

Agenda Item 15.2

National Reporting

Revision to National Reporting Format

Document 15.2

Revision of the Annual National Reporting Format

Action Requested

- Provide guidance on content, timing and frequency of national reports
- Decide how to progress the practical development of a revised reporting format

Submitted by

Secretariat / Intersessional Group



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

Revision of the Annual National Reporting Format

Background

1. The 21st Meeting of the Advisory Committee agreed to establish an intersessional group to identify the Agreement's reporting needs. Following a call for nominations in October 2014, five national delegates volunteered to participate in this process, along with the AC Chair and the Chairs of all ASCOBANS Working Groups. This intersessional group was set up to consider whether any improvements could be made to the national reporting framework. It was also tasked with considering whether links could be made with similar reporting activities under other international instruments in order to reduce burdens and improve effectiveness.
2. The intersessional group decided to gather the views of Parties and of the Working Group Chairs by means of a questionnaire, which was drafted by the United Kingdom in collaboration with the Secretariat. On 15 June 2015, after the majority of Parties had submitted their national reports, the Secretariat circulated the questionnaire to Parties and Working Group Chairs, with a deadline for response by 31 July.

Summary of Comments Received on the ASCOBANS National Reporting Format

3. Eleven responses were received to the questionnaire, seven from national delegates and four from chairs of working groups. The key points raised by respondents and subsequent proposals from the intersessional group are highlighted below.

Reporting structure and content

4. Several respondents suggested revisions to the structure and content of the report, including asking specific questions for each topic. These suggestions have been collated in a draft outline reporting template for consideration by the Advisory Committee (Annex 1). This template is intended to help standardize the information returned by ASCOBANS Parties, provide increased harmonization with other international reporting obligations¹, and ensure a more complete coverage of issues of interest to the Agreement.
5. Most respondents also stated that there would be significant benefits from receiving some information in a more regionally appropriate format, aligned with action plan areas or sea areas.
6. A related general question requiring further discussion is the extent to which ASCOBANS could make greater use of GIS data. Several respondents stated that it would be useful to have a GIS tool to overlay reported data, such as species distribution data, data on various threats, monitoring data, and boundaries of MPAs. This would allow simple representation of high risk areas, making it easier to determine whether monitoring in those areas is sufficient to ensure the implementation of the regional action plans. However, specific questions were raised relating to availability of data in useable formats, capacity in the Secretariat, opportunities to work with or through other organizations, and how the information would be used.
7. Several respondents also noted that increased quantification through the provision of more statistical/numerical data, possibly in tabular form, as well as specific questions on matters

¹ Respondents specifically noted the: Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD); Habitats Directive; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM); International Whaling Commission (IWC) and; ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME).

where additional information was required, would facilitate further analysis of the reports. It was also suggested that free text boxes are retained to allow for additional qualitative information but possibly with a word or character limit.

Frequency and timing of reporting

8. The issue of frequency and timing of reporting was raised several times. Suggestions were made to provide a comprehensive report either every two years (potentially in line with the voluntary biennial reports to the IWC Conservation Committee meetings) or once per cycle, prior to the Meeting of Parties.
9. One respondent suggested that a longer reporting cycle for comprehensive reports could be combined with more targeted reports on an annual basis, addressing only specific issues of concern that the AC has chosen to focus on in its subsequent meeting. This might provide the AC with focus and ensure that information provided by Parties is being better utilised. If combined with basic general information as required in Article 2.5, this would fulfil the obligations under the Agreement and is an option Parties might consider.
10. Respondents also raised difficulties with the deadline for submissions of national reports, which are due on 31 March of each year, requesting this be extended until later in the year in order to align with other related deadlines (i.e. under EC Regulation 812/2004 and MSFD reports on progress towards achieving GES).
11. However, it must be noted that the frequency and timing of reporting is laid out under Article 2.5 of the Agreement Text. Article 2.5 currently requires a '*brief report*' to be submitted '*not later than 31 March each year*' to "*cover progress made and difficulties experienced during the past calendar year in implementing the Agreement*". Article 4.2 also places a related obligation on the Secretariat each year to present Parties with a '*summary of the Party reports no later than 30 June*' thus sufficient time must be afforded the Secretariat to prepare an annual compilation.
12. Parties would therefore have to agree to either amend the current Agreement Text or interpret it differently. The latter may be possible through a Resolution² however legal advice on this would be necessary.

Use of the reported information

13. There was broad consensus among respondents that the information in the national reports is not being used to the fullest extent possible. This is largely due to the fact that the current format, with its unspecific questions and the resulting differences in the level of information provided, does not lend itself well to analysis.
14. It was generally acknowledged that increased standardisation facilitated by changes to the structure and content of the current reporting format would ease the analysis of reports. Providing a compilation document correlated to the different Action Plans and to the respective Action Points/Recommendations would also improve the ease of analysis. However, it was noted that further efforts may be needed to improve utilization by working groups.
15. It was also suggested that greater graphical representation of data would help with wider analysis and interpretation e.g. trends in abundance (for the entire Agreement Area as well as specific regions), and/or changes in threats and pressures.
16. In line with the suggestion made in paragraph 9 above, focussing reports on specific issues chosen by the Advisory Committee could help ensure the information reported is used

² See Resolution 7.7 on the application of Article 6.1 of the Agreement for a comparison.

more effectively as a basis for discussions and a more systematic identification of collaborative responses.

17. There is also significant potential scope for synergies with other parts of the CMS Family. An analytical tool for the online reporting system has been planned since its inception by CMS and AEWA. So far funds are still lacking in order to progress this, however, moving forward with this joint project would benefit ASCOBANS as well.

Functionality of the Online Reporting System (ORS)

18. Some general observations were made on the functionality of the online reporting system. While some responses were positive, other Parties experience difficulties and it is not clear the extent to which Parties use the full functionality of the system or whether it is has increased or decreased reporting burdens. Some general 'difficulties' in its use were alluded to along with suggestions for technical amendments to improve ease of use:
- Ability to add rows to tables in order to allow greater flexibility
 - Text boxes should allow tables to be pasted into them
 - A 'return to top' function and a drop-down menu of subheadings in the side panel
 - An option to look at the full report online (i.e. without the need to generate and download a PDF)
 - A query function, allowing the display of information submitted by all Parties on a specific topic (potentially narrowed further by year)
 - An additional "save" button that tracks down the screen
 - PDFs generated automatically immediately after submission.
 - The option to choose whether to see the whole form on one page or broken down by sections
 - A function for tracking changes made by delegates
19. The Secretariat will bring these issues to the attention of the colleagues in the Joint CMS/AEWA Communications, Information Management and Outreach Team, who are responsible for the maintenance and further development of the system by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC). Implementation of any of the suggested changes will depend both on the technical possibilities and the need and availability of funds.

Next Steps

20. At AC20 and 21, Parties endorsed the suggestion to take a two-step approach, starting with the consultation process now undertaken, to determine the content of the new format.
21. AC22 should now provide guidance on the recommendations made in this document, in particular addressing:
- a) The content to be included in a new comprehensive reporting format
 - b) The topics to be reported at regional level
 - c) The feasibility of making greater use of GI data and GIS tools
 - d) Whether changes would be beneficial to the frequency and associated deadline for Parties reports and, if so, whether a Resolution to make any changes is appropriate

- e) Whether changes to the frequency of comprehensive reports may mean changes to the content of any annual reports to the AC would be appropriate i.e. providing focussed topic based reports
 - f) The technical recommendations to improve the ease of use of the current ORS
22. The AC is also requested to agree how to progress the practical development of a revised reporting format, including consideration of the possible need to secure voluntary contributions to fund external expertise for the survey design (see AC21/AP48, and [AC22/Doc.8.2](#) on Activities Requiring Funding).

Annex 1

Draft Outline of a Revised National Reporting Format for ASCOBANS

In order to maintain the clear link to the ASCOBANS Conservation and Management Plan, it is proposed to maintain the general structure of reports, however with sub-sections significantly re-organized and expanded in line with the comments received.

For ease of reference, [AC22/Inf.15.2.a](#) contains the current reporting format.

The proposed format brings together all the views expressed within the returned questionnaires for consideration by the AC and therefore may not fully represent the individual views of the Parties involved.

Section I: General Information

A. Party Information

1. Name of Party
2. Details of National Coordinator (Focal Point) for ASCOBANS
3. Details of delegates (contributors to the report)
4. List of relevant national institutions

Section II: Habitat Conservation and Management (threats and pressures on cetaceans)

[Where indicated, each threat/pressure shall have the following standard questions associated with it:

- *Specific, where available quantitative information on the threat, provided on a national or regional geographic scale, as appropriate (by sea area / by action plan area)*
- *The perceived level of risk to favourable conservation status (FCS) or good environmental status (GES), i.e. is the pressure increasing, decreasing, staying the same, unknown*
- *Any notable instances/issues in the reporting period*
- *How the pressure is being managed, incl. relevant regulations / guidelines and the year of implementation (current and planned)*
- *Relevant new research/work/collaboration*

Any additional questions considered appropriate are indicated separately below].

A. Fisheries-related Threats

1. Bycatch

- *Standard questions*
- *Changes in fishing effort (for fisheries known to have an impact)*

2. Resource Depletion

- *Standard questions*

B. Disturbance (including potential physical impacts)

3. Noise (impulsive i.e. piling and continuous/ambient i.e. shipping)

- *Standard questions*
- Any notable instances/issues in the reporting period, including providing information on planned or completed significant developments/activities specifying for each one:
 - Status (applied for, permitted, under construction/development or ongoing, completed)
 - Sector, e.g. navy exercise, seismic survey, marine traffic, renewable energy, dredging, offshore construction (oil platform, harbour construction etc.) or others
- Noise management for individual approved activities, including:
 - Details on related EIAs, their contents and findings, as well as the resulting decisions and their rationale
 - Details on required noise mitigation measures for the project (e.g. bubble curtain, space-time management etc.)
 - Details on environmental (acoustic) survey/monitoring plans in place before, during and after the project
- Noise management for cumulative impact, including:
 - How the pressure is being managed, incl. relevant regulations / guidelines and the year of implementation (current and planned);
 - Details the national approval process for noise-generating projects
 - Level of impact that was assessed and deemed acceptable
 - Seismic shot point densities
- Relevant new research/work/collaboration
- Relevant new research on impacts, mitigation methods
- Relevant new work/collaboration, e.g. conference, meetings, symposia, workshops

4. Cetacean Watching Industry

- *Standard questions*

5. Recreational Sea Use

- *Standard questions*

6. Other Sources of Disturbance

- *Standard questions*

C. Habitat Change and Degradation (incl. potential physical impacts)

7. Pollution and hazardous substances (incl. microplastics)

- *Standard questions*

8. Marine Debris (ingestion and entanglement)

- *Standard questions*

9. Ship Strikes

- *Standard questions*

10. Unexploded Ordnance

- *Standard questions*

11. Climate Change (incl. ocean acidification)

- *Standard questions*

12. Physical Habitat Change (e.g. from construction)

- *Standard questions*

13. Other Issues

- *Standard questions*

D. Area-based Conservation / Marine Protected Areas

14. List of protected areas, e.g. Natura 2000 sites

- Number, names and status of MPAs with cetaceans forming part of the selection criteria
- Information on management measures, incl. any temporal/spatial restriction of activities i.e. seasonal fishery closures, changes to vessel activity etc.

15. Website or contact where spatial information on MPAs can be obtained

Section III: Surveys and Research

A. Biological Information

- 1. Abundance estimates**
- 2. Life history parameters**

B. Monitoring Programmes

- 3. High level overview of current monitoring programme**
- 4. Detail of any planned activities of note**
- 5. Relevant outputs to note**

C. Dedicated Surveys and Other Relevant Research

- 6. Aerial surveys (how many have been conducted, over which area, when?)**
 - How many have been conducted?
 - Over which area?
 - Timeframe of survey

7. *Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM)*

- Locations of moored instruments
- Timeframe of survey
- Make and model of instruments used

8. *Other research*

- Name of the project
- Institution
- Duration
- Aim
- Method

Section IV: Use of Bycatches and Strandings

A. Stranding Network

1. *Collection of Carcasses*

- Details (phone, email, website)

2. *Live-Stranding Responses*

- Details (phone, email, website)

B. Strandings

3. *Recorded events (for each)*

- Species
- Location
- Number of animals found per event
- Found dead or alive

4. *Chosen response in the event of live strandings*

- (Attempted/successful) re-floating
- (Attempted/successful) rehabilitations
- Euthanasia (incl. method used)

5. *Necropsies*

- Details of responsible institution (phone, email, website)
- Protocol used for dissection methodologies, collection of samples etc.
- Number of carcasses necropsied
- Causes of death identified
- Any notable issues to report

6. Database

- Details of responsible institution (phone, email, website)

Section V: Legislation

A. Overview of Legislative Framework

1. National

- Legislation
- Guidelines

2. Regional / International

- Legislation
- Guidelines

Section VI: Information and Education

A. Education and outreach

- Details of education/outreach events, stakeholders engaged i.e. industry, and threat/species focused on
- Details of information/outreach materials produced, threat/species focused on and target audience

Section VII: Other Matters

A. Other information or comments important for the Agreement

B. Difficulties in implementing the Agreement