

Agenda Item 2

Opening Statements

Information Document 2.b-ii

**Opening Statements : Observers
– WWF**

Action Requested

- Take note

Submitted by

WWF



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



ASCOBANS 8TH MEETING OF THE PARTIES

Finland August 30-1 September 2016

WWF is pleased to attend the eighth Meeting of Parties to ASCOBANS and is grateful to the Secretariat for the invitation. WWF was present during the first negotiations to establish the Agreement and is still a firm supporter of the Agreement. WWF's goal is to ensure that viable populations of all cetacean species occupy their historic range and fulfil their role in maintaining the integrity of ocean ecosystems. We believe that the establishment of ASCOBANS set out an important set of objectives and targeted the key issues that need to be addressed if we are to secure better conservation status for small cetaceans in European waters. We are particularly concerned about the status of the Baltic harbour porpoise and believe there is an urgent need to strengthen efforts to address the critical threat of bycatch.

WWF would like to recognise the important role ASCOBANS has recently played in making recommendations to the European Commission on the Requirements of Legislation to Address Monitoring and Mitigation of Small Cetacean Bycatch. We are currently collaborating with the Secretariat in the development of a technical briefing report on cetacean bycatch mitigation measures, to be released later this year. We hope to remain engaged with the ASCOBANS Secretariat and member Parties on these important issues in the future and look forward to a productive meeting to advance on the issues of most concern to cetacean conservation in the region and beyond.

Monitoring and Mitigation of Small Cetacean Bycatch (MOP8/Doc.6.2.1)

WWF strongly supports the draft resolution on Monitoring and Mitigation of Small Cetacean Bycatch and we recommend all member Parties of ASCOBANS to support the resolution. We hope this resolution serves as an example to be replicated in the European Commission as a whole and we congratulate ASCOBANS for taking this important step and hope to celebrate its consolidation at this Meeting of the Parties.

The Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan)

With less than 500 porpoises estimated to remain in the Baltic, reducing bycatch is a priority that cannot wait. WWF supports the recent International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee's urgent recommendation "that all countries bordering Baltic Proper assess and mitigate bycatch and other sources of mortality, including consideration of cumulative impacts by: implement independent fishery observer schemes; monitor population abundance; monitor health of the population through strandings and necropsies; develop and implement management plans for designated Natura 2000 sites; ban fishing practices with high risk of cetacean bycatch in Natura 2000 sites; immediately implement actions to reduce bycatch and encourage/promote/fund alternative fishing methods throughout population's range" (IWC/66/Rep01(2016)).

Concluding Remarks

Of course there are other important issues and documents to be discussed at this MoP, such as Managing Cumulative Anthropogenic Impacts in the Marine Environment (MOP8/Doc.6.2.5) Small Cetacean Stranding Response (MOP8/Doc.6.2.6), and the CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities (MOP8/Doc.6.2.7.a Rev.1). We would also like to see these resolutions approved and supported by member Parties and remain available to help in any way we can.