

Agenda Item 19

Managing workload and expectations around
Working Groups

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Action Requested

- Take note
- Provide feedback

Submitted by

Secretariat



MANAGING WORKLOAD AND EXPECTATIONS AROUND WORKING GROUPS

1. An indication of the necessity of ASCOBANS as a forum to address the conservation challenges facing small cetaceans in the Agreement area is that Parties have steadily increased the number of activities for the Secretariat to administer. While it is a core task of the Secretariat to facilitate the work of the different working groups (WGs), administer projects, and implement action points directed to it by the Advisory Committee, it is becoming increasingly challenging to do it all. The period between AC27 and AC28 has been particularly busy.
2. During this reporting period, the Secretariat organised three WG meetings and six workshops (in addition to preparing for AC28) – see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Meetings and workshops organised since AC27.

Title	Time	Location	Comments
3 rd Meeting of the Common Dolphin Group	15-16 Nov 2022	Online	Requested in the Work Plan (WPA 54). Chaired by Sinéad Murphy.
11 th Meeting of the North Sea Group	14-15 Feb 2023	Online	Requested in the Work Plan (WPA 54). Chaired by Peter Evans.
19 th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group	20-22 Mar 2023	Online	Requested in the Work Plan (WPA 54). Chaired by Ida Carlén.
ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Marine Debris Workshop: New and Emerging Aspects	15 Apr 2023	O Grove, Galicia, Spain	Requested in AC27/AP5. Held in conjunction with the ECS conference. Chaired by Mark Simmonds
ECS/ASCOBANS Workshop on Scoping the Development of a European Marine Strandings Database	16 Apr 2023	O Grove, Galicia, Spain	Requested in AC27/AP7. Held as part of the ECS conference. Chaired by Andrew Brownlow.
ECS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Workshop: Current cetacean bycatch issues in European waters	17 Apr 2023	O Grove, Galicia, Spain	Held as part of the ECS conference. Chaired by Peter Evans and Ayaka Amaha Öztürk.
Workshop to recommend small cetacean conservation objectives in relation to anthropogenic removals - Part 1	24-25 Apr 2023	Online	Related to Work Plan Activity 4. See also AC26/AP50. Chaired by Peter Evans.
Workshop to recommend small cetacean conservation objectives in relation to anthropogenic removals - Part 2	16-17 May 2023	Bonn, Germany	As above.
Technical Workshop to Develop Guidelines for Cetacean-friendly Marine Spatial Planning for the ASCOBANS Area	27-28 Jun 2023	Online	Related to AC26/AP16. Chaired by Aline Kühl-Stenzel.

3. Part of the Secretariat role in organising and servicing these meetings is to plan, together with the Chair and/or WGs, develop agendas, provide report writing (which includes recruiting a rapporteur), arrange catering (when required), establish webpages (including registration), and arrange travel (when relevant). It is also worth noting that the timing of the workshops and services is sometimes driven by the immanent expiry of the funding provided.
4. The long-standing working groups at ASCOBANS are the Steering Groups for the harbour porpoise action plans: the Jastarnia Group and the North Sea Group. In addition, the Steering Group for the Species Action Plan for the North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin (Common Dolphin Group), though established only four years ago, is envisaged to continue as the other species action plan working groups. Other long-standing working groups are the Joint Bycatch, Joint Noise, Large Cetaceans, Extension Area, and Joint MSFD working groups. In addition, there are eleven intersessional working groups, established by MOP9 or subsequent AC meetings, and expected to complete their work at or before MOP10.
5. In total, there are currently twenty ASCOBANS working groups – see Table 2 below. Each of the working groups require a different level of facilitation from the Secretariat, some working nearly independently, but most requiring the Secretariat to start and/or facilitate their discussions. In some cases, such as for the WGs for the species action plans, the Secretariat has been instructed to organize regular meetings via the ASCOBANS Work Plan 2021-2024 (ASCOBANS Res.9.1).

Table 2: List of current ASCOBANS Working Groups.

Name of the WG	Est.	Long-term or Intersessional	Chair	Status
Jastarnia Group ¹	2005	Long-term	Ida Carlén	Ongoing, annual meetings.
North Sea Group ²	2010 (AC17)	Long-term	Peter Evans	Ongoing, annual meetings.
Common Dolphin Group ³	2019	Long-term	Sinéad Murphy, Florence Caurant	Ongoing, annual meetings.
Resource Depletion WG	2018 (AC24)	Long-term	Graham Pierce	Reports to AC “as necessary” (latest to AC27).
Informal WG on Large Cetaceans	2010 (AC17)	Long-term	Peter Evans	No meetings; latest report to AC24. ⁴
Extension Area WG	2011 ⁵ (AC18)	Long-term	Peter Evans	As above.
Joint Bycatch WG of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS	2010 ⁶ (AC17); 2019 ⁷	Long-term	Peter Evans, Ayaka Amaha Öztürk	Ongoing, semi-regular meetings.
Joint ACCOBAMS/ ASCOBANS WG on MSFD	2011 (AC18)	Long-term	Sinéad Murphy; Giancarlo Lauriano, José Antonio Vasquez	Operates via correspondence; latest report to AC25.

¹ Steering Group for the ASCOBANS Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises, and for the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat

² Steering Group for the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea

³ Steering Group of the ASCOBANS Species Action Plan (SAP) for North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin

⁴ Since 2013, report combined with Extension Area WG report.

⁵ Started as an Intersessional Working Group.

⁶ Started as an Intersessional Working Group.

⁷ Established in 2010; joint group with ACCOBAMS established in 2019.

Name of the WG	Est.	Long-term or Intersessional	Chair	Status
Joint Noise WG of CMS, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS	2008; 2012; 2014 ⁸	Long-term	Sigrid Lüber, Yanis Souami	Ongoing, managed by CMS.
Beaked Whales	2020 (MOP9)	Intersessional	<i>Currently none</i>	Task completed (report to AC26), but is asked to draft a Res to MOP10. See AC26/AP35
Marine Debris Workshop WG	2022 (AC27)	Intersessional	Mark Simmonds	Task completed (organize workshop). See AC27/AP5.
WG to guide development of the MSP Guidelines	2022 (AC27)	Intersessional	Aline Kühl-Stenzel	Has convened online. Task to be completed by MOP10. See AC26/AP16.
Offshore Renewable Energy	2022 (AC27)	Intersessional	<i>None</i>	Has convened online. Asked to report to AC28. See AC27/AP9.
WG on data deficient taxa	2021 (AC26)	Intersessional	<i>None</i>	Asked to report to AC27. See AC26/AP47
WG on Nord Stream gas leak	2022 (AC27)	Intersessional	<i>None</i>	Asked to report to AC "asap". See AC27/AP16
Lagenorhynchus sp. WG	2021 (AC26)	Intersessional	<i>None</i>	Not convened. No deadline defined. See AC26/AP31.
National Reporting WG	2022 (AC27)	Intersessional	<i>None</i>	Asked to report to AC28. See AC27/AP22
WG to gather guidance on mitigating impacts of recreational speed crafts	2022 (AC27)	Intersessional	<i>None</i>	Asked to report to AC28. See AC27/AP18.
WG on on prioritization of activities (WPA 50)	<i>Not launched yet</i>	Intersessional	<i>None</i>	Not convened. Asked to report to AC28. See AC27/AP13.
WG on identifying potential duplication /gaps in efforts in ASCOBANS and other organisations (WPA 68)	<i>Not launched yet</i>	Intersessional	<i>None</i>	Not convened. Asked to report to AC28. See AC26/AP48 and AC27/AP14.

6. To reiterate, it is a core role of the Secretariat to organize meetings and workshops, facilitate the work of the working groups, and implement action points coming from the Advisory Committee meetings, and we remain happy to do our best. However, if the volume of tasks continues to be high, some other activities may not receive enough or indeed any attention. Arranging contracts for the Coordinators of the regional plans, maintaining the website, or finalizing meeting reports are other tasks that often get delayed for this reason, despite significant and regular overtime of staff.
7. The Secretariat recommends that Parties consider the number of new requests for workshops and working groups arising at this and future meetings. In some cases, it might be useful to indicate which activities should be given priority. In others, more consideration might be given to arrangements that allow intersessional working groups to operate more independently.

⁸ Established in 2008 (AC15) as an Intersessional Working Group; the ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS groups joined in 2012 (AC19); expanded to include CMS in 2014.