



**Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species
Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**
Joint Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



DRAFT PRESS RELEASE

Countries Step up Protection for Small Whales, Porpoises and Dolphins in Europe

Brighton, 24 October 2012 – Government representatives from eight countries met in Brighton, United Kingdom, to decide future priorities to better protect small whales, porpoises and dolphins under the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS). ASCOBANS was concluded 20 years ago as a daughter Agreement of the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

The meeting agreed a number of measures to protect these marine mammals in European waters. It was also attended by representatives of international organizations such as the European Commission, the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the OSPAR Commission, the sister Agreement in the Mediterranean (ACCOBAMS) and the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO), as well as by relevant NGOs.

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Acting Executive Secretary of ASCOBANS, said: “With the ever increasing pressure on whales, dolphins and porpoises, the decisions made at this meeting show that ASCOBANS must continue to play a key role in coordinating efforts towards better protection with the support of all countries and stakeholders in the region.”

A new Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat aims to intensify research and conservation efforts in this heavily used sea area shared by Denmark, Germany and Sweden. Activities such as fishing, marine construction, extraction of resources and shipping can be a threat to harbour porpoises.

We need to ensure that this population is adequately protected, not only for the area of the new conservation plan but also for the whole Baltic Sea. Experts expect that the plan will help not only to understand better the scope of the threats but also to address them effectively. To this end, governments, the private sector, IGOs and NGOs are joining forces with the aim of reducing threats, particularly bycatch in fishing nets, supporting research and monitoring as well as safeguarding suitable habitats for the harbour porpoise and its prey species.

The 4th ASCOBANS Outreach and Education Award was given to a leading Swedish scientist, Mats Amundin from Kolmården, for his work in promoting the conservation of porpoises.

In addition, participants agreed on priorities for research and conservation actions in the western part of the ASCOBANS Area, which comprises the Irish Sea and the European North Atlantic. A large diversity of whale and dolphin species, as well as the harbour porpoise, roam these waters. However, knowledge of their abundance and distribution as well as the magnitude of different threats remains scarce. Member States in the region therefore

agreed to collaborate closely towards enhancing data collection in order to close these knowledge gaps.

As chemical pollution, primarily from PCBs, continues to affect marine mammals, new types of contaminants are also entering the seas, with poorly understood effects on marine life. Member States identified priority research areas in order to improve the understanding of how lesser-studied contaminants or those of particular concern affect individuals and populations. They also stressed the need to limit the introduction of chemical substances into the marine environment.

ASCOBANS is committed to implement the overarching Conservation and Management Plan, and encourages neighbouring countries to join these efforts. Habitat conservation and management, surveys and research, mitigation of pollution and public information are designed to improve the conservation status of whales, dolphins and porpoises in north-western European waters.

Contact:

Ms Veronika Lenarz
Public Information Assistant
UNEP/CMS Secretariat
+49 228 815 2409
vlenarz@cms.int

Note to Editors:

ASCOBANS, the **Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**, is a UN treaty to promote close cooperation amongst member governments with a view to achieving and maintaining a favourable conservation status for small cetaceans in the ASCOBANS Area. A Conservation and Management Plan, which forms part of the Agreement, obliges Parties to engage in habitat conservation and management, surveys and research, pollution mitigation and public information. The Agreement was signed in 1992 and is celebrating its 20th Anniversary.

The term “**small cetaceans**” refers to small whales, dolphins and porpoises, which occur in nearly all of the world’s seas and in some rivers. The Agreement covers all small cetaceans found in the ASCOBANS Area. Examples are the well-known bottlenose dolphin, the killer whale, deep-diving species such as beaked whales and the Agreement’s flagship species, the harbour porpoise.

More information:
www.ascobans.org