



**CONVENTION ON
MIGRATORY
SPECIES**

UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.10.3.1

20 February 2026

Original: English

15th MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES
Campo Grande, Brazil, 23 to 29 March 2026
Agenda Item 10.3.1

**REPORT OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF SMALL CETACEANS OF
THE BALTIC, NORTH EAST ATLANTIC, IRISH AND NORTH SEAS TO CMS COP15**

(Prepared by the ASCOBANS Secretariat)

Summary:

This document contains a report on progress made on activities undertaken within the framework of the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS) since the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS (COP14).

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Status of Ratifications / Agreement Area Extension

1. Eight of the ten Parties¹ to ASCOBANS have ratified the Amendment to the Agreement (area extension to North East Atlantic and Irish Sea). The two remaining Parties, Belgium and Lithuania, are in advanced stages of the ratification process. The situation has not changed since COP14.

Meeting of the Parties

2. Meetings of the Parties to ASCOBANS take place every four years. The 10th Meeting of the Parties ([MOP10](#)) to ASCOBANS was held in September 2024 in Odense, Denmark.
3. The Parties adopted a new ASCOBANS work plan and new resolutions on the conservation of beaked whales, maritime spatial planning, mitigating impacts of recreational activities on small cetaceans, and shallow-water mining. MOP10 also endorsed a plan for the development of a European marine strandings database.
4. Resolutions addressing ocean energy and the adverse effects of underwater noise from offshore renewable energy construction were revised to protect critical life stages and habitats of small cetaceans. In addition, the resolution on the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise was updated as the population was listed in CMS Appendix I at COP14. The Parties also adopted the *2024 Revision of the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea*. The resolutions are available on the [MOP10](#) website with the meeting report.
5. As part of ASCOBANS Resolution 10.8 *Financial and Administrative Matters 2025-2028*, the Parties decided to update the ASCOBANS Coordinator post from P2 to P3. This change took effect in September 2025.
6. MOP11 is scheduled for 2028. The location is subject to offers by Parties to host the meeting.

Advisory Committee

7. The ASCOBANS Advisory Committee meets annually (except for MOP-years) and includes both scientific and institutional sessions. The 29th Meeting of the Advisory Committee ([AC29](#)) took place online in September 2025, as agreed by Parties that every other AC meeting should take place online. Through the annual National Reports, Parties reported on the following pressures and threats to small cetaceans: underwater noise, ocean energy, unexploded ordnance, and maritime spatial planning. The meeting agreed on 34 Action Points and Recommendations in its Scientific Session, with eight additional in the Institutional Session, all available on the [meeting page](#).

Implementation of the Work Plan

8. The ASCOBANS Work Plan for 2025-2028, adopted by MOP10 in [Resolution 10.2](#), covers all areas of the Agreement's work, as laid out in its Conservation and Management Plan. The Work Plan focusses on tasks for the AC, its Working Groups,

¹ Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

and the Secretariat. The AC assesses progress from National Reports submitted by Parties and makes recommendations accordingly. For evaluation of the implementation of the previous Work Plan, see the comprehensive report of the AC Chair and Vice-Chair [here](#).

9. Workshops and meetings

Since CMS COP14, ASCOBANS has organized nine meetings and five workshops²:

- 10th Meeting of the Parties
- 29th Meeting of the Advisory Committee
- 2nd Meeting of the Joint Bycatch Working Group of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS
- Meetings of the Jastarnia Group: JG20, JG21
- Meetings of the North Sea Group: NSG12, NSG13
- Meetings of the Common Dolphin Group: CDG5, CDG6
- Joint ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Workshop with Navies on Underwater Noise and Cetaceans
- ECS/ASCOBANS Workshop on protecting the lesser-known cetaceans of the NE Atlantic
- ECS/ASCOBANS Workshop No.2 on the development of a European Marine Strandings Database
- ECS/ASCOBANS Workshop on recreational activities and their impact on cetaceans
- ECS/ASCOBANS Workshop: Saving the critically endangered Baltic harbour porpoise - looking for novel conservation and profile-raising approaches

Working Groups

10. Part of the ASCOBANS Work Plan is for the Secretariat to support its Working Groups (WG). During the reporting period from February 2024 to February 2026, the below listed WGs have been active under ASCOBANS. The WGs marked with an asterisk (*) have reported to MOP10 or to AC29, completing their task.

- Beaked Whales *
- Climate Change
- Common Dolphin Group
- Discussion Group on the Iberian harbour porpoise *
- Identifying potential duplication / gaps in efforts with other organisations *
- Jastarnia Group
- Joint ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS WG on Cetacean Culture
- Joint Bycatch WG of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS
- Joint Noise WG of CMS, ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS
- Lagenorhynchus species *
- Mitigating impacts of recreational speed crafts *
- National report data usage *
- National reporting overlaps
- North Sea Group
- Offshore Renewable Energy *
- Prioritization of Work Plan Activities *
- Research and conservation actions undertaken in the extended Agreement Area, including large cetaceans
- Shallow-water mining

² <https://www.ascobans.org/meetings/related-meetings>

- Unusual mortality events and mass stranding events

11. Key outcomes from some of the Working Groups:

a) **Intersessional Working Group on Lagenorhynchus Species**

The WG provided a [A Review of Available Information on White-beaked Dolphin and Atlantic White-sided Dolphin](#) to AC29. Notable threats from human activities include climate change, contaminants, hunting in Greenland and the Faroes, bycatch, and underwater noise. The AC endorsed the report's recommendations to improve population knowledge, monitor climate-driven shifts and life-history parameters, assess threats and population health and develop more coordinated conservation actions.

b) **Intersessional Working Group on Beaked Whales**

Many of the beaked whales concerned are categorised as Data Deficient and are identified as being highly vulnerable to underwater noise. Updated report [Overcoming Challenges to Protect Beaked Whales in the Northeast Atlantic](#), was provided to AC29, which endorsed the group's recommendations.

c) **Intersessional Working Group on Unusual Mortality Events and Mass Stranding Events**

This working group was established to address and aggregate information on the rising amount of unusual mortality events (UMEs) and mass stranding events (MSEs). The working group briefed³ the AC29 about ongoing work. Of particular concern was the four probable "background strandings" followed by live strandings across 11 different countries in the ASCOBANS Area, featuring 19-23 individuals and some 3-4 species of beaked whales. Going forward, a key question is whether necropsies can determine if individuals were ill or if they stranded after venturing into more hazardous waters to feed.

d) **Joint Bycatch Working Group**

The JBWG held its second meeting in February 2025,. WG members shared their experiences in monitoring and mitigating cetacean bycatch in different areas and for different fishing gears, the meeting heard about transboundary activities, and the WG members discussed and decided on the priorities to be addressed during 2025-2027. The meeting report and recommendations are available [here](#).

Communication, Education and Public Awareness

12. Awareness-raising is seen as one of the tools for achieving the conservation targets of the Agreement. The Secretariat's activities and outreach events are reported to each meeting of the Advisory Committee. Some of the highlights since COP14 include:

- a) The 2024 ASCOBANS Outreach and Education Award was given to Guido Keijl & the Dutch strandings network⁴ at MOP10 in September 2024. The aim of the award is to recognize individuals or organizations that have contributed to promoting and supporting educational activities and to increasing public awareness to achieve a better understanding of the need to conserve small cetaceans.
- b) The annual ASCOBANS event *International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise* (IDBHP) aims to promote public support through (national) institutions staging various events and exhibitions at museums and scientific institutions around the

³ [ASCOBANS/AC29/Doc.4.6](#)

⁴ <https://www.ascobans.org/news/ascobans-outreach-and-education-award-guido-keijl-dutch-strandings-network>

Baltic Sea. The Secretariat shares events taking place throughout the Baltic Region, that have been reported to the Secretariat. It is hoped that the IDBHP will be observed by at least one notable institution in every country around the Baltic Sea. The Secretariat encourages Baltic Range States to organise various events to celebrate the IDBHP, which in 2026 falls on 17 May.

Cooperation

13. Cooperation with relevant international organizations remains a priority for the Agreement. Representation at their meetings is one important way to facilitate close contacts, and reports both by the Secretariat and members of the AC are presented annually to the AC meeting.
14. In December 2024, ASCOBANS signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES). This is a significant step in fostering stronger collaboration dedicated to the protection of small cetaceans. The MOU establishes a framework for cooperation and facilitates collaboration between ASCOBANS and ICES in areas of mutual interest, such as sharing of knowledge to improve data collection, bycatch methodology, and indicator development, to achieve conservation goals.
15. Representation at various IGO meetings is one important way to facilitate close contacts, and reports both by the Secretariat and members of the AC are presented annually to the AC meeting. There is also exchange of information as opportunities and needs arise.
16. Many NGO representatives play a key role in the implementation of the work plan of the AC, chairing and participating in ASCOBANS working groups, taking part in drafting groups, co-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.

Synergies with CMS

17. A number of the activities mentioned above are carried out in direct collaboration with CMS, showing the benefit to the Agreement Secretariat being part of the CMS Secretariat. Through collaboration within the CMS Family, ASCOBANS can achieve greater specialisation and better outcomes. The integration of ASCOBANS into the CMS Secretariat as a whole also facilitates representation at meetings of mutual interest.