

Agenda Item 6.1

Cooperation with other Bodies

Reports by the Secretariat, Parties and
Partners

Information Document 6.1

Reports from Relevant Meetings back to
ASCOBANS 2022-2023

Action Requested

Take note

Submitted by

Secretariat



Note: Delegates are kindly reminded to bring their own document copies to the meeting, if needed.

REPORTS FROM RELEVANT MEETINGS BACK TO ASCOBANS 2022-2023

6 October 2022, online

CMS: 2nd Workshop on Conservation Implications of Animal Culture (Part I)

Report: Secretariat

The purpose of the workshop, as outlined in the related CMS Decisions, was to identify priority species and populations on the CMS Appendices, and to provide advice to Parties on rapid assessment techniques and how to augment existing conservation efforts using insights on aspects of sociality. The objective was to assist the Expert Group to fulfil its mandate given in CMS Decision 13.103. The meeting report will be available on the CMS website [here](#).

10-14 October 2022, Karlskrona, Sweden

HELCOM: 2nd informal consultation session of the Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation (STATE & CONSERVATION 2-2021), hybrid session

Report: Penina Blankett

Updated ecosystem component maps

The Session took note of the recommended ecosystem components maps (document 5J-16 Rev.1). The Session noted the comment from Sweden on the difference of resolution of the maps between the seal species and harbour porpoise. The Session noted that this difference is due to the approach to create these maps.

Indicator related work

Mammals

The Session took note of the information, including solutions provided to address comments from the result review process (i.e. Annex 2), for the indicators related to marine mammals. The Session recommended the use of the results for the following indicators for HOLAS 3:

- Distribution of Baltic seals (one per species: Ringed Seal and Harbour Seal)
- Population trends and abundance of seals (one per species: Grey Seal and Ringed Seal)
- Nutritional status of seals (all species will be presented in one indicator due to anticipated data limitations)
- Reproductive status of seals (all species will be presented in one indicator due to anticipated data limitations)
- **Harbour porpoise abundance**
- **Harbour porpoise distribution**

Bycatch

The Session took note of the latest developments on defining the threshold value for the Belt Sea harbour porpoise bycatch (document 5J-19). The Session highlighted that the data availability varies between CPs, with data availability in the Contracting Parties bordering this population covering all the possible scenarios. The Session noted that all Contracting Parties are in agreement on the methodology used for harbour porpoise and thanked the experts involved for the effort made to achieve these scenarios. The Session discussed the options for threshold values, and while there are differing views on what threshold value to use, due to variable data availability. The Session recommended the application of the scenario where bycatch data is considered to be moderately underestimated for application in HOLAS 3, thus the application of a threshold value of 73. The Session emphasized that the threshold value would need to be review and possibly revised towards

HOLAS 4 and further emphasized that in case monitoring, and thus data availability improved in the future, this threshold value would need to be updated to reflect that development.

The Session noted the overall study reservation from Denmark due to national election and that the national coordination process has not been completed. The Session took note of the proposal that the new MiniScans assessment of harbour porpoise abundance in the Belt Sea could also be included and a new evaluation carried out utilizing this data. The Session concluded that the timelines for the 2022 MiniScans results, to be available is early January 2022, are not compatible with the HOLAS 3 timeline with regards to adjusting the indicators. However, the Session suggested that, if possible, to achieve by 8 February, the results of the scan, as well as a new calculation to evaluate harbour porpoise bycatch utilizing the 2022 data, be include as an information box in the HOLAS 3 biodiversity thematic assessment, to provided additional insights as supporting contextual information.

RECOMMENDATION 17/2 PROTECTION OF HARBOUR PORPOISE IN THE BALTIC SEA AREA

The Session considered reporting on the Recommendation and noted the suggestion by EG MAMA to utilize the ASCOBANS reporting directly when reporting on the Recommendation. The Session further noted that currently the reporting under ASCOBANS is done via an online format. The Session acknowledged, however, that not all HELCOM Contracting Parties are parties to ASCOBANS. The Session noted the suggestion for the countries who are not parties to ASCOBANS be invited to fill in the existing reporting form according to the reporting timeline. The Session noted that the reporting to ASCOBANS contains significant amounts of information, which is not relevant for reporting in HELCOM, and it is not possible to directly utilize the reporting information from the national ASCOBANS reporting as the reporting on the Recommendation needs to be included in the HELCOM Explorer. The Session invited Poland to contact ASCOBANS on the possibility to extract a subset of the information needed for the HELCOM Recommendation from the ASCOBANS reporting database and supported to come back to the discussion at the next session.

The Session took note of the follow-up and discussions by BALTFISH on the ICES Special Request Advice on EU request on emergency measures to prevent bycatch of Baltic Proper harbour porpoise, presented by CCB. The Session noted that discussions in BALTFISH are ongoing, covering proposals such as real time closures and pinger use. The Session welcomed the overview of alternative measures for the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise (document 4N-7) and noted that such information is also useful to stimulate discussion nationally. The Session noted that the list of areas and countries for additional measures included in the document is mainly based on HOLAS 3 maps and the acoustic monitoring stations. The Session acknowledged that additional measures are needed, however noted the comments from several Contracting Parties that real-time closures are not a realistic alternative. The Session took note of the comments that WWF Poland supports the implementation of additional measures but that some modifications to the proposal in the document may be needed, as well as that the proposal will be submitted to BALTFISH for consideration.

The Session took note of the latest information on the LIFE application for the SAMBAH II. The Session invited the Secretariat to share with HOD the information that the BSAP actions on harbour porpoise will likely be delayed due to delays in funding. The Session emphasized the importance of revitalizing and reviewing the HELCOM work on the critically endangered Baltic Sea harbour porpoise and to consider the possibility to apply funding from other calls. The Session acknowledged the need to allocate national funding for the work originally planned under the SAMBAH project, and regionally coordinate the work, which can then be supplemented with project funding, should such funding become available. The Session supported that, should a suitable call become available, an intersessional session of State & Conservation WG would be set up by the Secretariat to further discuss the application and the related practicalities. The Session invited national State and Conservation representatives to retain active contact with the national SAMBAH project partner, to enable quick response should an opportunity for funding arise. The Session noted the possibility to reach out to the IWC bycatch group for cooperation on harbour porpoise work. The Session noted that in Poland a contract for the remaining 5 months harbour porpoise monitoring will soon be

finalized, hence Poland will provide 24 months of continuous monitoring, from April 2021 until March 2023. The data for this 5-month monitoring will be available in May 2023.

RECOMMENDATION 35/1 SYSTEM OF COASTAL AND MARINE BALTIC SEA PROTECTED AREAS (HELCOM MPAs)

The Session took note of that total fisheries closure for static nets has been issued in the Middle bank, Poland, which is not a MPA yet, to protect the harbour porpoise under the regulation 2022/303. The Session took note that an exchange of information on German and Polish MPAs is ongoing, a conference between the two countries was held in 2021 on transboundary MPAs and harmonization of fisheries management measures with regard to the protection of the Baltic proper harbour porpoise has taken place between the countries. The Session further noted the suggestion to utilize the MPA managers network in the work on transboundary MPAs.

13-21 October 2022, Portorož, Slovenia

IWC: 68th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC68)

Report: Secretariat

The Secretariat attended the Conservation Committee (CC) Meeting on Saturday 15 October 2022 ([provisional agenda](#)). Topics of relevance included ship strikes, marine debris, anthropogenic underwater noise, climate change, cetaceans and ecosystem functioning. See also the [CC Work Plan 2022-2026](#).

The Commission meeting took place 17-21 October 2022 (see [plenary agenda](#)). A statement from CMS, ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS is available [here](#). The IWC Scientific Committee referenced to many ASCOBANS and CMS Working Groups in its report. The Commission adopted a resolution on Marine Plastic Pollution (submitted by the EU and its Member States. The resolution is a follow-up to the UNEA Resolution to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. The meeting report is available on the [IWC website](#).

FYI: the IWC Secretariat signed an MOU with COMHAFAT (The Ministerial Conference on fisheries cooperation among African States bordering the Atlantic Ocean), outlining future collaboration. Two new collaborative agreements on bycatch were endorsed: a co-operative agreement with the FAO/IOTC; and a contract with FAO/Common Ocean ABNJ.

18-20 October 2022, Madrid, Spain

OSPAR: Intersessional Correspondence Group on Marine Protected Areas (ICG-MPA)

Report: Secretariat (did not attend this meeting)

The meeting discussed, among other things, fisheries management in national OSPAR MPAs and offshore wind development (environmental versus climate protection). The summary record is available on the [OSPAR website](#).

19-20 October 2022, Bonn, Germany

CMS: 53rd Meeting of the Standing Committee (StC53)

Report: Secretariat

The meeting noted various reports, including from [UNEP](#) and [ASCOBANS](#); reviewed financial matters; took note of the [assessment of implementation of the Strategic Plan](#) for Migratory Species 2015-2023 and considered [options](#) for its follow up; took note of the implementation of the Programme of Work 2020-2023, among other things. The meeting report is available on the [CMS website](#).

15-16 November 2022, online

ASCOBANS: 3rd Meeting of the Common Dolphin Group

Report: Secretariat

The meeting discussed progress in the implementation of the Species Action Plan for North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin and elaborated [recommendations](#). Updates were heard of large area surveys, from relevant ICES meetings, and other relevant work such as OSPAR QSR 2023 biodiversity indicators assessments, CetAMBICion project and DELMOGES project. It was agreed that the group develop an outline for a strategic bycatch reduction plan. The meeting report will soon be available on the ASCOBANS website [here](#).

28 November – 2 December 2022, Malta

ACCOBAMS: 8th Meeting of the Parties

Report: Secretariat

The meeting adopted 23 Resolutions, half of which resulted from recommendations issued by the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee. An ambitious Work Programme (WP) 2023-2025 was approved, to improve actions aimed at responding to the many threats posed to cetaceans. Key issues in ACCOBAMS WP: underwater noise, bycatch, ship strikes, strandings. The meeting report, including the adopted resolutions in the annexes, are available on the ACCOBAMS website [here](#).

3-5 December 2022, Montreal, Canada

CBD: Fifth Meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (WG2020-5)

7-19 December 2022, Montreal, Canada

CBD: Part Two of the Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Tenth meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol and the Fourth meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol

Report: Penina Blankett (copied from [EU pages](#))

COP15 was the biggest biodiversity conference in a decade. On 19 December 2022, world leaders adopted the historic [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#). The framework has clear, measurable goals and targets, with complete monitoring, reporting, and review arrangements to track progress. It is complemented by a robust resource mobilisation package. It commits the global community to actions to protect and restore nature and remove pollution.

Goals and targets for ambitious action by 2030 and 2050

The Kunming-Montreal biodiversity agreement includes key global targets to

- **Restore 30% degraded ecosystems** globally (on land and sea) by 2030
- **Conserve and manage 30%** areas (terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine) by 2030
- **Stop the extinction** of known species, and by 2050 reduce tenfold the extinction risk and rate of all species
- Reduce **risk from pesticides by at least 50%** by 2030
- Reduce **nutrients lost to the environment by at least 50%** by 2030
- Reduce **pollution risks and negative impacts of pollution from all sources by 2030** to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystems
- **Reduce global footprint of consumption by 2030**
- **Sustainably manage** areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, and forestry and substantially increase **agroecology and other biodiversity-friendly practices**
- Tackle climate change through **nature-based solutions**
- Reduce the rate of introduction and establishment of **invasive alien species** by at least 50% by 2030
- Secure the safe, legal and sustainable **use and trade of wild species** by 2030

- Increase **benefit sharing from the use of genetic resources** to support biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use

The deal will also significantly increase finance for biodiversity from all sources (domestic, international – both public and private) mobilising at least USD 200 billion per year by 2030. It also addresses subsidies harmful to biodiversity. A new Fund established under the Global Environment Facility will be open to financing from all sources. A new multilateral mechanism to share benefits out of digital sequence information on genetic resources and contribute to mobilize resource was also established.

31 January – 1 February 2023, online
ASCOBANS: 11th Meeting of the North Sea Group (NGS11)
 Report: Secretariat

The meeting reviewed progress in implementation of the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea. The meeting also received presentations on porpoise bycatch assessment and porpoise mortality estimates in Danish and Swedish gillnets, emergent interactions in the management of multiple threats to the conservation of harbour porpoise, SCANS IV, and assessment of pollutant burdens and associated risks to small cetaceans for developing a framework for a contaminant indicator under the MSFD. The meeting also considered the draft revision of the Conservation Plan, that would be presented to AC28. Recommendations from the meeting are available [here](#). The meeting report will be posted on the ASCOBANS website [here](#).

3-9 February 2023, Vancouver, Canada
Fifth International Marine Protected Areas Congress
 Report: Penina Blankett

The fifth International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5) <https://www.impac5.ca/> took place in Vancouver, Canada, from 3-9 February 2023. It was jointly hosted by the Host First Nations — xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səliiwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) — together with the Government of Canada, Province of British Columbia, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). IMPAC5 brought together Ocean conservation professionals, high-level government officials, Indigenous leaders, youth representatives, and others, who participated in a multitude of events that included keynote addresses, interactive in-person and virtual sessions, and arts and cultural elements. Presentations explored how to advance Ocean protection, through support for MPAs, OECMs and marine spatial planning, Indigenous-led Ocean conservation and knowledge, sustainable finance solutions, and technological innovations.

IMPAC5 was informed by five themes:

- building a global MPA network;
- advancing conservation in the blue economy;
- actively managing MPAs and human activity;
- conserving biodiversity and addressing the climate crisis; and
- connecting Ocean culture and human well-being.

In addition, three streams were weaved into the discussions:

- Indigenous Peoples leadership;
- the voice of young professionals; and
- innovation and transformational change.

20-22 March 2023, online
ASCOBANS: 19th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group
 Report: Secretariat

The meeting reviewed progress in the implementation of the Jastarnia Plan and the Western Baltic, Belt Sea and the Kattegat (WBBK) Plan to conserve harbour porpoises. The meeting also discussed, among other issues, status of bycatch mitigation measures in the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise range, the listing of the population in CMS Appendix I, the outlook for implementation of the SAMBAH II project and the upcoming revision of the WBBK conservation plan. The meeting report will soon be available on the ASCOBANS website [here](#). The [action points](#) developed by JG19 will be presented to AC28 for the consideration of the Advisory Committee.

16-20 April 2023, O Grove, Galicia, Spain
34th Conference of the European Cetacean Society (ECS)
 Report: Secretariat

The ECS conference received a total of 586 registrations from 41 countries. The Secretariat organized / co-organized three well-attended workshops in conjunction with the conference:

- 15 April 2023: [ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Marine Debris Workshop – New and Emerging Aspects](#)
- 16 April 2023: [ECS/ASCOBANS Workshop on Scoping the Development of a European Marine Strandings Database](#)
- 17 April 2023: [ECS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Workshop: Current cetacean bycatch issues in European waters](#)

Workshop reports will be posted on the respective webpages in due course (links above).

In addition to 15 workshops, the conference programme included 80 oral presentations, 27 short talks, and 306 posters. Here are the [scientific programme](#), the [abstract book](#), list of the [workshops](#), and the [poster list](#). The ASCOBANS Working Group on Resource Depletion presented a poster *Investigating the role of prey depletion in cetacean distributions and population dynamics*.

24 April – 6 May 2023, Bled, Slovenia
IWC: Meeting of the Scientific Committee (IWC SC69A)
 Report: Mark P. Simmonds

The Scientific Committee (SC) met in person for the first time since 2019 in Bled, Slovenia, 24 April – 6 May 2023. This year 254 participants and 31 member countries were represented. Its full report and annexes were published at the end of June and are available online on the [IWC website](#). Highlighted here some parts of the report of particular relevance to ASCOBANS.

1. Harbour Porpoise of the Baltic Proper.

As at other recent meetings, the SC discussed the harbour porpoise of the Baltic Proper and made a series of recommendations which are reproduced in full below.

“Given its serious concerns, the Committee:

(1) reiterates previous recommendations (SC2097, SC2218), that, as a matter of urgency, all Baltic Sea range states should act immediately to implement long-term bycatch mitigation measures for the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise until recovery is achieved. In lieu of large-scale implementation of pingers in static net fisheries in the Baltic Proper, further closures of fisheries with high bycatch risk, primarily static net fisheries, should be urgently implemented;

(2) **notes** a number of concerns about the effectiveness of dynamic management areas that rely on responding to detections of harbour porpoise presence. Hence, it **recommends** further consideration of additional areas that have been suggested for closures of fisheries and is ready to offer technical advice on evaluating these;

(3) **encourages** countries whose military forces cannot accept large-scale use of pingers to fully investigate the potential effect of pingers on military underwater acoustic activities as well as possible technical adaptations to pingers to minimise such effects. The Committee is ready to offer technical advice as required and has established an intersessional group to facilitate this;

(4) **encourages** countries in the Baltic Sea Region to initiate, as soon as possible, a new static acoustic survey to estimate the abundance and distribution of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise to follow up on results of the SAMBAH project;

(5) again **encourages** the Baltic Sea range states to propose the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise for listing on CMS Appendix 1 at its conference of parties later this year and calls on all CMS Parties to support this listing (SC2010); and

(6) **requests** the IWC Executive Secretary to maintain the ongoing dialogue with range states and the EU Commission by writing to inform them of the Committee's ongoing concerns and recommendations."

It is noted that the CMS COP has been postponed until February 2024.

2. Bycatch

A full report was provided of the progress made by the IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative over the past year (SC/69A/HIM/13). Activities included: (1) production of factsheets in collaboration with FAO; (2) an agreement to provide IWC with funds to contribute to an FAO project to improve the understanding and management of cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries in the Indian Ocean and western Pacific Ocean; (3) engagement with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission; and (4) participation in Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. Planning continues for the implementation of pilot projects in countries previously identified as priorities. These pilot projects are locally led with IWC support and aim to monitor, mitigate, and manage bycatch on small-scale fisheries using gillnets. Svoboda was welcomed as the new Chair of the Standing Working Group on Bycatch.

A presentation was made about the Coordinated Development and Implementation of Best Practice in Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic region (CIBBRiNA) project. This will run for six years with the aim of improving bycatch knowledge in different fisheries, minimising bycatch of priority Eastern Tropical Pacific (ETP) species and assessing the impacts of bycatch on their populations. There is a focus on participation and collaboration with international organisations, including the IWC and fisheries Advisory Councils. The project should be able to start in September 2023; however, because some species, such as the harbour porpoise and common dolphin, do not qualify as priority species according to the criteria of LIFE, a lower funding rate of 67% (instead of 75%) was approved by the European Commission. Noting this, the SC went on to recommend that the European Commission consider revising these criteria for funding thresholds to facilitate projects addressing critical cetacean conservation issues.

3. Rescue of entangled Small Cetaceans

At the last meeting of the SC an intersessional correspondence group (ICG) was established to formulate guidelines for the best response to incidents of free-swimming small cetaceans carrying or trailing gear, as a complement to the IWC's principles and guidance for large whale disentanglement. It was noted that, in parallel, NOAA (US) had developed and published a comprehensive set of guidelines that the ICG recognised met many of its terms of reference: The NOAA Fisheries Small Cetacean Entanglement Response Best Practices (US Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program 2022).

4. Pollution

A substantive review of pollution issues linked to the previous recommendations of the SC on this topic was received (SC/69A/E/04) and is available online¹.

5. Climate change

The work of the intersessional correspondence group on climate change will continue and papers received included a study that suggests a potential distribution shift in at least the minke whale population of the North-East Atlantic based on strandings data. This is in line with what has been reported for other cetacean species in this region, where distribution shifts have been linked to climate change impacts (Snell et al., 2023)².

6. Deep Sea Mining

This emerging issue was discussed and the SC recommended that *independent research be conducted to better understand impacts and that new deep sea mining developments thoroughly assess impacts to cetaceans and their ecosystems. A new ICG was established to consider this and to report back at the next meeting.*

7. Greenland hunts

The SC discussed small cetacean takes in Greenland and expressed concern about their sustainability. It recommended that Greenland should follow the scientific recommendations from the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) and the Canada and Greenland Joint Commission on Narwhal and Beluga (JCNB).

8. Extinction Alert

The SC has developed a new mechanism to try to raise the profile and generate appropriate action for species and populations heading towards extinction and this 'Extinction Alert' will be issued for the first time this year for the vaquita. The harbour porpoise of the Baltic Proper was proposed as a suitable candidate for the same treatment in the future.

¹https://archive.iwc.int/pages/search.php?search=%21last1000&k=&modal=&display=list&order_by=resourceid&offset=836&per_page=240&archive=&sort=ASC&restypes=&recentdaylimit=&foredit=&noreload=true&access=#

² Maria Snell, Andrew Baillie, Simon Berrow, Robert Deaville, Rod Penrose, Matthew Perkins, Ruth Williams, Mark P Simmonds. 2023. An investigation into the effects of climate change on baleen whale distribution in the British Isles. Marine Pollution Bulletin 187, 114565. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpolbul.2022.114565>