from the close cooperation between the CMS entities in Bonn. The Secretariat was asked to explore joint working arrangements within the CMS Family and further integration of the ASCOBANS and CMS Secretariats, taking note of the CMS Future Shape process, in order to enhance synergies and achieve a more cost-effective operation, and report to the next Advisory Committee Meeting.