

Agenda Item 7

Cooperation with other Bodies

Reports by the Secretariat, Parties and
Partners

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**Letter from NAMMCO regarding
2018 stock assessment of harbour
porpoises in the North Atlantic**

Action Requested

- Take note
- Comment

Submitted by

NAMMCO



**NOTE:
DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED
TO BRING THEIR OWN COPIES OF DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING**

Secretariat's Note

The Rules of Procedure adopted at the 19th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee remain in force until and unless an amendment is called for and adopted.



Sami Hassani, Chair of the Advisory Committee
Bradnee Chambers, Acting Executive Secretary
Aline Kühl-Stenzel, ASCOBANS Coordinator

ASCOBANS

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Tromsø, 22 June 2017

Dear Sami, Bradnee and Aline

At its 24th Meeting, the Council of NAMMCO agreed to increase its scientific cooperation with the other international organisations having competence in conservation and management of marine mammals, including ASCOBANS (see agenda point **12.3 Other business**¹). The scientific cooperation with ASCOBANS was specifically mentioned under agenda point **12.2 ASCOBANS** where the following paragraph reads:

The assessment of North Sea harbour porpoises, so far considered a single stock and therefore a shared stock between one NAMMCO party (Norway) and several ASCOBANS parties (Sweden, Denmark, UK, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, France), was the most obvious [area where a scientific cooperation with ASCOBANS would be of relevance to both organisations]. The estimation of life parameters, population health status, impact of anthropogenic disturbances, including by-catch, and their mitigation were all difficult areas which would benefit from the broadest possible expertise.

Council therefore tasked the Secretariat to consult with the ASCOBANS Secretariat to explore possibilities for such a scientific cooperation. NAMMCO forwarded to ASCOBANS a more general invitation to an increased cooperation at MOP8 in its Opening Statement.

NAMMCO has previously organised a symposium on harbour porpoises in 1999, which resulted in a volume in the NAMMCO Scientific Publication Series², and the NAMMCO Scientific Committee Working Group on Harbour porpoises held a meeting in 2013 focussing on Norway and Greenland³.

Since these two meetings, a significant amount of data has become available in many areas, such as population abundance (particularly from the NASS 2015 and SCANS 2016 surveys), by-catch estimation and mitigation, contaminant loads, life history parameters, as well as telemetry, shedding light on distribution, movements and possibly stock identification. However, there is a need for an

¹NAMMCO Annual Report 2015. <http://nammco.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/report-nammco-24th-council-meeting.pdf>

² Harbour Porpoises in the North Atlantic, <https://nammco.no/topics/volume-5-harbour-porpoise/>

³ NAMMCO WG on harbour porpoises, <http://nammco.no/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/NAMMCO-HPWG-2013-Final-Report.pdf>



overview of the status of the harbour porpoise in the North Atlantic which combines all of the available data, including information from European and Nordic waters, where it is clear that harbour porpoises are subjected to significant levels of by-catch, pollution and other anthropogenic disturbances.

The NAMMCO Scientific Committee has recommended that a review and assessment of the status of harbour porpoise stocks in the North Atlantic be conducted in 2018⁴ (point 8.11.3, page 59), and supported the participation of ASCOBANS and other European Scientists to such an exercise.

As a single-stock framework has been proposed for the North Sea, it is a shared stock between ASCOBANS and NAMMCO, and it would make little sense for either organisation to conduct a stock assessment without involving the other organisation. In addition, the harbour porpoise is a species not very well understood in many domains, but which is subjected to many threats, including climate and environment changes and increasing anthropogenic activities. Associating forces, expertise and competence for conducting a thorough review and assessment of the harbour porpoise in the North Atlantic and adjacent waters would make good sense. NAMMCO would therefore like to propose to ASCOBANS to initiate such a collaboration and organise jointly this North Atlantic Review.

Our two organisations do not share the same view on the use of marine mammals. ASCOBANS view them solely as cultural ecosystem services. NAMMCO, recognising the right and needs of coastal communities to make a sustainable living from what the sea can provide, also add to this dimension nutritional ecosystem services. However, the ultimate interest of both our organisation is the sustainable use – whatever it is – and the conservation of small cetaceans. As the areas of jurisdiction of both our organisations are contiguous, we share not only stocks of these widely distributed species, but also unfortunately many of the consequences of anthropogenic activities and the threat they represent for species we want to conserve.

We hope that ASCOBANS will see this invitation as a way forward toward the sustainability of the harbour porpoise in the North Atlantic and adjacent waters.

We are therefore looking very much forward to hearing from you on this matter and on how to proceed. We will be participating to the ASCOBANS AC meeting in Brest and would be happy to present and discuss this possibility there.

Best regards

Geneviève Desportes
General Secretary

Jill Prewitt
Scientific Secretary

⁴ Report of the 23th Meeting of the SC Report, <http://nammco.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/sc23-report-final-21112016.pdf>