

Draft Resolution No. 10: Small Cetacean Stranding Response

Recalling that the Conservation and Management Plan annexed to the Agreement stipulates that “each Party shall endeavour to establish an efficient system for reporting and retrieving by-catches and stranded specimens and to carry out, in the framework of the studies mentioned above, full autopsies in order to collect tissues for further studies and to reveal possible causes of death and to document food composition”;

Recognizing that information collected from necropsies of stranded and bycaught animals is crucial for improving the understanding of causes of mortality, as well as population health and reproductive status;

Emphasizing the importance of standardizing necropsy protocols throughout the Agreement Area, and if possible beyond, in order to ensure data collected is comparable and of high quality;

Recalling that the Conservation and Management Plan annexed to the Agreement stipulates that “Parties shall endeavour to establish the obligation to release immediately any animals caught alive and in good health”, and *noting* that the principle should apply to live stranded animals as well;

Commending the efforts of stranding networks which have resulted in large numbers of animals having been rescued and returned to the sea throughout the ASCOBANS Area;

Mindful that effective responses to live strandings not only contribute to achieving and maintaining a favourable conservation status of small cetaceans, but also have significant animal welfare implications;

Noting related decisions adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS, in particular Resolution 4.16 on Guidelines for a Coordinated Cetacean Stranding Response;

Aware of ongoing work on the subjects of necropsy protocols and guidance for stranding responses in the frameworks of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), ACCOBAMS and the European Cetacean Society, as well as of related national and transboundary activities;

The Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS

1. *Encourages* Parties that have not yet done so to establish national strandings response networks fitting to their specific situation which
 - (a) follow best practice guidelines, insofar as available in line with internationally agreed protocols;
 - (b) train volunteers on animal welfare as well as on health and safety measures during live stranding events and during the handling of dead cetaceans;
 - (c) operate in connection with one nationwide helpline number, if feasible, to make it easy for the public to call for assistance;
 - (d) examine stranded cetaceans at post-mortem where appropriate, to establish causes of death and mortality baselines within the ASCOBANS Area;
 - (e) engage in appropriate sampling and make their data and samples available to researchers, contributing to the web-accessed database for marine mammal

strandings and necropsy data called for in Resolution No. 4 of MOP7 once this database is defined and created;

2. *Further encourages* Parties to support their stranding networks with the funds necessary to carry out their work, and to facilitate knowledge exchange and capacity-building between networks;
3. *Encourages* Parties, through national stranding networks and relevant institutes, as appropriate, to share experiences, data, samples and research outputs, with their counterparts in other countries in order to help build capacity throughout the ASCOBANS Area, and beyond;
4. *Requests* the Advisory Committee and the Secretariat to engage actively in the ongoing work on best practice guidelines for response to stranding events and establishment of an updated necropsy protocol within the frameworks of the International Whaling Commission, ACCOBAMS and the European Cetacean Society;
5. *Recommends* that such best practice guidelines for stranding responses and necropsies be developed collaboratively in order to ensure that they are relevant to all regions, covering topics such as:
 - (a) appropriate protocols for responses to both live and dead stranded cetaceans;
 - (b) exchange of experiences, case studies, and other relevant information at both a national and international level;
 - (c) training and capacity-building;
 - (d) health and safety considerations;
6. *Further recommends* that a repository for the dissemination of best practice on strandings response, including national strandings response strategies, appropriate training materials, euthanasia, necropsy protocols etc. be established, possibly under the framework of the IWC, to allow stranding networks access to relevant information;
7. *Also recommends* that basic advice to the general public be provided on animal welfare and on human health and safety considerations during live stranding events and when encountering dead cetaceans;
8. *Further recommends* that a core post-mortem protocol be developed and widely disseminated, covering sampling and diagnostic techniques, in order to harmonize data collection and interpretation, and supplemented by more detailed protocols for the investigation of specific causes of mortality such as bycatch, ship-strike, underwater noise and marine pollution;
9. *Calls on* Parties to provide sufficient funding and support for:
 - (a) the post-mortem examination of a relevant proportion of the number of available stranded animals;
 - (b) research focusing on the further improvement of techniques;
 - (c) the periodic revision and update of the protocols as required;
 - (d) the creation and maintenance of a web-accessed database for marine mammal strandings and necropsy data called for in Resolution No. 4 of MOP7; and
10. *Requests* the Advisory Committee to continue monitoring new information on the causes of strandings and mortality of cetaceans, as well as best practice guidance on stranding responses and necropsies, and to make recommendations to Parties as appropriate.