

Agenda Item 6.1

Project Funding through ASCOBANS  
Progress of Supported Projects

Document 6-01 rev.3

**Progress of Projects Supported  
through ASCOBANS**

**Action Requested**

- Take note of the report
- Comment

Submitted by

Secretariat



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

## **Secretariat's Note**

The project reports have been published separately in order to enable easy access and printing. They can be accessed as AC17/Doc.6-05, AC17/Doc.6-06, AC17/Doc.6-07, AC17/Doc.6-08 and AC17/Doc.6-09.

## Progress of Projects Supported through ASCOBANS

1. In 2008, Parties decided that surplus of the budgets of previous years be allocated to project funding. In follow-up of this decision, the Secretariat requested UNEP to add a budget line for Conservation Projects (BAL 2201) to the Agreement's budget. Positive balances from the accounts of 2005 and 2008 were re-phased to this budget line.
2. The 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Advisory Committee (2008) also decided on the projects it wished to be funded from these resources. These decisions are reflected in Annex 10 of the AC15 Report.
3. At the 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Advisory Committee (2009), the Secretariat was again able to report on a surplus in the previous year's budget. Again, Parties decided to make this money available for conservation and research projects shortlisted by the Committee. This list is available as Annex 13 of the AC16 Report.
4. In this document, the Secretariat reports on the progress of the projects that were funded from the budget line for Conservation Projects, as well as projects financed from the contribution from the UNEP Environment Fund.

### Finalized Projects

5. To date, three of the projects selected for funding by AC15 and AC16 have been completed.

### A. Effects of Contaminants on Reproduction in Small Cetaceans

6. The Funding Agreement (ASCOBANS/SSFA/2008/01) with St. Andrews University (UK), making available 10,000 Euro for the first phase of Sinéad Murphy's project entitled "**Effects of Contaminants on Reproduction in Small Cetaceans**", was signed in February 2009.
7. Activities agreed under the SSFA include:
  - Detailed laboratory analysis of all reproductive material
  - Assessment of reproductive abnormalities in female gonadal tissue
  - Age determination for all individuals
  - Statistical analysis for investigating the effects of contaminants on the reproductive output in females
  - Investigation of the relationship between accumulation of corpora scars (ovulation and pregnancy) and contaminant loads (taking into account the health status of the individual), in order to assess if contaminant burdens are either inhibiting ovulation, or pregnancy
  - Preliminary investigation of effects of high contaminant burdens on sperm production in males and reproductive abnormalities in male gonadal tissue
8. The final project report was completed in September 2009, has been published as AC17/Doc.6-05.

**B. Genetic structure of white-sided dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*) in the Eastern North Atlantic**

9. The project entitled "**Genetic structure of white-sided dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*) in the Eastern North Atlantic**", to be conducted through Dr. Eulalia Banguera Hinestroza, was selected for funding by AC16. The Funding Agreement (ASCOBANS/SSFA/2009/03) for 7,302 GBP with Durham University (UK) was signed in October 2009.
10. Activities agreed under the SSFA include:
  - Collection of samples of tissue, teeth and bone from Norway, Faeroes Island, Northern North Sea, Scotland, Celtic Sea, eastern England and possibly Iceland
  - DNA extraction
  - Analysis of molecular markers as outlined in Annex A
  - Statistical analysis of molecular variance
  - Preparation of report to ASCOBANS
11. The main results/outputs expected from this project are:
  - To study the population genetic structure of white-sided dolphin in the eastern North Atlantic and the North Sea, using a fragment of the mtDNA (mitochondrial DNA) control region
  - To test the hypothesis that samples from the southern range of the species in the eastern North Atlantic belong to a separated population
  - Provide and summarise data on diversity and population structure towards the development of effective conservation and management policy for white-sided dolphin in the eastern North Atlantic and North Sea
  - To contribute to the development of the sample data base of white-sided dolphins for future studies
12. The final project report has been published as AC17/Doc.6-07.

**C. Development of a co-ordinated reporting system and HELCOM/ASCOBANS database on Baltic Sea harbour porpoise sightings, by-catches and strandings**

13. Based on a recommendation of the Jastarnia Group, AC16 decided that ASCOBANS should provide funding for the project "**Development of a co-ordinated reporting system and HELCOM/ASCOBANS database on Baltic Sea harbour porpoise sightings, by-catches and strandings**". In line with the AC's decision, ASCOBANS supports the project with 5,000 Euro. The two Secretariats exchanged signatures on the Funding Agreement (ASCOBANS/SSFA/2009/04) in December 2009.
14. The activities to be carried out with the support of the ASCOBANS funds include:
  - Up-date of the existing database hosted currently by the German Forschungs- und Technologiezentrum Westküste der Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel (FTZ)
  - Enlarging the coverage of data to cover the whole HELCOM marine area
  - Development of a reporting system for data collection in the future
  - Searching for possibilities to include data also on size, age and sex of individuals
  - Create a web-based map service for viewing and downloading the data
15. The expected results/outputs to be achieved are:
  - An up-dated database on Baltic Sea harbour porpoise sightings, strandings and by-catch

- A harmonised and coordinated reporting system for Baltic Sea harbour porpoise sightings, strandings and by-catch
  - A web-based map service allowing both data viewing and download
16. An oral progress report was given by HELCOM at the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Jastarnia Group (see AC17/Doc.4-01). The final project report is contained in AC17/Doc.6-09.

### Ongoing Projects

17. Four projects are currently still ongoing.

### D. Risk Assessment of Potential Conflicts between Shipping and Cetaceans in the ASCOBANS Region

18. The second project for which a Funding Agreement was concluded (ASCOBANS/SSFA/2009/01) is entitled "**Risk Assessment of Potential Conflicts between Shipping and Cetaceans in the ASCOBANS Region**". The legal counterpart receiving the 15,500 Euro is the Sea Watch Foundation (UK). Signatures with Peter Evans were exchanged in March 2009.
19. Activities agreed under the SSFA include
- Acquisition of AIS data in synthesized form showing ship movements per unit time over the ASCOBANS Agreement Area
  - Development of GIS shape files that allow plots of track density by grid cell for the major types of shipping (possibly also by season)
  - Using effort-related sightings data gathered across the region, plot sightings densities by grid cell for the main cetacean taxa (dolphins, porpoises, baleen whales, large toothed whales)
  - Identifying main areas and seasons for potential conflict between shipping and cetaceans
20. The main results/outputs expected from this project are:
- Gridded distribution maps showing relative abundance of cetacean species in the ASCOBANS Agreement Area, with focus on species of direct interest to ASCOBANS (small cetaceans)
  - Gridded map(s) of shipping traffic showing relative densities of shipping within the ASCOBANS Agreement Area
  - Report analysing and interpreting results to highlight potential areas of conflict
  - Review of potential and limitations of using AIS data to examine spatio-temporal trends in shipping patterns
21. A progress report on the status of the implementation of the project, as submitted by the Sea Watch Foundation has been published as AC17/Doc.6-06.

### E. Historic and present harbour porpoise populations in the Baltic region – geometric morphometrics analysis

22. In late 2008, the ASCOBANS Jastarnia Group notified the Secretariat which project they wished to see supported through part of the funds kindly made available to ASCOBANS by the UNEP Executive Director for the Implementation of the Jastarnia Plan. The Agreement contributes 5,000 Euro to the total project costs. The Funding Agreement (ASCOBANS/SSFA/2009/02) with Aarhus University (Denmark) for the project entitled

**“Historic and present harbour porpoise populations in the Baltic region – geometric morphometrics analysis”** was signed in June 2009.

23. The ASCOBANS funding covers travel costs of the researcher, Anders Galatius, to museums and collections around the Baltic Sea. The main expected result of the project is the best possible assessment of historical and current population structure of the harbour porpoise in the Baltic by morphometric analysis with the use of all available material and the most up-to-date technology and methodology.
24. The project report is due in December 2010.

#### **F. Review of Trend Analyses in the ASCOBANS Area**

25. Following a public tender, a contract for the project entitled **“Review of Trend Analyses in the ASCOBANS Area”**, which was developed by AC16 (see Annex 7 of the AC16 Report), was issued to Peter Evans in December 2009. The aim of the project is to provide AC members with an accessible, readable and succinct overview of trends in status, distribution and impacts of small cetaceans within the ASCOBANS Agreement Area.
26. An interim progress report on the status of the implementation of the project and the results of its first phase will be made available as AC17/Doc.6-08 rev.1.

#### **G. Coordination of the ASCOBANS North Sea Harbour Porpoise Conservation Plan**

27. Also following the instructions of AC16 (see Annex 17 of the AC16 Report), the Secretariat issued a tender for the **“Coordination of the ASCOBANS North Sea Harbour Porpoise Conservation Plan”**, for which 10,000 USD from the UNEP Environment Fund were to be used. A team of two consultants, Russell Leaper and Vassili Papastavrou, was selected in consultation with the chairs of the North Sea Plan drafting group and a contract was concluded in October 2009.
28. The main tasks outlined for the consultancy include:
  - To document and collate existing international and national regulations and guidelines that are relevant to the conservation and management of harbour porpoises in the North Sea and to provide this collation to all stakeholders
  - To promote and explain the Conservation Plan to relevant stakeholders
  - To develop mechanisms to ensure that the Actions given in the Conservation Plan are implemented including the organisation of scientific workshops
  - To make a recommendation for the evolution of some EU fishery regulations: data collection regulation, electronic logbooks, etc. in order to get the most appropriate data from effective fishing effort
  - To coordinate the collection and collation of appropriate data on anthropogenic activities in a format that will facilitate its use in a GIS context
  - To report on progress with the implementation of the plan
29. Based on these tasks defined in the Terms of Reference for the contract, the consultants prepared a detailed work plan. An updated progress report on its implementation and initial results will be published as AC17/Doc.4-05 rev.1.