

The Work of the ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Joint Bycatch Working Group

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JBWG Meeting - 2022

- Membership of the JBWG currently numbers c. 40 persons from 18 countries, split fairly evenly between ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS Agreement Areas
- A catch-up meeting was held online on 18 August 2022
- It was attended by twenty participants, mainly from the ASCOBANS Agreement Area
- The Programme of Work for 2021-2023 was reviewed; progress since the last meeting was outlined under each heading; and leads for each task were proposed along with a schedule for actions
- Anne-Marie Svoboda gave a summary of the status of the CIBBRiNA project proposal and plans for re-submission to the European Commission
- Discussions took place on how to resolve the barriers to pinger deployment as a key mitigation measure to reduce bycatch risk to the endangered harbour porpoise population in the Baltic Proper, following concerns expressed by some national navies
- A report of the activities of the Group has been posted: see [ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.2.1a](#)

Programme of Work 2021-2023

- 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 2021-2023 (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

Current Recommendations

- A total of 24 Recommendations were adopted at the first JBWG meeting
- 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

Proposed Additional Recommendation

- Given the acknowledged urgent need for action to protect the endangered Baltic Sea harbour porpoise, those Parties whose Navies have expressed an as yet unquantified concern that the use of acoustic ‘pingers’ in fisheries (pingers are known to be the most effective bycatch mitigation measure apart from fishery closures) may interfere with their anti-submarine capabilities, are **strongly recommended to ensure as a matter of urgency**, that their Navy acousticians engage with porpoise acousticians, pinger manufacturers and other relevant experts at a technical level to work on solutions to enable critical porpoise protection measures to be implemented before it is too late.