

Agenda Item 5.1

Review of Implementation of the ASCOBANS
Triennial Work Plan (2007-2009)

Report of the Chair/Vice-Chair of the
Advisory Committee

Document 5-01

**Evaluation of the Implementation of
the ASCOBANS Work Plan 2007-2009
and the Work of the ASCOBANS
Advisory Committee**

Action Requested

- Take note of the report
- Consider its implications for the Work Plan for the triennium 2010-2012

Submitted by

AC Chair & Vice-Chair



NOTE:
IN THE INTERESTS OF ECONOMY, DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED TO BRING THEIR
OWN COPIES OF DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING

Evaluation of the implementation of the ASCOBANS Work Plan 2007-2009 and the work of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee

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The ASCOBANS Triennial Work Plan 2007-2009 was appended as Annex 19 to the Summary Record of the 5th Meeting of Parties to ASCOBANS. Resolution No. 6 of the 5th Meeting of Parties further defined the activities of the Advisory Committee. The Work Plan was designed to be implemented by the Advisory Committee, the Jastarnia Group, the ASCOBANS/CMS Secretariat and the Parties. Here we give a personal evaluation of progress in each of the categories mentioned in the Work Plan, as has become customary, by summarising the outcome of the activities during the past three years by category, followed by a table with a scoring index. The evaluation is largely subjective and indicates whether the action was addressed sufficiently (++) , partly sufficiently (+), partly, but not sufficiently (—), or not addressed (—).

DESCRIPTIVE EVALUATION

Incidental take

Incidental take remains the greatest threat to small cetaceans in ASCOBANS waters. Measures to reduce this take are partly a responsibility of Parties, and partly a responsibility of EU Fisheries managers in the framework of the Common Fisheries Policy. In April 2004, the European Council laid measures (Regulation 812/2004) to address cetacean bycatch in certain priority fisheries and areas. At the time of writing, the Commission of the European Community is reviewing the success of this Regulation in an attempt to improve bycatch assessment, mitigation, and reporting. ASCOBANS should continue to monitor this situation with a view to providing support, further input or advice.

Pollution

The Pollution Working Group has kept this issue under review throughout the period. ASCOBANS' role continues as a support to those assessing the impact of pollutants on small cetaceans, and as such to those working on reducing pollutants in the area, particularly within ICES, EU, OSPAR and HELCOM. Documents were presented in which scientific evidence was presented of a link between pollutants and the incidence of disease in porpoises and bottlenose dolphins.

Disturbance

Demonstrating the effects of disturbance (primarily acoustic) on small cetaceans is difficult. ASCOBANS has focused on describing and reviewing the occurrence of noise-producing activities as well as producing guidelines to reduce potential disturbance (Noise Working Group). The need remains for comprehensive reviews of the amounts of noise (with attention to frequency, amplitude, and duration among others) emitted into the marine environment as well as for methods to assess disturbance to small cetaceans. Concerns about the effects of noisy leisure activities such as motorboat races or the use of jet skis and jet scooters as well as of wind turbine construction remain. For the latter, several studies have demonstrated that pile-driving potentially disturbs small cetaceans over very large areas, and that porpoises leave a windfarm area during construction. An analysis of synergistic effects of different noise sources and of issues that cross international boundaries has not yet been undertaken.

After the AC meeting in 2007, an ASCOBANS – ECS symposium was held on the impact of offshore windfarms on small cetaceans. So far, however, the implementation of guidelines to minimise disturbance remains patchy within the ASCOBANS area. Furthermore, in the framework of disturbance mitigation, cooperation with the IWC on ship strikes was promoted.

Population structures & sites of importance

Two workshops were organised early in the triennium together with the European Cetacean Society (ECS) and with HELCOM to establish guidelines for the identification of potential marine protected areas (MMPAs) for cetaceans and to differentiate the structures of porpoise populations in the North and Baltic Seas.

Recovery and Conservation Plans

The first review of the Baltic Sea Harbour Porpoise Recovery Plan (also known as Jastarnia Plan) and the finalising of the North Sea Harbour Porpoise Conservation Plan were key targets during this triennium. Both documents took several years to draft and are now awaiting adoption by the Parties. Subsequent implementation of both plans will remain challenging as could be seen with the first edition of the Jastarnia Plan (2002). Threats to cetaceans appear to have increased in all ASCOBANS waters, in particular bycatch and certain kinds of pollution such as noise. There is little mitigation so far, such as the phasing out or the substitution of fishing gear of concern, or the reduction of noise emissions.

The two porpoise populations in the Baltic Proper and in the Belt Sea (incl. Inner Danish Waters and Kattegat), respectively, appear to decrease continuously judging by the scant survey data (SCANS surveys as well as aerial surveys by Berggren et al. among others). IUCN considers the Baltic Proper population to be threatened by extinction. Therefore, a basin-wide study using passive acoustic monitoring is planned during the coming triennium. The Jastarnia Group, charged with monitoring the implementation of the Baltic Sea Harbour Porpoise Recovery Plan, met annually (in Copenhagen/DK, 19-21 February 2007; in Kolmården/S, 25-27 February 2008; and in Turku/FI, 23-25 February 2009) and provided substantial reports (on the ASCOBANS website). Furthermore, the Jastarnia Group continues to promote the International Day of the Baltic Sea Harbour Porpoise.

Awareness raising and promotion of the Agreement

Efforts to provide information materials and to promote the Agreement and its aims on all levels (e.g., EU, IGOs, and stakeholders) have been made by Parties, NGO's and the secretariat. A plan is being developed to intensify it, once the future structure of the Agreement is determined.

External relations

ASCOBANS can really only work by influencing the actions of others. External relations are thus vital and should be improved. During the AC meetings ASCOBANS welcomed the participation of – besides the regular NGO's – several NGO's with particular interests, and of NAMMCO as well as the EC.

Management of the Agreement

With the ASCOBANS Secretariat merged into the secretariat of the mother convention CMS for this triennium as a trial period, the Agreement's bodies were largely concerned with improving their efficiency. An evaluation of the structure of ASCOBANS and its secretariat was made. Conservation work concentrated on revising the Baltic Sea Harbour Porpoise Recovery Plan and creating the North Sea Harbour Porpoise Conservation Plan as outlined above.

Conclusion

The triennium 2007-2009 was marked by the structural change from a stand-alone ASCOBANS Secretariat to one merged into the CMS Secretariat. Working relations with the Secretariat were not always smooth, but are expected to improve with recent and pending changes in the Secretariat. Once the final arrangement is decided at the upcoming Meeting of Parties, ASCOBANS should again focus on assessing and where possible take the initiative or assist in mitigating the threats to small cetaceans

in the Agreement area. In 2008, this area was enlarged considerably to the West (also to include high seas now) bringing ASCOBANS in closer contact with deep-diving species such as beaked whales that are sensitive to additional threats such as the impact of military SONAR and collision with vessels. Furthermore, oceanic species such as Common Dolphins among others are known to be under strong bycatch pressure from EU trawlers. These issues as well as the implementation of the two Porpoise Plans and the continuous impact of accumulating toxins, especially in coastal species such as Bottlenose Dolphins, will provide ample need for conservation efforts by ASCOBANS and others in the upcoming triennium. While some may criticise the lack of progress, we are confident that bringing together administrators, scientists, and representatives of NGOs, IGOs and stakeholders, all concerned directly or indirectly with small cetaceans, is vital in the progress of conservation objectives and measures.

Acknowledgements

The Advisory Committee met formally three times between 2007 and 2009. These meetings were supplemented by an enormous amount of time put in by Advisory Committee members between these meetings. We also owe thanks to the valuable and constructive input by representatives from Non-Party Range States, IGOs, and NGOs. The commissioning of experts to help in key areas of work has also been indispensable. We are extremely grateful for all of this work, without which most of the above achievements would have not been possible.

EVALUATION INDEX (as listed in the Triennial Work Plan 2007-2009)

Incidental take

Review new information on bycatch of cetaceans	++
Provide recommendations to Parties and other relevant authorities	+
Provide a format for information on static gillnet and tangle net effort	+

Pollution

Review new information on pollution and its effects on small cetaceans	++
Provide recommendations to Parties and other relevant authorities	---

Disturbance

Review the extent of negative effects of sound, vessels and other forms of disturbance	+
Review technological developments and recommend ways to mitigate negative effects	+

Population structures & sites of importance

Organise a workshop to establish guidelines for sites of importance	++
Organise a workshop on population structure of the harbour porpoise	++
Review information on population size, distribution, structure, and causes of mortality	+
Provide recommendations to Parties and other relevant authorities	-

Awareness raising & promotion

Raise awareness of issues related to cetacean conservation in the Agreement Area	+
Translate ASCOBANS information material and undertake promotional activities	+
Develop ASCOBANS web site and include educational material	+
Produce information material in languages of the Baltic Sea region	+
Promote the Agreement and its aims in Parties, Range States etc.	+
Promote accession of non-Party Range States to the Agreement	+

External relations

Define the Secretariat's role in working with EU, CMS, OSPAR, HELCOM and ACCOBAMS	---
Produce targeted information material on cetacean conservation with fishermen's organisations	---

Recovery and Conservation Plans

Review implementation of the ASCOBANS Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoise	++
Continue efforts to further the implementation of the Jastarnia Plan	-
Find funding to continue the web-based database on Baltic sightings, strandings and bycatch	+
Develop a conservation plan for the North Sea harbour porpoise	++
Review, once in place, the implementation of the North Sea Porpoise Conservation Plan	---

Institutional issues

Consider how the work of ASCOBANS should be extended to the new Agreement Area	---
Make Resolution 2b of MOP-5 operational for ASCOBANS	+
Continue to invite intergovernmental bodies to send representatives to AC meetings	-
Explore the possibilities of further developing positive relationships with other stakeholders	---
Improve co-operation and information exchange between AC and the SC of CMS	---
Review a list of international meetings at which the aims of ASCOBANS might be promoted	+
Review formal structures and processes of the Agreement	++
Explore ways in which ASCOBANS can better liaise and work with the EC	---
Consider the amendment of the Agreement to include all cetacean species	++
Support Parties, Range States and Agreement Bodies to implement the Work Plan	-