Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas

ASCOBANS

The Work of the ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Joint Bycatch Working Group

Peter G.H. Evans

Co-Chair, ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS JBWG

School of Ocean Sciences, Bangor University/Sea Watch Foundation, UK

ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS JBWG 1st MEETING

- First meeting was held online between 10th and 12th Feb 2021
- Attended by >150 persons from 31 countries spanning the Baltic, North Atlantic, Mediterranean and Black Seas
- Participants included scientists, managers, decision-makers, and representatives of the fishery sector
- First two days were devoted to 28 presentations sharing experiences in monitoring and mitigation of cetacean bycatch in different areas and for different fishing gears
- On the third day, WG members discussed and decided on the priorities to be addressed during the coming years

JBWG Recommendations

- A total of 24 Recommendations were made:
- Five **General Recommendations** calling for increased and more targeted sampling of high-risk fisheries (preferably minimum of 5-10% of annual fleet activity), along with urgent measures in the Black Sea and Baltic Proper, working towards eliminating bycatch there
- Ten **Recommendations to improve monitoring**, including wider use of REM, better understanding of factors relating to bycatch risk, support for strandings schemes, pathological examinations, and greater use of drift models
- Nine **Recommendations to prevent and mitigate bycatch** by greater stakeholder engagement, area-based measures, alternative gears and new technologies

Other Activities

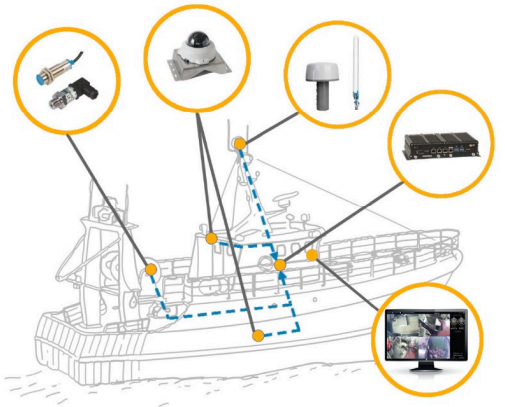
- Liaison with European Commission (DG Mare & DG Environment), ICES (WGBYC & WGMME), NAMMCO Bycatch WG, IWC, HELCOM, NE Atlantic Fisheries Council (NEAFC), GFCM, Baltic and NANSEA Regional Coordination Groups, and the Marine Stewardship Council

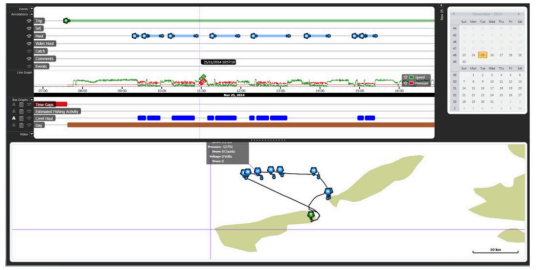
- Production of two contract reports: cost-benefit analyses of monitoring methods, and mitigation measures

- CIBBRiNA EU LIFE Bycatch Project Proposal – Coordinated Development and Implementation of Best Practice in Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic Region (A-M. Svoboda)

Cost-benefit Analysis of Monitoring

- Report by Grant Course of Sea Scope Fisheries Research, reviewed by 6 experts and the JBWG
- Report compares two methods used for bycatch monitoring: at-sea observers and REM
- Three fisheries are used as examples to conduct a cost-benefit analysis: a UK gillnet fishery, a French pelagic trawl fishery, and a Danish gillnet fishery
- The suitability of each method dependent on aim of the monitoring process, the levels of coverage required to improve confidence limits and utility, the acceptance of stakeholders towards the selected method, and whether the implementation was mandatory or voluntary
- Conclusion: REM provides a cost-effective and high-quality monitoring coverage especially suited for larger, pelagic vessels or for high levels of fleet coverage. Its accuracy is increased with additional fishing sensors, GPS data, and the ongoing development of machine learning approaches that automatically identify bycatch incidents
- Developments in portable REM units could allow systems to be swapped across smaller vessels, saving costs and there is potential to combine REM with a self-reporting system from fishers to report all ETP species bycatch events, with observers conducting the video reviews and collecting other data.





Cost-Benefit Analysis of Mitigation

Mitigation measures

- Various mitigation measures investigated to reduce cetacean bycatch including ADDs, PAL, acrylic echo enhancers, LEDs, exclusion devices and changes in fishing practices
- Most mitigation measures within the ASCOBANS regions are for static nets
- Cost of implementation varies between 1,000-5,000 Euros for a 4,000m long gillnet
- ADDs are currently the only proven mitigation method in the ASCOBANS region
- Mitigation measures and their effectiveness need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis (fishery, area, and species at risk)
- Trials should be conducted in operational fisheries

Alternative gears

- Alternative fishing methods (e.g. seine nets, jigging machines, longlines, fish pots and fish traps) to replace static nets were reviewed
- Alternative gears are generally limited to coastal waters
- Cost of switching gears varies between 2,000 (fyke net) and 46,000 (pots) Euros

Conclusions

- Success of mitigation measures and alternative gears requires close collaboration between industry, scientific institutions, and government
- Countries need to comply with their legal obligations to reduce & prevent cetacean bycatch

Programme of Work 2021-22

- Collate and prepare an overview of scientific information relevant to bycatch of affected cetacean species. Relate to abundance and management units, including population dynamics
- Review available information on IUU (Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated) fishing, recreational fishing, identification of bycatch risk areas, fishing techniques and gears applied in both agreement areas related to bycatch
- Contribute to the assessment process of the EU-MSFD criteria and/or UNEP-MAP EcAp, and associated targets
- Review and provide updates on bycatch mitigation measures currently available or under development and their effectiveness, using existing sources

Programme of Work 2021-22 (cont.)

- Prepare an overview of national and international legislation and other measures relevant to the monitoring and management of cetacean bycatch, and include an overview of actions taken to deliver on ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS obligations
- Prepare, as appropriate, and in coordination with ICES WGBYC, advice on target setting including potential conservation and user objectives, in accordance with the policies of the two Agreements; and monitoring cetacean bycatch and fishing operations
- Provide technical support as required to facilitate dialogue with relevant bodies that have certification schemes, such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), by actively contributing to the assessment of relevant fisheries with respect to cetacean bycatch