

30th MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Bonn, Germany, 1-3 September 2026
Agenda Item 8.1

REPORTS FROM RELEVANT MEETINGS TO ASCOBANS 2025-2026

2-4 September 2025, Bangor, Wales & Online Meeting of ICES WGMME (Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology) Report: Peter Evans

There were five terms of reference addressed, most of which are ongoing ones reviewed at each meeting. WGMME reviewed new information on abundance, distribution, and population/stock structure on cetacean and seal populations in the North Atlantic, North & Baltic Seas. For cetaceans, an update was given by region and country (where available) of recent surveys and monitoring undertaken for the different species, providing latest estimates of abundance. The results of the winter-SCANS survey undertaken in 2024 in the southern and central North Sea was summarised. For seals, latest monitoring results were given for harbour, grey, and Baltic ringed seals. New records of rare or vagrant species from both taxa were provided in order to record possible range changes in marine mammal species in the future in response to climate change. Further information on cetacean and seal management frameworks in the eastern North Atlantic was reviewed in relation to bycatch and underwater noise disturbance.

A literature review of recent publications on cetacean and seal anthropogenic threats was continued, and threat matrices, previously produced in 2019, were reviewed and updated by ecoregion. In dialogue with WGBYC, and to contribute to the ICES Roadmap for bycatch on endangered, threatened, and protected (ETP) species, information on abundance, demographic trends, and life history parameters was assembled to support the bycatch risk assessment process for data deficient species. Finally, the process of reviewing stranding frequencies and trends in causes of death was continued, country-by-country.

23–30 September 2025, Rostock, Germany ICES: Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species Report: Peter Evans

WGBYC seeks to describe and improve understanding of the likely impacts of fishing activities on affected populations, to inform on the suitability of existing at-sea monitoring programmes for assessing sensitive species bycatch, and to collate information on bycatch mitigation efforts.

Six terms of reference were addressed. Following a formal data call, details of reported monitoring and fishing effort data, and bycatch records were submitted to the WGBYC database from 22 of 25 countries contacted in 2025. Over the past 8 years, the quantity and quality of the information provided have been steadily improving. A literature review on mitigation solutions for ETP species published in 2024 was conducted. The BEAM approach, first developed in 2022 and designed for evaluating and quantitatively assessing population impacts of bycatch, was used to estimate bycatch mortality ranges, by ecoregion and gear type, were produced for several mammal, seabird, turtle, and fish species listed on the EU priority species list as the ICES species lists where allowed. A semi-quantitative methodology for evaluating bycatch risk for high priority data limited species was further developed for those species for which reliable quantitative assessments cannot currently be

carried out using the BEAM approach. A risk-based approach to highlight potential monitoring gaps and inform coordinated sampling designs was further expanded to include all ecoregions, including the Mediterranean. Data deficient species were examined further and measures proposed to obtain the required information to improve the data situation in these cases.

1 October 2025, Online

Wadden Sea Secretariat: Expert Group on Marine Mammals for the Wadden Sea Trilateral Agreement

Report: Jip Vrooman

The EG Marine Mammals meeting reviewed ongoing research and monitoring across the Wadden Sea, highlighting advances in seal and harbour porpoise studies, including tagging, diet analysis, acoustic monitoring, and cross-border movements, alongside concerns about declining seal numbers, strandings (e.g. large whales), pollution (e.g. PFAS, DDT), and unusual mortality events (e.g. beaked whales). Updates were provided on seal monitoring data (from counts, tagging). Key elements of the ASCOBANS North Sea Plan were presented to the group, for further discussion on what's relevant for the Wadden Sea harbour porpoises. An update of harbour porpoise stranding data, as presented in a 2024 paper on harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea, is planned, and data sharing has been requested.

7-8 October 2025, Lund, Sweden

Lund University: Marine Mammal Science Sweden Symposium (MARMASS)

Report: Julia Carlström

The aim of the symposium was to gather people involved in research and management of marine mammals, to share new scientific knowledge, information on ongoing activities, and provide a forum for networking.

The symposium gathered approximately 60 participants from 5 countries, including students, researchers, managing authorities and NGOs, working with marine mammals. A total of 20 oral presentations and approximately 15 poster presentations were given on the topics of population dynamics and development, monitoring and conservation, diet and foraging ecology, methods, impacts, and ecosystems. The programme allowed for discussions and networking, and a strong interest in was expressed in future follow-up symposiums.

18-21 November 2025, Limassol, Cyprus

ACCOBAMS: 9th Meeting of the Parties (MOP9)

Report: Secretariat

Key developments of particular relevance to ASCOBANS include:

- **Joint Bycatch Work:** ACCOBAMS Parties agreed that recommendations from the Joint ACCOBAMS–ASCOBANS Bycatch Working Group should be submitted to the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee for endorsement, including by intersessional silent procedure when necessary.
- **Joint Underwater Noise Activities:** ACCOBAMS highlighted its strong collaboration with ASCOBANS on underwater noise, including a joint workshop with naval and technical experts, harmonisation of monitoring approaches, and cooperation through the Joint Noise Working Group (JNWG). The JNWG continues to support CMS, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS through technical advice on mitigation measures, noise thresholds and regulatory guidance, as requested.
- **Large-scale Monitoring and Data Collection:** ACCOBAMS formally adopted Resolution 9.11 supporting the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative II (ASI-II) and long-term cetacean monitoring. Although focused on the ACCOBAMS area, the survey and associated

methodologies are relevant to ASCOBANS' interests in coordinated population assessment, conservation planning and data harmonisation across CMS Agreements.

- **Black Sea Cetacean Conservation:** Adoption of a Post-War Plan for Black Sea Cetaceans reflects growing attention to emerging anthropogenic pressures on cetaceans and may offer lessons for wider CMS-family cooperation on large-scale environmental impacts.

For more details, please refer to the meeting report and documents available on the [ACCOBAMS webpage](#).

25-27 November 2025, Warsaw, Poland

HELCOM: Informal Consultation Session of EG MaMa (IC EG MAMA 5-2025)

Report: Ida Carlén

The 4th informal consultation session of the HELCOM Expert group on Marine Mammals (IC EG MAMA 4-2025) took place in Warsaw on 25-27 November 2025. The session discussed various topics such as the 4th Holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea environment (HOLAS 4) and the marine mammal indicators to be included in this work, sightings of uncommon marine mammals in the HELCOM area, activities under the marine mammals health team, bycatch of marine mammals including ongoing policy processes, and the potential of a coordinated programme for monitoring of harbour porpoises in the HELCOM area. The memo of the session is available on the HELCOM Meeting Portal for those who have access.

4 December 2025, Online

HELCOM & ASCOBANS: Webinar: Protecting small cetaceans – Results from the ASCOBANS workshop on MPA management

Report: Ida Carlén

In collaboration with HELCOM and the HELCOM PROTECT project, a webinar was organised to present the results from the ASCOBANS workshops on MPA management. The webinar was attended by approximately 50 people, and had presentations from Ida Carlén, chair of the ASCOBANS Jastarnia group, and Alexandra Colbing, Marine Biologist and Environmental Manager at Gotland County Administrative Board, Sweden. A recording is available at <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/events/events-2025/webinar-protecting-small-cetaceans-results-from-the-ascobans-workshops-on-mpa-management/>, and an article from the PROTECT project is available here: <https://protectbaltic.eu/news/f/protecting-small-cetaceans>.

15-18 December 2025, Bonn, Germany

CMS: 8th Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council (ScC-SC8)

Report: Secretariat

Being the last meeting before COP15, the purpose of CMS ScC-SC8 was to provide advice on scientific and technical documents to the COP. The meeting report and relevant documents can be accessed on the [ScC-SC8 webpage](#).

13-14 January 2026, Online

ASCOBANS: 6th Meeting of the Common Dolphin Group

Report: Secretariat

The meeting gathered more than 40 representatives from governments, research institutions, NGOs, IGOs and fisheries organisations to review the status of common dolphins in the Northeast Atlantic. Participants assessed progress under the Common Dolphin Species Action Plan, with countries reporting major developments in monitoring, research and bycatch mitigation. France outlined new regulatory closures and expanded electronic monitoring, while the UK highlighted advances in

long-term data integration and national strategies on bycatch, noise, pollution and habitat protection. Ireland presented new abundance estimates showing a sharp rise in common dolphin numbers in recent years, whereas Spain and Portugal reported contrasting regional trends, including an unprecedented absence of dolphins in the Cantabrian Sea during spring 2025 surveys.

Stranding networks provided detailed insights into mortality patterns, revealing continued high levels of bycatch alongside rising cases linked to disease and emaciation. Scientific updates covered population structure, genetics, pollutant burdens, diet, body condition and demographic indicators, with large-scale surveys showing rapid shifts in distribution and Ireland now hosting much of the regional population. Bycatch mitigation remained a central theme, with EU-funded projects reporting progress on acoustic deterrents, drift modelling, remote monitoring and risk assessment. The meeting concluded with updates from intergovernmental bodies and agreement on strategic priorities

The recommendations and can be found on the ASCOBANS website [here](#); and the meeting report can be found [here](#).

23-29 March 2026, Campo Grande, Brazil
CMS: 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties
 Report: Secretariat

Please see [ASCOBANS/AC30/Inf.8.1b](#) *Overview of CMS COP15 Outcomes Relevant to ASCOBANS*, and a [news item](#) on the ASCOBANS website.

Highlights:

- New [Resolutions](#) adopted: Res.15.2 *Marine Pollution*, Res.15.3 *Priorities for Area-based Conservation of Marine Migratory Species*, Res.15.5 *Conserving Seamount Ecosystems*. COP15 also amended Resolution 12.22 (Rev.COP15) *Bycatch* and Res.12.21 (Rev.COP15) *Climate Change and Migratory Species*.
- New [Decisions](#) on bycatch, fish aggregating devices, marine pollution, underwater noise, deep-sea mining and migratory species, vessel strikes, marine wildlife watching, conservation priorities for cetaceans, and cumulative effects assessments.
- Report *Impacts of Deep-sea Mining on Migratory Species: Review and Knowledge Gaps* (now available as [CMS Technical Series Publication No.53](#))
- Information Documents: Report of the CMS Marine Pollution Workshop (UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.25.2.1), Report on the Impacts of Climate Change on Cetacean Welfare and Conservation (UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.25.4.1b), Cumulative Effects Assessment for Migratory Species (UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.28.9)

All adopted resolutions and the meeting report, can be found on the [COP15 website](#).

ASCOBANS Report to COP15 is available [here](#).

13-14 April 2026, Online
ASCOBANS: 14th Meeting of the ASCOBANS North Sea Group
 Report: Secretariat

This North Sea Group Meeting brought together representatives from North Sea countries, environmental organizations, and invited experts, to assess the current state of harbour porpoise conservation and threat mitigation measures. It focused on the implementation review of the North Sea Plan. Categories within this plan and discussed during this meeting include bycatch, distribution and abundance, health and causes of mortality, along with other relevant activities relating to the harbour porpoise.

Countries reported on their conservation efforts, experts conducted presentations on ongoing studies, and joint collaboration were discussed. Major threats to harbour porpoises include bycatch, habitat disturbance, construction of offshore wind farms, and other human activities.

The meeting also highlighted collaborative efforts, such as the POSEIDON Project, and different EU incentives acting as driving forces.

For more details, please refer to the [priority recommendations](#) and the meeting report, which will be made available [here](#).

15-16 April 2026, Online

ASCOBANS: 22nd Meeting of the ASCOBANS Jastarnia Group

Report: Secretariat

Steering Group for the ASCOBANS Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises ([Jastarnia Plan](#)) and the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat ([Western Baltic Conservation Plan](#)) – the Jastarnia Group – reviewed progress under the action plans, learnt about complementary initiatives, and aimed to move implementation of the action plans forward.

Countries bordering the Baltic Sea reported on progress in implementing the two action plans. Participants shared updates on research, monitoring and policy developments affecting harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea. Joint discussions with the ASCOBANS North Sea Group highlighted shared challenges such as bycatch, underwater noise and disease, as well as new scientific findings from projects including CIBBRiNA, SAMBAH II and CUMBIAH. Encouraging signs emerged from Swedish gillnet monitoring, which showed declining bycatch, while new distribution data indicated reduced porpoise density in the Great Belt. Research on pinger performance, species distribution, and historical population size underscored both progress and the scale of long-term anthropogenic impacts.

The meeting also reviewed conservation actions, outreach efforts and management measures across the region. Notable achievements included new marine protected areas in Sweden and Germany and habitat restoration through stone reef installations in Denmark. At the same time, challenges persisted, such as limited uptake of alternative fishing gear and increased strandings in Poland. Participants endorsed new guidelines for genetic sampling of stranded porpoises to strengthen population-level assessments. Broader discussions addressed the implications of offshore wind and carbon capture storage developments, emphasising the need for cross-border coordination. JG22 concluded with a review of progress on existing action points and the adoption of new ones, including measures to address underwater noise from CCS-related surveys.

The agreed action points can be found [here](#); and the meeting report will be available [here](#).

20 April 2026, Dundee, United Kingdom

ECS-ASCOBANS Workshop: Towards Meaningful Conservation Action for Risso's Dolphins in the North Atlantic

Report: Mark Simmonds

The ECS-ASCOBANS Workshop *Towards Meaningful Conservation Action for Risso's Dolphins in the North Atlantic* aimed at synthesising current knowledge, identify priority actions, and components of an ASCOBANS conservation plan for the species.

Risso's dolphins (*Grampus griseus*) are widely distributed across the North Atlantic, yet their population status, ecological requirements, and vulnerability to human pressures remain poorly understood. Recent large-scale surveys, data compilations (including strandings data) and long-term photo-identification studies highlight regional hotspots around the British Isles, Ireland, France and

the Azores, while genetic analyses reveal significant population differentiation between European Atlantic waters and the Mediterranean. Despite these advances, conservation challenges persist, including fisheries interactions, prey availability, chemical pollution, acoustic and anthropogenic disturbance, and coastal development.

21 April 2026, Dundee, United Kingdom

ECS-ASCOBANS Workshop: Building Knowledge, Building Action: Atlantic White-sided and White-beaked Dolphins

Report: Peter Evans

The ECS-ASCOBANS Workshop *Building Knowledge, Building Action: Atlantic White-sided and White-beaked Dolphins* aimed at presenting current knowledge and data gaps for both species, foster collaboration across national boundaries, and discuss the development and components of an ASCOBANS conservation plan, similar to existing plans for other small cetaceans.

Despite some recent advances in our knowledge, the white-beaked dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*) and Atlantic white-sided dolphin (*Leucopleurus acutus*) remain two of the least-studied dolphins across their range. For both species, there are few estimates of life-history parameters; no reliable overall abundance estimates for either species that encompass their range, limited information on population trends, and a poor understanding of the conservation threats and population-level impacts faced by either species. One fundamental issue has been distinguishing the two species during abundance surveys, and concerns remain over mortalities resulting from direct hunting and bycatch.

There is a potential risk of local extirpation of the southernmost populations of white-beaked dolphin, which could lead to the loss of a significant proportion of species-wide genetic diversity whilst the Atlantic white-sided dolphin appears to have a relatively narrow ecological niche, which makes them particularly vulnerable.

27 April – 9 May 2026, Bled, Slovenia

IWC: Scientific Committee Meeting (SC70)

Report: Secretariat (based on the [Report of the SC70](#))

1. Global Cetacean Strandings Database:

- Since SC69B, the IWC's Data Manager and Strandings Coordinator have been in discussions with ASCOBANS and ICES to advance this initiative, and following funding from the UK Government, it can now progress. ICES has the technical capacity and data policy expertise to develop and host the database to the highest standard. Working jointly with ASCOBANS will ensure that there is one single, coherent global platform rather than duplicating effort across organisations.
- The Committee welcomed the collaboration with these international organisations and thanks the UK Government for funding the development of a Global Cetacean Strandings Database. The Committee endorsed the collaborative approach to developing a global cetacean strandings database in partnership with ASCOBANS and ICES.

2. Bycatch and entanglements:

- The Committee recommended a collaborative approach using an open platform for the development of pingers designed to reduce cetacean bycatch that respond to cetacean vocalisations, and the creation of a standardised set of trial scenarios that can be used to assess their performance.
- The Committee reiterated the global nature of bycatch in gillnets and its recommendation that IWC Contracting Parties invest in the use, development and adoption of alternative fishing gears. It requested focused engagement with fishers to investigate the potential for alternative gears, attitudes towards these, and how they could be incentivised.

- The Committee requested that the fisheries closures implemented since 2024 in the Bay of Biscay to reduce common dolphin bycatch should continue.
 - The Committee reiterated its previous recommendations for immediate actions to effectively reduce and, where possible, eliminate bycatch of harbour porpoise throughout Iberian Peninsula waters.
 - The Committee remained ready to provide advice on the issues listed in the Report of SC69B.
 - The Committee reiterated its previous concern about the Baltic porpoise and noted that ASCOBANS continues to review progress in implementing the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises as well as the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat.
3. Anthropogenic underwater noise:
 - The Committee noted that the International Maritime Organization (IMO) is considering a global Underwater Radiated Noise (URN) study to support work on developing targets for reducing URN. The study would provide a very valuable dataset for assessing the impacts of URN from shipping on cetaceans. The Committee requested that the Secretariat write to Contracting Parties to encourage them to support the study, emphasising the value of this to the work of IWC and to future collaborations between the IWC and IMO.
 - The Committee recognised that the implementation of a moratorium on the use of anti-submarine sonar in 2004 has been associated with the absence of further atypical mass strandings of beaked whales for more than two decades. The Committee strongly encouraged the Government of Spain to maintain the current moratorium on the use of antisubmarine sonar in Canary Islands waters in order to ensure the continued prevention of atypical mass strandings of beaked whales.
 - The Committee further recognised the potential relevance of this approach to other regions where atypical mass strandings of beaked whales have been documented.
 4. Beaked whales: An increase in beaked whale strandings in European waters since mid-2025 is being investigated as a potential unusual mortality event (UME) by the IWC Strandings Expert Panel and ASCOBANS and will be reviewed by both E and the Beaked Whale ICG. A report will be provided to SC71.
 5. Iberian killer whale: The new information provided to the Committee indicates that fewer than 40 Iberian killer whales remain. Given that interactions between Iberian killer whales and sailing vessels are still being reported, posing risks to whales and compromising vessel safety, the Committee strongly encouraged the range states of Spain, Portugal, Morocco and France to treat this species as a priority candidate for a CMP and develop a proposal for consideration at SC71. The Scientific Committee considers that Iberian killer whales would benefit from the development of a CMP and recommended that the SWG-CMP treat the species/population as a 'priority species/population' for the purpose of the CMP development process. In making this recommendation, the Scientific Committee acknowledges that a nomination would not be required for the species/population, and the Scientific Committee encouraged the SWG-CMP to commence outreach to relevant range states and stakeholders to encourage and support the development of a CMP.
 6. Pollution: The Committee reiterated its previous recommendation that per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are globally emerging contaminants of concern in aquatic systems, bioaccumulate in cetaceans, and potentially impair cetacean health and recommended both compound-specific and broad-spectrum analyses are conducted to characterise emerging PFAS compounds in cetaceans.
 7. Marine debris: Plastic ingestion of both macro- and microplastic is an increasingly reported finding in stranded cetaceans, yet recording practices vary considerably across stranding networks. The Committee endorsed the recommendations presented in SC/70/E/13 and requested the Strandings Expert Panel to develop protocols for use during post-mortem investigations designed to be applicable across networks with varying levels of capacity and to present them to SC71 for endorsement.

8. Vessel strikes: The Committee recommended that the finalised version of SC/70/HIM/13* should be made available through the IWC website and other dissemination channels, as IWC guidance for standardising reporting of vessel strike risk assessments.

*Guidance for those developing vessel strike risk assessments developed based on the principles agreed at the January 2026 workshop – also includes suggestions for terminology and a specification for a global data product (in collaboration with Global Fishing Watch) to provide AIS data for vessel strike risk assessments.

ASCOBANS submitted a report – see SC/70/O/28Rev5 (full report on *Cooperation with Other Organisations*).

11-12 May 2026, London, United Kingdom

NEAFC and OSPAR: 9th Meeting under the Collective Arrangement for the management of selected areas in the North-East Atlantic

Report: Secretariat

The 9th Meeting under the Collective Arrangement focused on strengthening cooperation between regional and international bodies on area-based management, ecosystem-based management, scientific assessment, and implementation of the BBNJ Agreement. ASCOBANS participated alongside several intergovernmental organisations, and provided an update, including on the CMS COP15.

Key points relevant to ASCOBANS:

1. Recognition of bycatch as a continuing priority
 - OSPAR reported ongoing work on bycatch indicators for birds, marine mammals and turtles under its Intermediate Assessment 2029 process.
 - OSPAR has adopted a bird bycatch common indicator across all OSPAR regions and is developing a marine turtle bycatch indicator.
 - Discussions highlighted the need to improve bycatch monitoring and assessment methodologies. This aligns closely with ASCOBANS' long-standing work on cetacean bycatch mitigation.
2. Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) developments
 - OSPAR and NEAFC both reported ongoing work on ecosystem-based management.
 - OSPAR is advancing regional action plans on birds and benthic habitats, including consideration of cumulative impacts, climate change and ecosystem resilience.
 - Participants concluded that further work within each organisation is needed before more integrated EBM cooperation can be developed under the Collective Arrangement. These developments may provide opportunities for stronger consideration of cetacean conservation objectives within wider ecosystem management frameworks.
3. Marine Protected Areas, OECMs and ABNJ management
 - OSPAR reported progress on its MPA network, management effectiveness assessment tools, and plans to identify new Arctic MPAs by 2030.
 - Significant discussion focused on collaborative management plans for OSPAR MPAs in areas beyond national jurisdiction and cooperation with NEAFC and other relevant organisations.
 - The meeting agreed to continue discussions on collaborative management planning as a standing agenda item. This could create future opportunities to integrate cetacean conservation measures and threat mitigation into ABNJ management arrangements.

Emerging work under OSPAR on bycatch indicators, ecosystem-based management, MPAs and BBNJ implementation provides potential avenues for future cooperation and for incorporating cetacean conservation considerations into broader regional ocean governance processes.

12 May 2026, Online

Wadden Sea Secretariat: Expert Group on Marine Mammals for the Wadden Sea Trilateral Agreement

Report: Jip Vrooman

The meeting was informed about the extension of the Seal Management Plan to 2030. The meeting determined possible flight dates for the upcoming harbour seal counts. A trilateral workshop on citizen science was proposed: What is going on in different parts of the Wadden Sea? How can the data be used to help assess the status of populations of marine mammals in the Wadden Sea? How can results be communicated back to citizen scientists to encourage better engagement with ongoing programmes?

15 June 2026, Online

Wadden Sea Secretariat: Expert Group on Marine Mammals for the Wadden Sea Trilateral Agreement

Report: Jip Vrooman

The meeting focused on harbour porpoises, and monitoring updates. The grey seal report has been published. Participants further reviewed harbour porpoise sightings (from Observation.org) in the Wadden Sea, and discussed adding data from other sighting platforms and comparing inshore and offshore records. In addition, the group further planned the trilateral workshop (due autumn 2026) focused on citizen science: stranding data and photo identification.