

- Agenda Item 4.3:** **Possible amendment of ASCOBANS to cover all species of cetaceans**
- Agenda Item 5.6:** **Accessions of Range States; extension of Agreement area**

New cetacean NGO from Portugal

Submitted by: **Secretariat**



NOTE:
IN THE INTERESTS OF ECONOMY, DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED TO BRING THEIR OWN COPIES OF THESE DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING

	<p>New cetacean NGO from Portugal - ratifying ASCOBANS</p>
	<p>April 2006</p>

The conservation of cetaceans in Portugal has been made difficult by the lack of human and financial resources, which added to a poor scientific knowledge of cetacean populations occurring in the Portuguese coast, severely compromises the identification of potential threats and the consequent development of conservation measures. Nevertheless, several national laws and international conventions give protection to cetaceans in Portuguese waters.

In 2005, Portugal ratified the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), securing in this way that the conservation of cetacean populations off the southern coast of the country is addressed by an international agreement. Additionally, interest in ratifying the ASCOBANS agreement was shown by the Portuguese government in 2001 when the document "*Portuguese waters in ASCOBANS: a preliminary report*" was presented to ASCOBANS 8th Advisory Committee Meeting. In this document, the government demonstrated its support to the geographical extension of the agreement and emphasised its importance to the conservation of cetaceans in the northeast Atlantic, and particularly in the western coast of Portugal. It stated that there is a higher abundance of cetaceans on this coast as compared to the southern coast and it is on this coast also that the major problems of bycatch and habitat degradation occur. Since then, however, no move towards ratification has been made and even though the Portuguese government has been approached several times by ASCOBANS, no confirmation of support or intent to ratify the agreement has been released.

CETUS, the Portuguese Association for Cetacean Conservation, is a NGO that was established in January 2005 and became official in March 2006. CETUS participated in the 12th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee in April 2005 as an observer, becoming acquainted with the work of ASCOBANS and its importance to the conservation of small cetaceans in northern European waters. CETUS believes that the Portuguese government should ratify the agreement, allowing some influence in the

direction and vision of it, and making Portugal an active participant in the identification of threats, support of research and development of mitigation measures. Otherwise, it becomes limited to the conservation guidance and measures written solely by other members of ASCOBANS, which might not fit the Portuguese context entirely. The benefits that will hopefully come from the ratification of ASCOBANS for marine conservation in Portugal and cetacean conservation in particular, are in our understanding, numerous. We have met informally with a representative from the Portuguese governmental agency for the environment (Instituto de Conservação da Natureza, ICN) twice in the last year and raised the issue of ASCOBANS. We are currently in the process of writing to the Portuguese Ministry of the Environment to try and influence them to ratify to ASCOBANS.

We believe that the establishment of a geographic continuum between ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS would immensely favour cetacean conservation in European waters. In addition to the geographical expansion, however, it is our belief that it is both relevant and necessary to extend the agreement to include all cetaceans. This would make the two agreements effectively continuous, addressing the conservation of large cetaceans in northeast Atlantic waters and tapping on the experience and expertise of both the ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS advisory committee.

We wish all the participants of the 13th meeting of the Advisory Committee to ASCOBANS a productive and successful meeting, and hope that in the future Portugal will be an active member of the agreement.

Yours sincerely,

Sónia Mendes

CETUS – Associação Portuguesa de Conservação de Cetáceos