

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS MARINE DEBRIS WORKSHOP

15 April 2023, O Grove, Galicia, Spain

- Noting the ongoing importance of long-term strandings networks and the associated pathological investigations, countries are encouraged to support them across the ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS regions.
- Support research to better understand the distribution of marine debris in the water column and on the seabed and the risk it poses to different species and populations.
- Given the high levels of ingestion of marine debris by some species, it would be helpful to better understand the behavioural aspects of this (i.e. why do some species ingest plastics and under what circumstances).
- Experts from the ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS regions were encouraged to review and further develop and improve the joint protocol *Best practice on cetacean post mortem investigation and tissue sampling* to better inform our understanding of the impact of marine debris and microplastics (down to 100 µm, when feasible) on cetaceans, including by making it better suited to conditions in the field. Additionally, consideration should be given to sharing of knowledge, facilities and samples for a multidisciplinary analysis (e.g. diet and pathogens).
- The potential high importance of the IWC in collecting and collating information about interactions between cetaceans and marine debris was highlighted and taking note of the recent commitment made by the IWC parties to better understand and map such interactions in Resolution 2022:1, the workshop encouraged suitable development of an IWC database for marine debris.
- ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS are encouraged to support integration and harmonization of data collection and management systems which relate to marine debris.
- The workshop encouraged the IWC Scientific Committee to again convene an international workshop to help take forward its work on marine debris (an offer to host was gratefully received from the University of Siena).
- Establish an ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Working Group to look at interaction with fishers with regards to marine debris; a correspondence group was established to further discuss how to best progress this. Eisfeld-Pierantonio was requested to convene the correspondence group.
- The workshop encouraged the Scottish Entanglement Alliance (SEA) to continue its important work on research and mitigation of marine animal entanglements and encourages similar initiatives in other areas.
- Support research to better understand the health implications of marine debris at an individual and population level by
 - a) defining new methods to evaluate the exposure to plastics and plastic additives in free-ranging organisms, which includes plastic-associated contaminants and biological responses,
 - b) evaluating the presence and effects of micro and nanoscale plastics, including sub-lethal effects which can affect population in critical areas, and
 - c) integrating data towards understanding the cumulative stress to cetaceans (ranging from contaminants of emerging concern to climate change).

- Enhance awareness raising by communicating to other scientists, young people and other citizens, stakeholders and policy makers.
- Reiterates the point made at the 2019 IWC workshop that the IUCN should take into account marine debris in its next assessment of the sperm whale.
- Support using cetaceans (e.g. sperm whales, fin whales, beaked whales) as indicator species for marine debris under relevant policy frameworks.