

REPORT OF THE 24th MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Vilnius, Lithuania

25-27 September 2018



**Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**



AC24 participants outside the National Visitors Center State Service for Protected Areas, Vilnius, Lithuania

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Selected List of Acronyms used by ASCOBANS

AC	Advisory Committee
ACCOBAMS	Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area
ADD	Acoustic Deterrent Device
AIS	Automatic Identification System
ASCOBANS	Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas
AFMU	Administrative and Fund Management Unit (CMS)
APR	Annual Pregnancy Rate
AP	Action Plan
ASM	Average age
BALHAB	Baltic Sea Harbour Porpoise Foraging Habitats Project (DCE, CCB, NRM)
BALTFISH	Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum
BARTC	Baltic Sea Animals and Therapy Centre
BfN	Bundesamt für Naturschutz (German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation)
BIAS	Baltic Sea Information on the Acoustic Soundscape
BMSY	For a particular fish stock, the ratio of observed Biomass to the Biomass that would provide Maximum Sustainable Yield
BSAC	Baltic Sea Advisory Council
BSBD	Baltic Sea Bathymetry Database
BSHC	Baltic Sea Hydrographic Commission
BYC	Bycatch
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCB	Coalition Clean Baltic
CEPA	Communication, Education and Public Awareness
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy (European Commission)
CG FISHDATA	Correspondence Group for Fisheries data (HELCOM)
CI	Calving Interval
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
CLA	Catch Limit Algorithm (IWC)
CLARTAP	Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (UN)
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species
CODA	Cetacean Offshore Distribution and Abundance (St Andrews University Project)
COP	Conference of the Parties
CP	Conservation Plan
C-POD	Continuous Porpoise Detector
CSIP	Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme (UK Department of Environment)
DAS	Days at sea
dB	Decibel
DCE	Danish Centre for Environment and Energy, Aarhus University
DCF	Data Collection Framework (CFP)
DCM	
DCR	Data Collection Regulation
Defra	Department of environment, food and rural affairs (UK)
DEPONS	Disturbance Effects on the Harbour Porpoise Population in the North Sea (Aarhus University)
DFG	Derelict Fishing Gear
DTU Aqua	National Institute of Aquatic Resources, Denmark
EBSA	Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area (Under CBD)
EC	European Commission
EcAp	Ecosystem Approach
EC Council Regulation 812/2004	The Fisheries Regulation
ECS	European Cetacean Society
EDC	Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EFCA	European Fisheries Control Agency (EU)
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EU)
EP	European Parliament
ESW	Effective Strip Width

EU	European Union
FMSY	Fishing mortality consistent with achieving Maximum Sustainable Yield
FRV	Favourable Reference Values (EC HD)
GAMM	Generalized Additive Mixed Model
GEE	Generalized Estimating Equation
GES	Good Environmental Status (under EC MSFD)
GIS	Geographic Information System
HBD	Habitats and Birds Directives (EC)
HD	Habitats Directive (EC)
HELCOM	Helsinki Commission (Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission)
HOLAS	Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea
HP	Harbour Porpoise
HSI	Humane Society International
Hz	Hertz
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea
ICMMPA	International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas
IDBHP	International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise
IGO	Intergovernmental Organization
IMO	International Maritime Organization
ITAW	Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research (Hanover University)
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated
IWC	International Whaling Commission
JCP	Joint Cetacean Protocol (JNCC)
JG	Jastarnia Group
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (UK government agency)
JP2016	Jastarnia Plan (for recovery of Baltic Harbour Porpoises)
kHz	Kilohertz
kW	kW days – a measure of fishing effort
LSM	Lithuanian Sea Museum
MAMBO	Measuring and Monitoring Biodiversity Offshore
MAP	Mediterranean Action Plan
MAP	Multi-Annual Programme (EU)
MARE	Foundation for conservation and protection of (Baltic) marine ecosystem (Poland)
MEG	Marine Expert Group (EC HD)
MELUR	Ministry of Energy transition, Agriculture, Environment and Rural Areas, Schleswig-Holstein
MEPC	Marine Environment Protection Committee (IMO)
MERP	Marine Ecosystems Research Project (NERC/Defra)
MFSD	Marine Framework Strategy Directive (European Commission)
MMO	Marine Management Organization (UK)
MMPA	Marine Mammal Protected Area
MMPA	Marine Mammal Protection Act (USA)
MOP	Meeting of Parties
MOTHY	Prediction model for estimating drift at sea
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MS	Member State(s) (EU)
MSC	Marine Stewardship Council
MSE	Mass stranding event
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive (EC Directive 2008/56/EC)
MSP	Maritime Spatial Planning (EC)
MSY	Maximum Sustainable Yield
NABU	Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union, Germany (Naturschutzbund Deutschland)
NAMMCO	North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission
NASS	North Atlantic Sightings Survey
NE	North-east
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council (UK government agency)
NERI	National Environment Research Institute, (Ministry of the Environment, Denmark)
NFP	National Focal Point
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NM	Nautical Mile
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA, USA)

NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (US Federal Scientific Agency)
NOVANA	National Monitoring and Assessment Programme for the Aquatic and Terrestrial Environments (NERI, Denmark)
NRM	Swedish Natural History Museum
NS	North Sea
NSG	North Sea Group
NW	North-west
ObSERVE	Offshore survey programme of Irish government
OBSMER	Observation à la mer (observations at sea required by various fishery Regulations, France)
OIC	Ostsee Info Center (Baltic Sea Information Centre)
OSPAR	Oslo/Paris Convention (Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic)
PAF	Prioritized Action Framework (EC)
PAL	Porpoise Alerting Device (“pinger”)
PAM	Passive Acoustic Monitoring
PBR	Potential Biological Removal
PCB	Polychlorinated biphenyl
PELGAS	Pelagic ecosystem monitoring project, Bay of Biscay
POP	Persistent Organic Pollutants
PPM	Porpoise Positive Minutes
PSBMP	Protected Species Bycatch Monitoring Programme (UK)
pSCI	Proposed Site of Community Importance (HD)
RAC-SPA	Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (Barcelona Convention)
RASS	Risk Assessment for Sourcing Seafood
RBINS	Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences
RCG	Regional Coordination Groups (DCF)
RDBES	Regional Database and Estimating System (ICES)
REFIT	Regulatory Fitness and performance (EC)
REM	Remote Electronic Monitoring
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organization
RLA	Removals Limit Algorithm (SMRU)
SAC	Special Area of Conservation (EC Habitats Directive)
SAMBAH	Static Acoustic Monitoring of the Baltic Sea Harbour Porpoise (EC Life Project)
SAP	Species Action Plan
SAR	Seas at Risk
SBSTTA	Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (CBD)
SCANS	Small Cetacean Abundance in the North Sea (SCANS 1994, SCANS II 2005, SCANS III 2016)
SCI	Site of Community Importance
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SE	South-east
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
Seafish	UK Sea Fish Industry Authority
SEAMARCO	Sea Mammal Research Company (The Netherlands)
SG	Steering Group
SLU	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
SMRU	Sea Mammal Research Unit (St Andrews University)
SNP	Single Nucleotide Polymorphism
sPCA	Spatial Principal Component Analysis
SSB	Spawning Stock Biomass
STECF	Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (European Commission)
STELLA	Gill net fisheries: Development of alternative management approaches (Institute of Baltic Sea Fisheries, Thünen)
SW	South-west
SWF	Sea Watch Foundation
SwAM	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water management
TAC	Total Allowable Catch
TG	Technical Group (EU)
TG Noise	Technical Group on underwater noise (MSFD)
T-POD	Timing Porpoise Detector
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNON	United Nations Office in Nairobi
VMS	Vessel Monitoring System
WBBK	Western Baltic Belt Sea and Kattegat
WBBKP	Western Baltic Belt Sea and Kattegat Plan (for conservation of the Harbour Porpoise population)
WCA	World Cetacean Alliance
WDC	Whale and Dolphin Conservation
WGBYC	Working Group on Bycatch of protected species (ICES)
WGMME	Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (ICES)
WKDIVAGG	(ICES)
WPA	Work Plan Activity
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
ZSL	Zoological Society of London

REPORT OF THE 24th ASCOBANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

1. Opening of the Meeting

1. The Chair of the Advisory Committee (Mr. Sami Hassani, France) welcomed participants to the Lithuanian Ministry of the Environment National Visitors' Centre for the 24th meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee. He noted that this was the first ASCOBANS meeting to be held in Lithuania, and said he was pleased to see that all Parties were present. He then thanked the Ministry for the Environment of Lithuania for its attentive and thorough preparations for the meeting.

1.1 Welcoming Remarks

2. The Chair introduced Mr. Kestutis Navickas, the Minister for the Environment of Lithuania.

3. The Minister welcomed the meeting participants to Vilnius. He stressed that marine habitats were extremely important, but that they remained poorly known in Lithuania and beyond. It was important to understand biodiversity in the Baltic, but because they were invisible, underwater habitats did not receive the attention they deserved. Culture also presented a challenge because people were terrestrially minded, although whales and other cetaceans made good stories which could open people's eyes to the importance of the marine environment.

4. It was a pleasure to welcome participants to the 24th ASCOBANS AC, and he was well aware of the importance of ASCOBANS and its mother Agreement CMS. He drew attention to the challenges of poor knowledge of the marine environment, and in particular, plastic pollution of those habitats. Another challenge in Marine Protected Areas was unsustainable fishing, and this was an issue under discussion among all the countries around the Baltic. Public information was also important, and there was a need to find a balance between biodiversity conservation and economic activity.

5. The Harbour Porpoise was the only small cetacean in the Baltic, and he believed that common efforts to protect cetaceans would result in positive change.

6. He concluded by thanking ASCOBANS for holding its AC meeting in Lithuania, and said he hoped for fruitful discussions and a productive meeting. He was looking forward to seeing the final conclusions of the meeting which politicians would use to put conservation policy into practice.

7. Ms. Melanie Virtue (Secretariat) thanked the minister for his warm welcome. This was the first visit to Lithuania for many participants. She added her thanks to Lithuanian colleagues and hosts for their help during preparations for the meeting and expressed appreciation for the wonderful displays at the venue.

8. Ms. Virtue explained that Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) had resigned her position a year earlier, because unfortunately, CMS required that the post holder should be located in Bonn. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel had worked from home in Hamburg for the past year, and Jenny Renell from Finland had been recruited from over 400 applicants and was present at the meeting. She was highly qualified for the role, having worked with the CMS Secretariat office in Abu Dhabi for the past nine years on the Raptors and Dugong MOUs, and at CMS COP12 in Manila, she had taken on an exacting role with responsibility for all documents. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) was flexible about the timing of the handover, which

remained uncertain, and a smooth transition was assured (it has since been agreed that the hand-over will take place at the end of the year).

9. Ms. Renell thanked Ms. Virtue for her warm introduction and said she looked forward to working with all the participants and with the wider ASCOBANS network.

1.2 Adoption of the Agenda

10. The Chair presented the provisional agenda (document [AC24/Doc.1.2.a/Rev.1](#)) and the provisional annotated agenda and schedule (document [AC24/Doc.1.2.b/Rev.1](#)) and invited comments and suggestions for amendments.

11. Ms. Karen Stockin (International Whaling Commission) offered to inform the meeting about the new IWC whale watching handbook under Agenda item 12 (Any other business).

12. Ms. Aline Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) said that Mr. Brownlow (Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme) would present information about a recent unusual mortality incident in the UK and Ireland in which more than 70 beaked whales had been stranded. This would be taken under Item 2.5.5 on 26 September.

13. The Agenda was adopted subject to inclusion of these items.

14. The Chair then sought comments on the Rules of Procedure (document [AC24/Inf.1.2.a](#)), noting that the Rules of Procedure adopted at MOP8 would be used.

1.3 Opening of the Scientific Session

15. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) presented document [AC24/Doc.1.3](#), a progress report against the Work Plan for the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee and Secretariat 2017-2020 (see Resolution 8.2), where overall the implementation was well on track. The national report from Denmark had been delayed and would be provided shortly.

2. Review of new information on threats to small cetaceans (reporting cycle 2017 only)

2.1 Bycatch

16. The session was chaired by Mr. Peter Evans (Sea Watch Foundation; Chair of the ASCOBANS Bycatch Working Group). Mr. Evans introduced Ms. Kelly Macleod (UK) and Ms. Sara Königson (Sweden), Co-chairs of the ICES Working Group on Bycatch (WGBYC), who gave a presentation.

2.1.1 Update on monitoring, mitigation and assessment of bycatch from the ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC)

17. The [presentation](#) by Ms. Macleod and Ms. Königson summarized the main outcomes of the latest ICES WGBYC meeting on Bycatch of protected species, held in Iceland in May 2018, and detailed in document [AC24/Inf.2.1.b](#).

18. The presentation explained the role of WGBYC, especially the compilation of data from national reports under EC Council Regulation 812/2004 into a database, and the annual assessment of monitoring, bycatch and mitigation, summarized results of which were presented, together with a bycatch risk assessment on Common Dolphin in the midwater trawls

and nets used in the Celtic Sea and Bay of Biscay. The next meeting would be in early March 2019 in Portugal.

19. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) brought up the issue of difficulties related to monitoring fishing effort. A number of methods were available, but none provides a complete assessment of fishing effort relevant to the potential to cause bycatch, and the results of different methods often gave different results. More comprehensive methods giving a more accurate picture of bycatch risk were needed.

20. Ms. Königson replied that not all EU Member States delivered the necessary data, and that better results would be achieved if they did. The biggest gap in data was from small vessels in all Member States. Other ICES groups were working on ways of extrapolating from various data sources and it was hoped that further analyses would be possible.

21. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) added that when fishing effort was mapped from different sources, some areas were covered by one method, but not others. This presented difficulties when doing risk mapping.

22. Ms. Sarah Dolman (Whale and Dolphin Conservation) observed that there appeared to be issues with data availability on both fisheries and bycatch. She asked whether it was possible to demonstrate that bycatch was a threat to some populations, and whether the annual advice being given was making a difference. If this was not the case, she asked what could be done to make the advice influential.

23. Ms. Macleod (UK) replied that these questions were hard to judge. One challenge was that assessments were currently area-specific, and this should be taken into account when regulations were changed. In the UK, the emphasis had switched more towards mitigation measures. She considered all AC members to have a role in raising awareness of these issues in their countries and added that a particular problem was the focus of Regulation EC 812/2004 on bigger vessels.

24. Ms. Katarzyna Kaminska (Poland) asked why no data had been presented from the Baltic, and why data on fishing effort was so incomplete.

25. Ms. Königson replied that no Risk Assessment had been done by ICES in the Baltic in 2018, although a FishPi Risk Assessment had been done. ICES concentrated on protected species and lacked the capacity to assess all areas and all species each year.

26. Regarding the quality of fishing effort data, Ms. Königson said that not all EU states have a log book system for small vessels, many of which were operated by part-time fishermen. Sweden was an exception in this regard, and fishing effort by small vessels was recorded.

27. Ms. Kaminska (Poland) asked whether it was known what would follow EC Regulation 812/2004 after it was repealed.

28. Ms. Königson replied that data from all regional and other databases would need to be summarized and included under the new EUMAP. Ms. Macleod added that there would be reporting requirements under EUMAP when Regulation 812 was repealed.

29. Mr. Vedran Nikolic (DG Environment) thanked ICES for their consistent and high-quality advice, and summarized expectations in relation to bycatch following the repeal of Regulation 812. Deficiencies in Regulation 812 had been an obstacle to reliable and robust bycatch data. Member states had new obligations and it was now obligatory for data on bycatch (including negative data) to be recorded for protected species for all fisheries. These included all marine mammals, plus seabirds & turtles, and vessels of all sizes were now included in the Regulation. The EU was paying for data collection and expected this to happen in a standardized, well-

organized manner. A huge increase in effort from Member States was expected in the current EU multi-annual data collection programme (2017-2019).

30. Recommendations on methodologies, including dedicated surveys, had been made by relevant bodies using their knowledge of best practice. Advice on how to improve the work plans of Member States would be welcomed before they kicked off (some are overdue). The EC could also offer practical advice on how this could be done. ICES had a standing invite to meetings of Regional Coordination Groups for data collection, and other ways of contributing will be explored.

31. Moving on to the Data Collection Framework (DCF), which is the framework for collecting all fisheries data including that on bycatch, data would be submitted from 2018 onward and templates for this were under development. Regarding the reliability of fishing effort data, the Commission proposed in the revised control regulations that all vessels should be fitted with VMS or similar tracking devices.

32. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) expressed concern that under the new DCF, effort would focus on recording non-target fish species. Different skills were required to record marine mammals. Another issue was small boats that were unsuitable for deployment of VMS.

33. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) replied that the Commission would ask countries to ensure that all relevant taxa and appropriate methods were included when planning monitoring programmes, including, if appropriate, training of on-board observers, and possibly the deployment of cameras. Regarding the tracking of small boats, the proposed changes to the control regulations introduced this as an obligation. Now 'micro-VMS' was available, as well as a system that used mobile telephone networks. Member States would be able to use the European Maritime and Fisheries fund to pay for these systems.

2.1.2 Analysis of national reporting data

34. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation), the Chair of the CMS ASCOBANS Bycatch Working Group, presented a summary of the bycatch information submitted in the national reports (documents [AC24/Inf.2.a-j](#)) which had been filled in using a standard template (document [AC24/Inf.2.0.](#))

35. The [presentation](#) considered national reporting to have been inconsistent and incomplete in most countries. Mr. Evans concluded that all countries should: submit annual reports, including supporting documents (or linking to them); provide maps of national fishing effort each year by gear type; provide a summary of number of vessels by size, type and gear type; summarize the percentage of vessels of each type having dedicated monitoring; list the number of bycaught cetaceans by species, gear type and area; and, list the number of necropsies by species, identifying those caused by bycatch.

36. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) expressed disappointment at the paucity of data in the reports. Regarding Section 3, question 1 in the report, countries submitted reports on the conservation status of species under the Habitats Directive but had reported 'unknown' for many species.

37. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) agreed that there was a problem, with information flow between different organizations often lacking.

2.1.3 Joint Working Group on bycatch with ACCOBAMS

38. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) reminded the meeting that in 2020, the national reports would again require a review of new information on bycatch.

39. The TORs of the Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Bycatch Working Group (document [AC24/Inf.2.1.a](#)) had been discussed at AC23. Members of the new Working Group could be national coordinators, approved observers, external experts or existing members of the ASCOBANS Bycatch Working Group. A nomination procedure was open and candidates would be reviewed later in 2018.

40. Mr. Mazzariol (ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee member) reported that the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee would nominate experts at their forthcoming 12th meeting (5-8 November 2018). ACCOBAMS already had a task manager for interaction with fisheries, and results of the nomination process would be available in November.

41. Mr. Hassani (France) reported that the French authorities were planning to participate in this Working Group and were offering to host a workshop of the new Group in 2019.

2.1.4 The US Marine Mammal Protection Act Import provisions: The regulation, the list of foreign fisheries, and a regional analysis of marine mammal bycatch

42. The Chair welcomed Lauren Fields (National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA) who gave a [presentation](#) reviewing the US Marine Mammal Protection Act import provisions for fish products for human consumption. Further information was provided in the NOAA Seafood Import provisions (document [AC24/Inf.2.1.e](#)) and NOAA Compliance Guide (document [AC24/Inf.2.1.f](#)).

43. The aim of the 1972 Act was to reduce marine bycatch and hold other nations to US standards. The import of seafood products to the USA could be banned under the Act if they had been caught using low standards. Fisheries using gillnets, stationary gear or longlines would need to develop a regulatory programme comparable to that in the US. After presenting information relating to 2,300 export fisheries, Ms. Fields concluded that the NMFS would continue to coordinate with other countries, develop gear, and continue research, data collection and monitoring, to better understand the impacts of fishing gear on bycatch risk.

44. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) said that there had been correspondence between the European Commission and NMFS, and the US Marine Mammal Protection Act import provisions had been discussed at a meeting with Member States. The Member States would welcome further information and the European Commission was ready to provide feedback.

45. Ms. Fields had been in coordination with DG MARE and had also talked to individual countries through their embassies in Washington DC. This had helped to fill data gaps.

46. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation), Ms. Kaminska (Poland) and Ms. Dolman (WDC) asked for clarification of specific discrepancies between the presented data and their own information. Ms. Fields explained that she had presented the data in the form in which they had been reported to her, which may not always have had the fine resolution that would be ideal.

47. Ms. Königson (Sweden) expressed satisfaction that the issue of multiplication of bycatch giving a falsely inflated picture in some regions was being addressed. Multiplication caused by bycatch being recorded additionally for different fish species caught by the same vessel was a confusing issue that presented a false picture.

48. Ms. Macleod (UK) asked whether the MMPA used potential biological removal (PBR) in the assessment of exempt fisheries. This was not used by most ASCOBANS Parties.

49. Ms. Fields replied that data from PBR were welcomed if they were available from a country, but that if another method was used, they took that into account.

50. Ms. Alice Doyle (UK) remarked that the presentation had focused on bycatch and asked whether aquaculture was also considered by the MMPA import provisions. She gave the example of licensed shooting of seals by aquaculture interests in Scotland as giving cause for concern.

51. Ms. Fields said that intentional killing of marine mammals was prohibited under the MMPA import provisions, and that the US would not be able to import aquaculture produce from any country that tolerated this practice.

2.1.5 Technical discussion on semi-driftnets

52. As mandated by AC23 (Action Point 14), the Chair raised the issue of how drift nets are defined, mentioning the existence in Poland of semi-driftnets, and introduced an explanatory [presentation](#) by Ms. Iwona Pawliczka (Poland).

53. The presentation described the use of different types of driftnet in Puck Bay, Poland. After 2004, when EC Regulation 812 became legally binding in Poland, fishermen had stopped reporting bycatch to Hel Marine Station. Harbour Porpoise had a relatively high occurrence at Puck Bay and marine biologists considered the driftnets there to be a threat.

54. Ms. Kaminska (Poland) gave a complementary [presentation](#) about the use of semi-driftnets. Semi-driftnets were defined as being anchored on one side, so that they drifted with the water current. They were usually very short (<70m long) due to the risk of entanglement at the quite narrow Puck Bay and several semi-drift nets set in the same location. Set nets were anchored on both sides and could be up to 3.5 km long. Ms Kaminska considered Puck Bay not to be a significant site for Harbour Porpoise (*contra* Ms. Pawliczka) and said that comparison of data from 2004 and 2013 suggested that most porpoises had been caught in traditionally set nets (anchored at both sides).

55. The chair recalled that one of the aims of the Jastarnia Plan for the recovery of the Harbour Porpoise in the Baltic was to re-establish populations of this, the most endangered population (with fewer than 500 individuals) in former areas.

56. Ms. Ida Carlén (Coalition Clean Baltic) pointed out that although it was not demonstrated by all available datasets, Puck Bay did seem to be an important area for Harbour Porpoises.

57. Ms. Pawliczka asked Ms. Kaminska why semi-driftnets were not considered a problem, especially as their bycatch was not recorded separately.

58. Ms. Kaminska replied that semi-driftnets were used less nowadays because there were fewer fish in Puck Bay than in the past. She did not see why semi-driftnets should be banned and not other gill nets, because all these nets appeared to pose a similar risk.

59. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) pointed out that the definition of the net was not important; if there was a gear type that posed a particular risk, it was essential to ensure adequate monitoring and mitigation. Monitoring and mitigation of these nets had not happened in the past and all high risk gear types needed to be adequately monitored, especially for an endangered population like the Baltic Harbour Porpoise.

60. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) understood that the term driftnet also included any gill net (or any other net) with a stabilizing device, which would allow the net to drift in the water column. He said this issue could be further discussed with DG MARE to provide technical interpretations.

61. Ms. Pawliczka (Poland) asked whether semi-drifts were an issue in other Baltic countries.

62. Ms. Königson (Sweden) replied that they were not really an issue in Sweden, and Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) clarified that driftnets could be used in Sweden if the target species was not Salmon, but that any driftnetting in Sweden would be recorded as use of a bottom-set net.

63. Mr. Olli Loisa (Finland) added that driftnets were legal in Finland if used with small mesh sizes for Herring or white fish, but that these mesh sizes did not present a risk for Harbour Porpoise.

2.1.6 Marine Stewardship Council

64. As requested by AC23 (Action Point 6), Mr. Matt Gummery (Marine Stewardship Council) gave a [presentation](#) titled 'Strengthening engagement with the MSC'. Mr. Gummery summarized the activities of MSC and the processes by which it worked. The latest Fisheries Standard Review was being launched on that very day on the MSC website. There would be technical workshops in mid-2019 where the participation of ASCOBANS observers would be welcome.

65. The Chair asked whether there was scope for a more formal arrangement between ASCOBANS and MSC. ASCOBANS would be able to provide a list of certified and high-risk fisheries and would be glad to share this information with MSC. Engagement with other expert groups globally would also benefit MSC assessments in other regions.

66. Mr. Gummery welcomed the offer of closer relations between the two organizations, saying that MSC was aware of the need to reach out to more stakeholders, particularly for assessments of stock status, environmental impact and effective management. The global communications team at MSC was in the process of recruiting a Stakeholder Liaison Director. After that, a proper strategy to involve stakeholders should be developed within 6 months.

67. Mr. Mark Simmonds (Humane Society International) observed that although ASCOBANS provided triggers for fisheries standards assessments for some species, because large cetaceans were not included in ASCOBANS, there might be a risk of these assessments being based on incomplete information. He then asked whether MSC saw ASCOBANS as a partner going forward.

68. Mr. Gummery replied that the assessment team was aware of the missing information and regarded the triggers as a convenient approach to reviewing which species to assess. Having input from ASCOBANS would be extremely useful, especially with regard to bycatch and information gathering by fisheries.

69. Mr. Hassani (France) asked why 27 certifications had recently been suspended.

70. Mr. Gummery was unable to provide complete details but was sure that bycatch and stock status had been the cause of some of the suspensions.

71. Ms. Dolman (Whale and Dolphin Conservation) mentioned her involvement in a BirdLife International project that was reviewing key global MSC fisheries bycatch of all taxa. The NOAA import provisions could also be very useful to MSC. She asked whether MSC was engaging with these organizations, and if they anticipated any problems with this.

72. Mr. Gummery replied that MSC had a strong interest in the BirdLife paper and that MSC was in contact with Rory Crawford at BirdLife. With regard to MMPA, MSC was at an early stage of engagement and had participated as an observer in their groups. MSC had a contract to assess the fisheries list and include the results in the fisheries standard review.

73. Ms. Macleod (UK) asked how MSC policy assessed the bycatch of marine mammals.

74. Mr. Gummery presented an example of a scoring table used by MSC assessment teams, under which fisheries were given a score of 60, 80 or 100 according to various criteria. Further details were available on the MSC website.

75. The Chair asked how Mr. Gummery envisaged the development of relations between MSC and ASCOBANS going forward.

76. Mr. Gummery said that MSC would welcome participation in future ASCOBANS AC meetings and hoped to stay in touch intersessionally on relevant issues. When MSC consultation dates became available, input from ASCOBANS into assessment processes would be very welcome.

2.1.7 A new web-based tool for seafood businesses to assess the environmental risks when sourcing fish

77. Ms. Eunice Pinn (Seafish, UK) gave a [presentation](#) introducing a new web-based tool for seafood businesses to assess the environmental risks when sourcing fish: Risk Assessment for Sourcing Seafood (RASS) ([AC24/Inf.2.1.c](#)).

78. The presentation explained how RASS worked. It had been set up to allow fish buyers to make informed judgements about the sources of the seafood they bought, and 380 fishery profiles of 80 species were available online. Next steps were completion of a review to ensure standardized assessments for all RASS profiles, and another review of bycatch scoring.

79. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) agreed with Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) and Ms. Macleod (UK) that it would be valuable for ASCOBANS to engage with the two certification schemes – MSC and RASS. This new collaboration would require a focal point within ASCOBANS, or possibly with ASCOBANS being represented by some other body. If the cooperation was to involve ASCOBANS endorsing things, the Parties would need to be involved. Consideration was needed of a process under which this would work.

80. Ms. Pinn (Seafish) agreed that this new area of work had been needed for a while and was an obvious addition to the existing work of ASCOBANS.

81. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) thought engagement with the certification schemes would be best organized through the Secretariat and the Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Working Group on bycatch, where Parties would be able to agree or disagree on actions.

82. Mr. Simmonds observed that engagement with these schemes would not be a small undertaking, and a good approach might be for a group to consider possibilities and come back to the AC with a proposal.

2.1.8 Discussion and recommendations

83. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) wrapped up by presenting the Recommendations in the [oral report](#) of the Bycatch Working Group.

84. Ms. Macleod (UK) pointed out that, as discussed the previous day in the North Sea Working Group meeting, an important point about coordinating activities and results through collaboration between countries was missing. A more 'joined-up' approach to optimize the use of resources was needed.

85. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) agreed, noting that difficulties in communication had delayed implementation of some of these recommendations. Recommendations at these meetings were not made by the same people involved, for example, in meetings at the EC. More emphasis on how to practically solve issues – rather than just telling countries what to

do - would be useful. Better engagement of all stakeholders would ensure better implementation of the Recommendations.

86. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) observed that these were general recommendations, and that more detail on practical implementation would be welcome. This might be best done through a different body such as the new Joint ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Bycatch Working Group. These kinds of details were important for getting the right advice at the right time when things were discussed at EU level.

87. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) thought it would be beneficial if the AC could be represented at more meetings, such as with the new DCF under the EC Common Fisheries Policy.

88. Ms. Stockin (International Whaling Commission) stressed the high importance of synergies. There were many opportunities, and ASCOBANS should ensure that it made use of existing practices and protocols and avoided reinventing wheels.

89. Ms. Dolman (Whale and Dolphin Conservation) noted, and Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) agreed, that some of the general, high-level points in the Recommendations would benefit from the addition of more specific bullet points to make them more explicit and put them in line with the Recommendations of the North Sea Group meeting the previous day.

90. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) agreed to update the wording of the Recommendations and circulate them for input by the AC members over the following two days.

91. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) reminded the Committee that bycatch was the biggest issue facing small cetaceans in the Agreement area, and that some of the Recommendations on bycatch produced during this session would be tabled as Action Points while others might form the basis of a Draft Resolution for ASCOBANS MOP9 in 2020.

92. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) reported on the establishment of the IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI) which had been endorsed at the recent IWC67 meeting. A coordinator would take forward a detailed strategic plan. The next phase of work was to look for case studies to explore. The focus was on developing effective mitigation, starting with small scale fisheries such as issues around gillnets.

93. Ms. Stockin (International Whaling Commission) drew attention to Information documents [AC24/Inf.2.5.c](#) and [AC24/Inf.2.5.d](#) where further details of the BMI were available.

94. The Chair recalled that regarding the actions recommended by the Working Group, there had been proposals for contracts to 1) examine the costs and benefits of different monitoring approaches in fisheries with high cetacean bycatch in the ASCOBANS region (and beyond) (see draft Terms of Reference in Annex 3); and 2) to determine costs of individual mitigation measures which could be used in high bycatch fisheries within the ASCOBANS area – so that countries would understand the available options (see draft Terms of Reference in Annex 4). There was also the long-standing mandate for a Part II Workshop on Unacceptable Interactions, the Terms of Reference for which had been agreed at an [expert workshop](#) on the matter in 2017 (see Annex 4 in the [report](#)). There had been progress made in developing the conservation management approaches, but more input was needed in order to prepare adequately for a Part II workshop.

95. Ms. Macleod (UK) referred to the draft recommendation on bycatch requesting Parties to decide on a management procedure for determining maximum allowable bycatch by species and assessment unit to ensure that ASCOBANS objectives to reduce bycatch are met (see Action Point 18). If this Action Point was to be agreed, a discussion of the approach would need to take place at the Part II workshop. Document [AC24/Inf.2.1.b](#) outlined a Removal Limit

Algorithm that would play a part in this approach. The proposed management procedure was driven by conservation objectives, and a tighter, more quantitative conservation objective would be welcome. Agreed definition of terms such as 'long-term' and 'short-term' was needed. Parties would need to agree on these types of management decisions.

96. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) drew attention to a data quality issue alluded to in document [AC24/Inf.2.1.b](#). It was important to be realistic about what could be achieved with the data, and the current discussion emphasized that these issues deserved further consideration – in a workshop, as suggested by Ms. Macleod.

97. Ms. Macleod (UK) agreed that there was indeed a data quality issue. Analysis using the Removals Limit Algorithm (RLA) developed by SMRU allowed simulations to be run to test different scenarios, and the method was very flexible, being able to capture uncertainty around the data. Strandings modelling data suffered from the same issue of many unknown parameters. An advantage of RLA was that it could test the robustness or uncertainty of the modelling.

98. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) observed that there was no dissent about the suggestions for a Part II workshop.

99. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) said that this approach looked very interesting from the perspective of the EC. It would help Member States comply with obligations regarding bycatch in the Habitats Directive. Funding might be an issue, but more than 600 million euro from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) had been allocated for biodiversity conservation by EU Member States, but they had so far made use of less than 10% of this and there was a strong need to persuade Parties to use the funding available through EU membership.

100. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) recalled that one of the recommendations of the North Sea meeting had been to make more use of EMFF.

101. The chair wrapped up the session by inviting amendments and additions to the general Recommendations within the next 24 hours.

Action Points on Bycatch

8.) Parties to work nationally (e.g. through EU data collection work plans) and regionally (through DCF Regional Coordination Groups) to improve the quality and availability of fishing effort data (e.g. by region, gear-type, net length, vessel size category, season, and country).

9.) Agree to commission a cost-benefit analysis of available and potential monitoring tools aboard fishing vessels (e.g. observers, mobile REM) that will investigate options for more robust and cost-effective bycatch monitoring in the ASCOBANS region, in liaison with Parties and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. EC, HELCOM, ICES, IWC, OSPAR). The method needs to also be suitable for vessels less than 15 meters in length.

10.) Parties should draw on fisheries funding from the EU (e.g. EMFF) to jointly implement better bycatch monitoring and mitigation, with assistance from the European Commission.

11.) Parties to make sure that their financial needs for ASCOBANS' species conservation actions are properly reflected in the Prioritized Action Frameworks (PAFs) under the Habitats Directive for the next EU multi-annual financial framework by the end of 2018 at the latest.

12.) Agree to commission a review of available mitigation methods applicable to high-risk fisheries within the ASCOBANS Agreement Area, to investigate gear- and area-specific solutions to mitigate bycatch, including alternative fishing methods. Throughout this process

those engaged in the review are to closely liaise with Parties and other stakeholders, including the IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI).

13.) Identify pilot studies for bycatch mitigation, taking into account the outputs of the , in close liaison with the IWC BMI.

14.) Parties to address the challenges for monitoring cetacean bycatch as a consequence of working under the EU DCF-MAP. These include an appropriate sampling design (e.g. taking account of areas, métiers, number of vessels to be sampled, amount of sampling days/hauls), and ensuring that trained and dedicated observers are deployed in sufficient numbers and adequately engaged in monitoring cetaceans, drawing upon knowledge of high-risk areas and fisheries. Noting that additional dedicated monitoring may be required. The Secretariat to address these issues through participation in RCGs as observers, if feasible.

15.) Parties to influence the discussion on EU Fishing Regulations (e.g. control regulation) in order to include monitoring requirements to be used for monitoring of small cetacean bycatch.

16.) Parties to pass on recommendations for bycatch monitoring and mitigation within their own country to the appropriate persons, to facilitate engagement internationally, particularly in discussions with the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) and the European Commission.

17.) Parties to continue supporting the international strandings database aiming to provide supplementary information on causes of death, to assess the scale of bycatch and its potential impacts.

18.) Parties to decide a management procedure approach to ensure that ASCOBANS objectives (e.g. minimising bycatch whilst working towards a zero-bycatch target) are met. Quantitative triggers for action may need to be established [in line with requirements under EU environmental legislation].

19.) Parties to take mitigation action as soon as possible where it is already known that particular fisheries are resulting in notable bycatch.

20.) The Secretariat to ask the European Commission for advice on how to classify semi-drift nets at métier level IV, so that EU Member States can be clear on their usage in particular regions.

2.2 Resource depletion

2.2.1 Analysis of national reporting data

102. Mr. Graham Pierce (Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas) (North Sea Group) gave a [presentation](#) titled 'Geographic variation in Harbour Porpoise diet'.

103. The presentation examined the status of demersal species stocks in the Greater North Sea area using ICES and other data and found evidence that not all fish stocks were in good condition, which could be interpreted as evidence of prey depletion.

104. With regard to data from the national reports, only Poland and Sweden reported taking specific measures to collect evidence of national fish depletion, and only Sweden and the UK reported making use of necropsy data. There were a number of national surveys looking at body condition.

2.2.2 Prey depletion and changes in prey quality

105. In line with the mandate from AC23 to include prey depletion and changes in prey quality in the Agenda for AC24, Mr. Pierce (Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas) introduced Ms. Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) who continued his presentation with information about Harbour Porpoise diet in relation to these issues in the Baltic.

106. The presentation suggested that the three populations of Harbour Porpoises in the Baltic and North Seas have adapted differently to different prey types. Changes in prey quality could be a result of overfishing, warming climate, or pollution, and all could cause starvation.

2.2.3 Discussion and recommendations

107. Mr. Hassani (France) observed that prey depletion was not included in the national reporting template. Current monitoring in the Bay of Biscay did include studies of prey quality, but results of the assessment were not yet ready.

108. Ms. Meike Scheidat (Netherlands) asked whether Mr. Pierce (Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas) considered the national reports to fulfil the function for the Parties of demonstrating their adherence to their obligations under the Agreement.

109. Mr. Pierce thought there was room for improvement in this area.

110. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) suggested that consideration should be given to establishing a Working Group on prey depletion. It was a key issue behind impacts on fish stocks, with strong ecosystem consequences. The Group could collate information and keep a watching brief on stock size changes and trends.

111. Mr. Pierce (Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas) pointed out that a useful data source for Parties might be information from fisheries surveys in each country. These data were held by ICES and could be requested, although obtaining data directly from national sources might be preferable.

112. Ms. Sveegaard (Denmark) said that blubber condition could be a good indicator of prey depletion, but there were few specimens to work with in the Baltic. A Working Group would provide a good approach to keeping an eye on this.

113. Ms. Lonneke IJsseldijk (Utrecht University) acknowledged that blubber thickness was often used as an indicator of health, but this did not often reflect health status of an individual accurately and therefore care was needed in interpretation. Assessing health was complex and there were often other underlying reasons for emaciation.

114. Mr. Pierce (Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas) did not think blubber thickness was the best measure and did not advocate its use to indicate resource depletion.

115. Mr. Hassani (France) added that when considering blubber thickness, it was important to incorporate ecological parameters. For example, blubber thickness differs before and after the moult, and before and after breeding.

116. Ms. Susanne Viker (Sweden) said that it would be helpful for ASCOBANS to cooperate with HELCOM on this issue.

117. Ms. Penina Blankett (Finland) agreed, noting that the HELCOM report on the Baltic Sea included information about the abundance of coastal fish species¹ and information on fish stocks.

118. Mr. Pierce (Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas) noted that the discussion had produced recommendations covering three main areas: collating fish abundance, setting up a Working Group, and collaborating with HELCOM.

119. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) saw value in including in the Recommendations a review of how MPAs contribute to maintaining the species in a good conservation status. There were many MPAs for Harbour Porpoise and Bottlenose Dolphin under EU Natura 2000 network, and fisheries in MPAs sometimes closed to protect fish stocks for threatened species, for example in certain areas of the North Sea to conserve Sandeels for Kittiwakes. The issue of how to deal with fisheries in MPAs was an area where there was scope for more work by Parties.

120. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) pointed out that one of the challenges was that many MPAs were small, and animals foraged outside them.

121. Ms. Kaminska (Poland) suggested inviting a representative from ICES to join the proposed Working Group. It would be helpful to have a fisheries scientist in the group.

122. Mr. Andrew Brownlow (Cetacean Stranding Investigation Programme) observed the importance of thorough investigations of health in order to assess the reasons for strandings. Blubber thickness was one of many parameters to consider.

123. Ms. Macleod (UK) stressed the need for more fundamental information about what marine mammals were eating, and where and when.

124. Mr. Pierce (Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas) agreed that there were huge variations in diet that required study.

125. Ms. Sveegaard (Denmark) pointed out that studies of stomach content in European waters showed that there were strong similarities in the principal prey species throughout the region. There was a possibility that small fish might be a kind of backup if bigger ones were not available.

126. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) observed that the focus of dietary studies was rightly on Harbour Porpoise, but there were other species for which much less was known where research was needed.

127. Mr. Pierce and Mr. Evans pointed out that animals stored fat in anticipation of food shortages and could be lean when food was plentiful. Animals such as Harbour Porpoises also stayed lean to help avoid predation, for example by Bottlenose Dolphins.

128. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) said it would be interesting to include examination of stress hormones in studies of health status.

129. Discussion with Ms. Doyle (UK) and Ms. Sveegaard (Denmark) concluded that stress hormones could be collected from blow samples, and from hair and skin, but that care was needed not to stress the animals while collecting the samples. Results were also difficult to interpret because of high natural variations in hormone levels.

¹ <http://stateofthebalticsea.helcom.fi/biodiversity-and-its-status/fish/>

130. Mr. Pierce (Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas) concluded that the discussion had provided a basis for recommendations, which would be drafted in collaboration with contributors to the discussion.

Action Points on Resource Depletion

21.) Establish a Working Group on Resource Depletion to review new information on resource depletion and its impacts on small cetacean populations and to make recommendations to Parties and other relevant authorities for further action, to follow-up on Work Plan Activity 5 (2017-2020). The Working Group membership should include veterinary and fishery science expertise as well as cetacean ecology and conservation expertise. Additional members may be added, notably from HELCOM and ICES.

22.) The Secretariat is to finalize the Terms of References for the new Working Group to be approved intersessionally with the Co-Chairs of the AC and then establish the Group. The Working Group shall continue its work and report to MOP9 in 2020.

2.3 Marine debris

2.3.1 Analysis of national reporting data

131. The Chair, Mr. Hassani (France) introduced Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) who introduced document [AC24/Inf.2.3a](#) and gave a [presentation](#) titled 'Marine Debris at ASCOBANS'.

132. The presentation provided a review of the current state of affairs with regard to marine debris in preparation for making recommendations to the Parties for future activities. Mr. Simmonds drew attention to the 2nd World Marine Mammal Conference in Barcelona in December 2019, where there would be a marine debris workshop led by IWC.

133. Mr. Jan Haelters (Belgium) indicated that marine litter had become an issue which received a lot of attention nationally, and that Belgium participated in the different international fora where it was discussed. He further wanted to mention an NGO initiative that brought people together to collect litter from beaches, and the temporary exhibit of a life-sized whale constructed from beach litter in the historic centre of Bruges.

134. Ms. Blankett (Finland) referred to the [HELCOM Marine Litter Action Plan](#), which included national as well as joint actions on marine debris.

135. Ms. Kaminska (Poland) reported the large-scale removal of lost and abandoned fishing gear in the Polish Baltic coast in 2017, organized by the MARE Foundation.

136. Mr. Hassani (France) said that in France, a regulation about prohibition of all single use plastic would come into force in 2020. He further suggested that marine debris could also be incorporated into the ASCOBANS strandings and necropsy protocol.

137. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) pointed out a possible need to standardize inputs to all protocols and national reports.

2.3.2 Discussion and recommendations

138. Ms. IJsseldijk (Utrecht University) recalled the ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS/RAC-SPA workshop on strandings and marine debris earlier in 2018 (document [AC24/Inf.2.3.a](#)), where there had been a discussion which concluded that marine debris seemed only rarely to be a

direct cause of death of animals, although the effects were difficult to assess. Microplastics were another issue whose significance would be difficult to ascertain.

139. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) said that there were plans to include pathology protocols in the Barcelona workshop referred to in his presentation. Plastic was increasing and there was a need to maintain a watching brief. He offered to establish a Working Group on marine debris, to put together recommendations to take to ASCOBANS MOP9. These would take into account the outcomes of the December 2019 workshop.

140. Ms. IJsseldijk (Utrecht University) reiterated the challenge of linking marine debris, and in particular microplastics, to strandings and suggested that discussion with appropriate experts would be needed if a protocol was required.

141. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) said that the Barcelona workshop would last three or four days and would include strandings.

Action Points on Marine Debris

23.) Requests Mark Simmonds to report to MOP9 on the outcomes of the marine debris workshop at the 2nd World Marine Mammal Science Conference in Barcelona in December 2019.

24.) Convene AC members and experts interested in the impact of marine debris on small cetaceans to prepare draft Recommendations on marine debris for AC25.

2.4 Survey and Research

2.4.1 Mapping distribution and abundance of small cetaceans in the Agreement area

142. The Chair, Ms. Meike Scheidat (Netherlands) introduced a [presentation](#) by Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) entitled 'Mapping cetacean distributions in NW European seas', which presented some of the results of the Marine Ecosystems Research Programme (MERP).

143. The presentation gave a comprehensive and detailed account of the distribution of cetaceans in the Agreement area based on this large scale programme and research consortium. The wealth of information provided included detailed distribution maps, long-term and monthly population trend trajectories, demonstration of, for example, inshore-offshore movements by Common Dolphins, and risk mapping of cetacean species and fishing types.

144. Mr. Gummery (Marine Stewardship Council) asked whether there were plans to make this wealth of data more widely accessible, for example through a web tool.

145. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) replied that the principal output so far considered was a cetacean & seabird atlas which would be available as a pdf file as well as in hardcopy. The shapefiles relating to cetaceans would be made available to different user groups as required.

146. Mr. Gummery referred to an online tool prepared by the American Bird Conservancy where interactions between seabirds and fisheries could be assessed.

147. Mr. Evans said that there was scope for doing something similar with the MERP data, but that resources were currently lacking.

148. Mr. Evans added that there was a desire to extend the survey area into the Belt Sea area and Skagerrak, and also into Portuguese waters. He had also been in touch with NAMMCO about collecting data from areas to the North, but without success.

149. Ms. Sveegaard (Denmark) noted that there appeared to be some discrepancies between the distribution maps presented by Mr. Evans and the national level data on Harbour Porpoise distribution in the Danish North Sea. She asked how the model used by MERP was validated.

150. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) replied that a lot of new data had been collected under MERP. The main challenge in analyzing the data was gaps in coverage in time and space. The modelling compensated for these gaps, but in any modelling procedure it is possible that this introduces inaccuracies. The results could be useful for identifying where to target survey effort, and for verifying patterns.

151. Ms. Macleod (UK) was very impressed by the scale and the results of the MERP programme, but she had some concerns regarding the outputs. Some of the distribution maps looked different from the results of other surveys in some areas. She would be reluctant to use the outputs until the methods had been peer reviewed. She felt a need for assurance that the modelling approach was fit for purpose.

152. Mr. Evans replied that they were working on a methods paper that would be peer reviewed. The differences between the MERP and CREEM analyses were probably related to MERP having access to much more data and having the opportunity to clean up some of the historic data. CREEM had worked closely with MERP.

153. Ms. Sveegaard (Denmark) pointed out that an uncertainty analysis would be a useful addition.

154. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) said that this would be included, and that there were a number of papers in the pipeline.

155. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) said that the database was an amazing resource, and it looked like the future of status and distribution assessment. She asked who would take care of the database after the project was completed, and whether data processing would continue.

156. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) replied that this had not been decided in the long term. OSPAR or ICES were unlikely to take over management of the data in future. The current custodians would maintain their work on the database in the short to medium term.

157. Ms. Macleod (UK) asked whether it was likely that the raw data, or the modelled results, would be made available to third parties. Stakeholders could benefit from a central database where data were accessible for third party analysis, and she suggested that this might be a useful end point of the project.

158. Mr. Evans replied that the question of third party data access would have to be decided after consultation with all the data providers. He hoped they could be made freely accessible to qualified people where appropriate. They were still cleaning a lot of datasets, but he anticipated that ultimately there should be a really smooth running system.

159. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) agreed that the risk of unqualified people using data inappropriately should be avoided.

2.4.2 Analysis of national reporting data

160. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) gave a [presentation](#) summarizing the content of the national reports submitted by the Parties to the Secretariat relating to surveys and research. The template used for national reporting was available as document [AC24/Inf.2.0](#) and the submitted reports themselves comprised documents [AC24/Inf.2.a-j](#). She asked delegates not to take her remarks personally, but to please take them seriously.

161. The main aim of national reporting was to monitor progress in the implementation of the Agreement. The submitted reports were, however, inconsistent and incomplete, and included many discrepancies between what was reported and what was actually happening in the countries. Compliance, consistency and completeness in the national reporting were often lacking.

162. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) stressed that national reporting was the primary tool available to review the progress of implementation of the Agreement. The inconsistent and incomplete reporting from most countries was disappointing, but understandable considering the fact that it was the first round of new national reporting templates following the adoption of Resolution 8.1 in 2016. There was room for improvement in the past national reporting templates (covering 2016 and 2017), and following a planned workshop supported by the UK which had, unfortunately, been cancelled, she still considered a workshop with a small number of well-informed participants to be the best way to develop the national reporting template covering 2018 and to improve the existing national reporting templates (covering 2016 and 2017).

163. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) said that revising the format would be fairly straightforward, but the Parties would need to be more serious about the process to ensure improvement.

164. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation), speaking as someone who regularly used the national reports, suggested that one problem was that the people who designed the reporting formats were not the users, and they were therefore unaware of potential difficulties. The template was also often not filled in by the most appropriate person. Clearer guidance was needed to ensure more standardized results between countries. This was a general problem with national reporting for intergovernmental organizations.

165. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) suggested drafting a document highlighting the requirements and a way forward for improved national reporting and discussing it under Agenda item 17 on 27 September. She asked for assistance with this from Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation), Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) and Mr. Pierce (Invited expert).

2.4.3 Discussion and recommendations

166. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) introduced the topic of surveys and research.

167. Ms. Carlén (Coalition Clean Baltic) gave a brief overview of a follow-up project to the SAMBAH project called "SAMBAH-II" and asked whether the Parties agreed to support such an acoustic monitoring project of Baltic Harbour Porpoises in 2020.

168. Ms. Julia Carlström (Sweden) said that the SAMBAH-II coordinators would be applying for EC LIFE funding, and the earliest possible start date for their participation would be 2020. The survey would need co-funding from each party, and support from competent national authorities.

169. On the issue of a SCANS-IV survey, Mr. Hassani (France) offered support from France for the proposal. It had been decided to survey the French coast every six years starting in 2022.

170. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) said that DG Environment would welcome more marine LIFE projects of high quality. The last SCANS survey had taken place in 2016, and a survey in 2022 would be timely.

171. Ms. Macleod (UK) suggested that it would be worth officially recommending a preferred SCANS survey interval of six years to Parties, as encouragement to the national authorities.

172. Ms. Sveegaard (Denmark) observed that different countries still used different survey and monitoring methods, as was shown by the inconsistent national reports. She stressed the need for better coordination between countries to make results as standardized as possible. ASCOBANS could encourage countries to combine efforts and improve synergies.

173. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) asked Ms. Sveegaard (Denmark) and Ms. Macleod (UK) to work together with her to draft an Action Point on the need for better coordination between countries.

174. Ms. Carlén (Coalition Clean Baltic) noted in relation to this that Action Point 1 in the 14th report of the Jastarnia Group (document [AC24/Doc.3.1.a](#)) pointed out the need for alignment of timing and methodology between surveys in different countries.

175. Ms. Carlström (Sweden) pointed out that a full SCANS survey would not take place very often, and that more frequent intervening surveys at national level were required.

Action Points on Surveys and Research

25.) Parties are encouraged to commence preparatory work for a SCANS-IV survey in 2020 and to secure funding accordingly. The actual boat and aerial survey should be no later than 2022, noting that the next MSFD assessment is due in 2024.

26.) Requests Parties to support an increase in frequency of international SCANS-type surveys to six years instead of every decade. The increased frequency will improve the power to detect trends for more species and within shorter time periods which will better support assessments for the reporting cycles of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Habitats Directive.

27.) Requests Parties to actively pursue the coordination of national surveillance programs of small cetaceans between countries throughout the species' ranges, with regards to the methodology used and timing of the programs. This will allow improved assessment of abundance and distribution at meaningful scales.

2.5 Use of bycatches and strandings

176. The Session Chair, Mr. Deaville (Cetacean Stranding Investigations Programme, Zoological Society of London) set the scene on "Use of bycatches and strandings" with an introductory [presentation](#) providing context and background to the subject, and presented summarized information from the 2017 ASCOBANS national reports.

177. Strandings were anthropogenic drivers of cetacean mortality, but data on strandings included a number of biases, including the opportunistic nature of discoveries, and difficulties with establishing accurate causes of death. Strandings information informed policy, science, and efforts in education and outreach.

178. Information from the national reports was incomplete, with gaps in records of both strandings and necropsies. Most strandings and post-mortems had occurred in France and the UK. Altogether about 3,500 strandings and over 1,000 post-mortems had been reported in the ASCOBANS region in 2017, with the most commonly affected species being Harbour Porpoise. The most frequent cause of death appeared to be bycatch, but available data were mostly qualitative.

2.5.1 Update on the new IWC Strandings Initiative

179. The Session Chair then introduced , Ms. Stockin (International Whaling Commission), who gave a [presentation](#) on the IWC Strandings Initiative (document [AC24/Inf.2.5.b](#)). The presentation stressed the importance of having a broad basis of knowledge regarding stranding events, and outlined IWC's approach to this, which included a major element of capacity development.

180. Ms. Stockin continued with a second [presentation](#) introducing the recently established IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (document [AC24/Inf.2.5.c](#)). The main focus was on adding value to existing initiatives, finding solutions to tackling cetacean bycatch, developing experimental techniques, and raising awareness and capacity.

2.5.2 Update on the new international database for marine mammal stranding and necropsy data

181. Mr. Deaville (Zoological Society of London) gave a [presentation](#) updating developments with the new international database for marine mammal stranding and necropsy data discussed at AC23 ([AC23/Inf.9.1.a](#)). Development of the database was a two-year programme involving the collaborative building of a web portal followed by the compilation of pathology data that will contribute to the understanding of causes of death.

2.5.3 Update on best practice guidelines for stranding events (ACCOBAMS/ ASCOBANS/ECS/IWC/RAC-SPA)

182. Mr. Mazzariol (ACCOBAMS) gave a [presentation](#) summarizing the results of the Joint workshop of ACCOBAMS, ASCOBANS and RAC-SPA on marine debris and cetacean stranding, held during the ECS Conference earlier in 2018 (document [AC24/Inf.2.3.a](#)). The workshop had produced many outputs and an important focus was on harmonization of processes and protocols.

2.5.4 Update on new necropsy protocol

183. Ms. IJsseldijk (Utrecht University) introduced document [AC24/Inf.2.5.a](#) and gave a [presentation](#) entitled 'Cetacean necropsy protocol – update'. The presentation summarized developments since publication of the proceedings of the ECS workshop on cetacean pathology in Madeira in 2016, with the aim of providing standardized and up-to-date stranding and necropsy guidance for mass mortalities and mass whale strandings.

184. The Chair commented that harmonization and synergies seemed to be themes emerging from this session.

185. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) asked Ms. IJsseldijk (Utrecht University) about the extent to which protocols in Europe corresponded with those in the USA, especially with regard to assessing the cause of death.

186. Ms. IJsseldijk replied that she had not looked at all available protocols side by side, but the similarity of ideas between ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS was striking, and it seemed likely that the American protocol would also be similar.

187. Mr. Mazzariol (ACCOBAMS) said that sometimes American protocols would be too advanced for all countries in ACCOBAMS. There was a need to adapt to local situations by developing a protocol suitable for countries with fewer resources and less advanced levels of skill.

188. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) remarked that it would be good to have a dialogue with American practitioners, but agreed that some of the tools available in the USA were highly sophisticated. On the other hand, some American approaches were likely to be valuable everywhere, and it would be worth examining the potential use of American protocols in countries where they were appropriate.

189. Ms. Stockin (International Whaling Commission) said that IWC adopted an approach that encouraged synergy where it could be useful. The very sophisticated American response capability for mass strandings was not easily applied elsewhere. Cultural sensitivities were also an issue. It would be important to gain an overview across all protocols.

190. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) observed that the IWC focus had so far been in countries with existing strandings schemes. There were countries in the ACCOBAMS region without effective strandings schemes and it would be good to include them in future. There was a need to find effective ways of engaging with them.

191. Mr. Deaville (Zoological Society of London) agreed with Mr. Evans and said that practitioners in the UK were training colleagues for a necropsy network in Ireland. Mr. Brownlow (Cetacean Stranding Investigation Programme) was also helping to establish a similar network in Norway.

2.5.5 Analysis of national reporting data

192. The Chair recalled that this session had been allocated to discussion of a major stranding event in the UK and Ireland, and introduced Mr. Brownlow (Cetacean Stranding Investigation Programme), who gave a [presentation](#) titled 'Update on Irish and Scottish beaked whale Unusual Mortality Event.'

193. The presentation outlined an Unusual Mortality Event in August-September 2018 involving the stranding of over 70 beaked whales (mostly Cuvier's Beaked Whales) on the Irish and Scottish west coasts. There was a possible link with military sonar activity and more research was needed.

194. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) said that she had discussed the strandings with Ciáran O'Keefe at the National Parks and Wildlife Service in Dublin, and the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Simon Coveney, was reportedly concerned. The Irish authorities were keen to engage with ASCOBANS on this issue, although the likelihood of them becoming a Party remained low.

195. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) said that the stranding event had been discussed at the 6th International Meeting on the "Effects of Sound in the Ocean on Marine Mammals (ESOMM)" in The Hague the previous week. The issue of possible effects of sonar had been discussed with representatives of national navies and there was a NATO mitigation panel.

196. Ms. Virtue (Secretariat) asked whether Ministries of Defence were interested in engaging seriously over this issue, and whether they could be expected to respond to concerns.

197. Mr. Brownlow (Cetacean Stranding Investigation Programme) replied that he was in regular contact with the British Ministry of Defence and that persistence in communication was necessary.

198. Ms. Stockin (International Whaling Commission) confirmed that if required, IWC would probably be able to provide a letter of support the following week.

199. Ms. Dolman (Whale and Dolphin Conservation) recalled that this was not the first time ASCOBANS had dealt with such an event. There had been a similar Unusual Mortality Event involving Cuvier's Beaked Whales in 2008, and there seemed to be a history of sensitivity of

this species to active sonar. Monitoring of beaked whales was important, and the Irish programme ObSERVE had demonstrated the importance of the waters off western Ireland for Cuvier's Beaked Whales and also Northern Bottlenose Whales.

200. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) suggested that the ASCOBANS Secretariat should write a letter to the appropriate Ministries of Defence and NATO, expressing concern about the potential effects of military sonar on cetaceans.

201. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) said that it would be useful to remind Ministries of Defence of national obligations under the EC Habitats Directive, and in particular the aim under Articles 12 and 16 to establish and implement a *strict protection* regime for species within the whole territory of Member States. Ministries of Defence were not exempt from these obligations. No exemptions were possible. There was a need to share best practice in communication with naval authorities over their use of sonar.

2.5.6 Discussion and recommendations

202. The Chair opened discussion of the whole of Agenda item 2.5

203. Mr. Mazzariol (ACCOBAMS), supported by Ms. IJsseldijk (Utrecht University) remarked on the need to build synergies, not least between ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS, and recommended joint meetings and workshops.

204. Ms. IJsseldijk said that the best practice guidelines for stranding events would be presented for approval by ACCOBAMS in November 2019, and ASCOBANS MOP9 in 2020. She requested further work to harmonize and finalize the protocol in 2019, preferably at a combined workshop involving (at least) ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS, IWC and ECS.

205. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) drew attention to Resolution 8.10, and particularly Paragraph 4, the implementation of which would benefit from a workshop on best practice guidelines for response to stranding events and establishment of an updated necropsy protocol were needed in 2019.

206. Mr. Deaville (Zoological Society of London), together with Mr. Mazzariol (ACCOBAMS) and Ms. IJsseldijk (Utrecht University) agreed to prepare an Action Point proposing this joint workshop in 2019 and asked anybody who wished to contribute to do so.

207. Mr. Hassani (France) expressed support and encouragement to this initiative to improve the scientific use of strandings through a database, and thanked Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, and Mr. Deaville in particular, for developing it rapidly.

208. Mr. Haelters (Belgium) reported that a brochure on strandings had been produced for the general public in Belgium.

209. The Chair moved proceedings on to discussion of the new international strandings database and web portal.

210. Ms. Macleod (UK) asked whether the web portal might become a hub where agreed protocols across Parties could be made available to all.

211. Mr. Deaville (Zoological Society of London) found this a useful suggestion and thought the portal would be an appropriate place to host this information.

212. The discussion progressed to the recent stranding event in Ireland and Scotland, and Mr. Simmonds proposed drafting a letter on behalf of the Secretariat that should be sent after the meeting to the relevant Ministries of Defence and to NATO. Ms. Dolman (Whale and Dolphin Conservation), Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) Mr. Brownlow (Cetacean Stranding

Investigation Programme) and Ms. Anne-Marie Svoboda (Netherlands) expressed interest in helping with the draft, which would be circulated around the rest of the AC membership for comment.

213. Mr. Brownlow (Cetacean Stranding Investigation Programme) said that there was a need to collate existing work on the effects of sonar and direct the results towards the current investigation. There had been a number of stranding events similar to the one currently under investigation, which was the biggest for many years. More needed to be done to investigate possible mitigation measures.

214. Ms. IJsseldijk (Utrecht University) supported the proposal for a workshop, and suggested that ESOMM, which had met recently in The Hague to discuss the effects of Noise on Marine Mammals, would be a suitable group to invite.

215. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) said that the ESOMM meeting had discussed the potential impacts of Sonar and the recent stranding event, and that the representatives of a number of navies had been there. A lot of individual representations had been made but there were no formal resolutions or other outputs on this specific topic.

Action Points on Use of Bycatches and Strandings.

28.) Recommends that Parties support a workshop in early 2019, which will bring together relevant experts from nations across the ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS region. This workshop shall contribute to harmonizing best practice guidelines for stranding events and necropsy methodologies to ultimately facilitate the comparison of national results.

29.) Recommends that Parties assist progress with the ASCOBANS strandings database initiative with additional support and provision of appropriate data during its implementation phase.

30.) The Secretariat will send a letter on the behalf of the Advisory Committee to the relevant Ministries of Defense (copying in NATO, EC and International Organization of Oil and Gas Producers) regarding the possible role of noise-generating activities in the recent (i.e. 80+) and historical Unusual Mortality Events affecting beaked whales in the North Atlantic region. Before the end of September 2018, Mark Simmonds will prepare a first draft of the letter expressing concerns about the scale of the mortalities and urging collective investigations of possible causes.

3. Species Action Plans

216. Ms. Carlén (Coalition Clean Baltic) introduced document [AC24/Doc.3.1.b](#) and gave a [presentation](#) on progress with the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan).

3.1 Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan)

217. The 14th meeting of the Jastarnia Group took place in Copenhagen in March 2018 (document [AC24/Doc.3.1.a](#)), and participants included the HELCOM Secretariat, and an invited expert on Harbour Porpoise genetics from Denmark.

218. Ms. Brtnik reported on the deployment of almost 2,000 PALs (Porpoise Alerting Devices) to local fishermen along the Baltic Schleswig-Holstein coast and referred to a small study which had shown that PALs can lead to a reduction in bycatch of 70%. The PAL method had, however, proven unsuccessful in the North Sea, where bycatch had actually increased.

219. A letter had been written to the German government following the 14th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group *inter alia* calling for the establishment of adequate PAL monitoring in the German Baltic Sea (document [AC24/Inf.3.3.a](#)). The response was available online (document [AC24/Inf.3.3.b](#)) and Ms. Brtnik reported that such a monitoring is in the planning process and should start as soon as possible.

220. Ms. Blankett (Finland) reported on the EBSA (Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area under CBD) workshop in Helsinki in February 2018, where the focus had been on the HELCOM area. The principal outcome was a description of 9 areas meeting EBSA criteria, many of which were cross-border sites. These sites were geographically extensive, covering 23% of the Baltic Sea (excluding Polish and Danish marine areas). Two of them were important areas for Harbour Porpoise: South Gotland and Fehmarn Belt in Germany. The outcome was welcomed at the CBD SBSSTA meeting in Montreal in July, and CBD COP13 was expected to confirm the description of the EBSAs in November 2018.

221. Ms. Carlström (Sweden) reported on plans for the SAMBAH-II survey on acoustic monitoring of Harbour Porpoises. There was a need for another abundance estimate with smaller confidence intervals than had previously been obtained, and that extended into waters deeper than 80m (where C-PODs had not been deployed under SAMBAH-I). A finer grid was also needed in the Baltic proper. The plan to apply for EC LIFE funding in the spring of 2019 meant that the earliest possible start would be in 2020.

222. The plan was to collect data on spatio-temporal fishing effort, and based on that and the distribution of Harbour Porpoises, it would be possible to do a bycatch risk assessment. The inclusion of fisheries data would also allow a social impact assessment for fisheries, and this aspect might increase the interest of fisheries authorities in the survey. There would also be high definition surveys to look for calves.

223. Ms. Carlén (Coalition Clean Baltic) concluded by summarizing the most important of the 26 Action Points from the Jastarnia meeting in spring, most of which were valid for both the Jastarnia and WBBK Plans. These Action Points are presented as Annex 2.

224. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) said that he would encourage Parties to include competent authorities in EC LIFE applications, to increase the chances of success. He also suggested getting the fisheries authorities involved in drafting detailed mitigation measures for specific areas.

225. Ms. Sveegaard (Denmark) noted the paucity of mitigation measures. PALs remained the most widely used measure, but their effectiveness was still not always clear.

226. Ms. Carlén (Coalition Clean Baltic) agreed that it was difficult to identify effective mitigation measures but stressed the importance of continuing effort.

227. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) concurred that it was important to seek other ways forward. He thought there were possibilities for further work on this issue.

228. The meeting endorsed the Action Points of the 14th meeting of the Jastarnia Group subject to a change in the wording of Action Point 16 proposed by Ms. Königson (Sweden) and supported by Ms. Kaminska (Poland) and Ms. Sveegaard (Denmark) (see Annex 2).

3.3 Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat (WBBK)

229. The report and discussions on the WBBK Plan were covered jointly with that for the Baltic Proper Population (Agenda item 3.1).

230. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) gave a [presentation](#) with evaluations of Progress Reports on the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan) and the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat (WBBK) (document [AC24/Doc.3.1.b](#) and [AC24/Doc.3.3](#)).

231. Mr Evans reported in his presentation that Tiu Similå, who had been recruited by the Sea Watch Foundation to coordinate the three Harbour Porpoise Conservation Plans, unfortunately had to resign as a result of illness following a series of family tragedies. Mr. Evans had taken over from her as a short-term measure, and had prepared the progress reports.

232. Mr. Evans's presentation summarized his assessment of the progress of each country under the different activities/mandates in the Jastarnia and WBBK Plans.

233. Ms. Carlström (Sweden) and Ms. Uldal (Denmark) commented on aspects of implementation missing from Mr. Evans's evaluations, and it was agreed that they could make amendments and additions to the Progress Reports. Sweden, Denmark and Germany all had information to add to the reports, and Mr. Evans agreed to keep the reports open for comment until 15 October.

3.2 Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea

234. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) gave a [presentation](#) evaluating the Progress Report on Harbour Porpoise Conservation for the North Sea (document [AC24/Doc.3.2.b](#)).

235. Mr. Evans's presentation summarised his assessment of the progress of each country under the different activities/mandates in the North Sea Plan.

236. Mr. Evans presented the Recommendations from the Progress Report on Harbour Porpoise Conservation for the North Sea, as amended by the meeting of the North Sea Group which had met on the day before the current meeting. Amendments and additions were made to the Recommendations during a detailed point-by-point discussion.

3.4 Draft Conservation Plan for the Common Dolphin

237. Ms. Macleod (UK) gave a [presentation](#) on the draft Action Plan for the Common Dolphin (document [AC24/Doc.3.4](#)) titled 'Species Action Plan: Short beaked Common Dolphin'. The presentation emphasized the need for a Conservation Plan for this species and summarized the activities in the Plan. The next steps had been outlined in Resolution 8.4 and section 1.5 of the draft Action Plan and included electing a chair for the Steering Group to drive the Plan forward. As many of the actions in the plan related to bycatch, Ms. Pinn (Sea Fisheries Industry Authority) volunteered to join the Steering Group as a fisheries representative.

238. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) reiterated the importance of engaging with ACCOBAMS over this Action Plan, especially in Spain and Portugal.

239. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) pointed out that one of the options in the Action Plan was a Memorandum of Cooperation with ACCOBAMS and Non-Party Range States (such as Ireland). The ASCOBANS Coordinator and the Chair of the Common Dolphin Action Plan Steering Group could work towards this.

240. Mr. Evans said that Spain and Portugal seemed unlikely to become ASCOBANS Parties and would also have difficulty obtaining support from their governments to participate in meetings. This was probably less of an issue for Ireland.

241. Mr. Hassani (France) said that Common Dolphin was the most numerous species in the East Atlantic. France strongly supported this Action Plan and looked forward to engaging strongly with it.

242. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) declared that there being no proposed additions or amendments to the Action Plan, and since all Parties were present, the Plan was now ready for adoption by the AC. She congratulated the Committee members and thanked everybody who had contributed to the Plan, including members of the Steering Group and others not at the meeting.

243. It was now time to publicize the Action Plan and begin implementation. Next steps were to send it to all Non-Parties and other stakeholders such as fisheries authorities. A chair of the Steering Group would be elected in October-November 2018, after which consideration would be given to resourcing and coordinating implementation activities.

244. The Chair declared the Action Plan for the Conservation of the Common Dolphin adopted. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) warmly welcomed the new plan, and it was greeted with a round of applause.

Action Points – Common Dolphin Action Plan

- 1.) Approve and finalize the Species Action Plan for the North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin and agree to circulate it to the Parties for adoption in line with Resolution 8.4.
- 2.) Reconfirm the Steering Group to support the implementation of the new Species Action Plan for the North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin in close liaison with the Secretariat, with emphasis on the activities outlined in section 1.5 of the Action Plan.

4. Special Species Session: Atlantic white-sided dolphin

4.1 Introduction and conservation status

245. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) introduced documents [AC24/Inf.4.1.a](#), [AC24/Inf.4.1.b](#), and [AC24/Inf.4.1.c](#). Mr. Evans then gave a [presentation](#) titled 'The Atlantic White-sided Dolphin: Research and Conservation' summarizing the population status and structure, life history, and pressures affecting the Atlantic White-sided Dolphin, which he noted was endemic to the North Atlantic region.

246. Mr. Evans posed the following research questions, for which there was general agreement that these were of great importance to improve conservation status of the species: (i) better abundance estimates across all areas of North Atlantic; (ii) genetic sampling in northern & north-eastern parts of range; (iii) studies of life history parameters (ages & lengths at sexual maturity, reproductive rates, life spans) from stranded & bycaught animals; (iv) studies of diet through stomach contents, stable isotope and fatty acid analyses; (v) development of an audiogram for the species; (vi) more contaminant studies; and (vii) studies of likely effects of climate change.

4.2 Recommendations for Research and Conservation Actions

247. Mr. Brownlow (Cetacean Stranding Investigation Programme) said that he expected to be able to obtain data on contaminants in stranded cetaceans, including White-sided Dolphins, thanks to the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS), which had provided funding for the collection of data from a representative sample of 40-50 animals from cetacean strandings around the UK coast.

248. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) pointed out that the population was small and possibly declining, there was a significant potential threat from climate change, biological data were missing, and the population was hunted (by the Faeroese) on the edge of the Agreement area. There was a strong possibility that this hunting posed a threat to the population, and it would seem timely to write to the Faeroese authorities to express concern.

249. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) agreed that this was necessary. The population appeared to be around 30,000 individuals, although it was not known if there were more in the mid-Atlantic. There seemed to have been a range shift to the north, which appeared in surveys as a decline, and it was not known if apparently decreasing numbers represented a genuine trend. The Faeroese hunt was opportunistic and appeared to be unregulated.

250. Mr. Evans reiterated that this was a poorly known species, and the deficiency of data meant that it was overlooked by IUCN processes.

251. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) said that a re-evaluation of the species status by IUCN was needed, and that the lack of data on the species was also a point that should be raised in the letter to the Faeroese authorities. The letter should also include details from Mr. Evans's review.

252. Ms. Uldal (Denmark) said that this would be a helpful approach, but that she would need to confirm after the meeting whether Denmark officially supported it.

253. Ms. Macleod would also have to confirm in the UK whether there was official support for the letter, but she thought this would be the case.

254. Mr. Hassani (France) recalled that ASCOBANS had approached the Faeroese in the past about the hunt of Pilot Whales.

255. The Chair concluded that the Secretariat would draft a letter to the Faeroese authorities after the meeting. It would be circulated to the AC with a mid-October deadline for comment.

Action Points –Atlantic White-sided Dolphin

3.) The Secretariat will write to the Faeroese authorities on behalf of the Advisory Committee, requesting further information about the opportunistic hunt of Atlantic White-sided Dolphins in the Faeroe Islands. The draft letter will be shared with Parties and AC24 observers and sent in November at the latest.

5. Follow-up from AC23 Special Species Session: White-beaked dolphin

5.1 Updated status information

256. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) gave a [presentation](#) summarizing information received since the data request (document [AC24/Doc.5.1](#)) had been circulated the previous year. He also drew attention to a recently published paper in LUTRA by Ms. IJsseldijk (Utrecht University) *et al.* (document [AC24/Inf.5.1.a](#)).

5.2 Recommendations for Research and Conservation Action

257. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) said he would like to see countries working together to share information about sightings of this species, and increasing efforts to obtain observations, possibly using methods such as acoustic monitoring.

258. Ms. Sveegaard (Denmark) suggested that it would be useful to have recommended methods for this.

259. Mr. Evans asked whether this and other research information could be collected through the national reports.

260. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) thought it best if it were a separate, one-off process.

261. Mr. Haelters (Belgium) said he found this summarized information about the species very interesting. IUCN and others would be interested in it, and it would be worthwhile to continue to update it.

262. Ms. Stockin (International Whaling Commission) observed that this appeared to be another data-deficient species and Action Points could concentrate on research questions.

263. Ms. Doyle (UK) suggested that maybe a research strategy would be something to consider.

264. Ms. Macleod (UK) said that Mr. Evans's list of suggested research questions could be prioritized as the basis for such a strategy. An obvious high priority would be to make more use of existing samples in freezers in the UK and elsewhere.

265. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) agreed that a high priority should be to put resources into making better use of data and samples already collected from strandings. Data that would contribute to abundance estimates were also important.

266. Mr. Brownlow (Cetacean Stranding Investigation Programme) observed that there were some stomach content samples that would contribute to studies of diet. There were also possibilities for stable isotope work, based on skin and muscle samples. International cooperation would be important for these studies because sample sizes from the UK alone were small.

267. Ms. Stockin (International Whaling Commission) suggested that a good starting point would be a full inventory of available samples across Parties. This would give an idea of what could be done and would help with setting research priorities.

268. Ms. IJsseldijk (Utrecht University) noted that there were a lot of samples. Methods would need to be harmonized, as with Harbour Porpoise. There were tools for setting research priorities (such as those described in [AC24/Inf.3.2.a](#)), but the AC might not be the best group to do this. Work should start with urgent, short-term activities, plus, for example, data collection for longer term studies.

269. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) suggested that an appropriate Action Point might be to encourage Parties to support research on the six research questions raised by Mr. Evans. The AC tasked Mr. Brownlow (Cetacean Stranding Investigation Programme) to report back to AC25 on this.

270. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) suggested that the Committee should consider which species should be reviewed for special species sessions at AC25.

271. Mr. Evans recalled that the first species that had been reviewed in this way had been Common Dolphin, which was the most abundant and wide ranging small cetacean in the region not covered by other processes. Reviews had then moved on to the two species endemic to the North Atlantic, White-beaked and White-sided Dolphins.

272. Ms. Carlström (Sweden) asked whether criteria for selecting species to review would be useful.

273. After detailed discussion, it was decided that the small number of cetacean species in the region made this unnecessary, and that conservation concerns and the abundance and distribution of species should be the main considerations in selecting species.

274. On this basis, the species selected by the Parties for review in a special species session at AC25 were beaked whales and Bottlenose Dolphin. The beaked whales included Northern Bottlenose, Sowerby's and Cuvier's beaked whales.

Action Points – White-beaked Dolphin and future special species session

4.) ASCOBANS Parties are encouraged to address the following six research questions presented in the review of the Conservation Status of White-beaked Dolphin at AC23, updated at AC24:

- a. Studies of life history parameters (ages, lengths at sexual maturity, reproductive rates, life spans) from stranded and bycaught animals;
- b. Better abundance estimates in the northern North Atlantic;
- c. Further investigations of population structure;
- d. Studies of diet through stomach contents, stable isotope and fatty acid analyses;
- e. More contaminant studies;
- f. Studies of likely effects of climate change.

To facilitate joint analyses, a high priority should be an inventory of necropsy and other samples held by each country. Andrew Brownlow is tasked to intersessionally liaise with other stranding networks regarding samples and to report back to AC25.

5.) Hold special species sessions on Beaked Whales and Bottlenose Dolphins at AC25.

6. Status of small cetaceans in the Irish and Celtic Seas

275. The Chair recalled that reviews of small cetaceans in the extension area of ASCOBANS had been recommended by AC23. It was unfortunate that observers from Spain, Portugal or Ireland had been unable to participate in AC24.

276. Mr. Evans (Chair, Extension Area Working Group) gave a [presentation](#) titled 'ASCOBANS Extension Area Progress Report 2016-18' the first part of which covered the Status of small cetaceans in the Irish and Celtic Seas, based on reports from monitoring programmes in Ireland and the UK.

7. Status of small cetaceans in the North-East Atlantic extension area

277. The second half of Mr. Evans's presentation covered the Status of small cetaceans in the North-East Atlantic extension area (Portugal & Spain).

278. Mr. Hassani (France) commented that he very much supported the approach and collaboration in this area.

8. Relevant EU Policy matters

279. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) introduced document [AC24/Inf.8.a](#), and gave a [presentation](#) updating the EU nature, marine and fisheries policy matters relevant for ASCOBANS activities. His presentation emphasized that ASCOBANS had many links with EU policy and that the two organizations benefitted from supporting each other.

280. One of the most important developments was the implementation of the Action plan for nature, people and the economy (with actions aiming to complete and effectively implement the Natura 2000 network, publish a revised guidance document on species protection, increase financing, etc.), the current effort to modernize, strengthen and simplify the fishery control system and the new EU framework for data collection in fisheries, which now included collection of bycatch data. The EMFF (European Maritime and Fisheries Fund) remained very underspent and the European Commission was encouraging Parties to make more use of this fund.

281. Ms. Macleod (UK) and Ms. Carlström (Sweden) asked for explanations of specific EC decisions in their countries and were referred to the relevant definitions and provisions.

282. Ms. Kaminska (Poland) asked about the approach of the new Regional Coordination Groups (RCG) to the new monitoring regulations, and about reporting requirements under these regulations.

283. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) referred her to the Rules of Procedure of each RCG and said that both the DCF Multi-annual Programme and Regulation 812 was currently still in force. He said that a big change was that countries had agreed to collect data on bycatch under the DCF, and while this was possibly a burden, it was necessary to improve compliance with the Habitats Directive. Member States needed to implement appropriate methodologies to collect bycatch data in order to fulfil the legal requirements. The European Commission might be able to help with this, for example by putting the issue on the Agenda of RGC Meetings in June 2019.

284. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) asked why Member States were not making better use of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) for bycatch monitoring and mitigation.

285. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) suggested that the priority for EMFF spending on biodiversity was low in some countries, and that awareness of available funding mechanisms and capacity to put forward calls for projects were limited. The EC was working to remedy the situation.

286. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) asked about the potential for funding for ASCOBANS from the European Commission.

287. Mr. Nikolic explained that EU money flowed through specific funding programmes that were usually project based. There was no reason why ASCOBANS could not apply for LIFE funding, for example, but available possibilities and the amount of funding were limited. He offered to provide information about specific possibilities at a later date.

288. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) recalled that the ASCOBANS Coordinator for the Harbour Porpoise Action Plans was already tasked with providing technical advice to the Regional Coordination Groups (see Terms of References in AC24/Doc.3.0), which would no doubt strengthen cooperation with the EU. She thanked Mr. Nikolic warmly for his very helpful participation in the meeting, and strongly recommended that all participants should read document [AC24/Inf.8.a](#).

Action Point - EU Policy matters

6.) Encourage Parties and ASCOBANS stakeholders to submit EU LIFE project and other relevant applications targeting ASCOBANS species. The Secretariat shall explore opportunities for such proposals.

9. Cooperation with other bodies

9.1 Reports by the Secretariat, Parties and Partners

289. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) summarized the meetings relevant to ASCOBANS that the Secretariat had participated in, and the processes to which she had reported.

290. The 2nd World Marine Mammal Science conference in Barcelona in December 2019 provided an opportunity for tabling and participating in workshops, such as the one already discussed on marine debris under Agenda item 2.3.

291. Ms. Virtue (Secretariat) had recently returned from representing ASCOBANS at the first session of the Intergovernmental Conference on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in New York.

292. Mr. Nikolic (DG Environment) suggested that it would be helpful for ASCOBANS to participate in the 5th International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas in Greece in April 2019.

293. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) replied that the Secretariat would consider this, but the travel budget was limited.

294. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) suggested that participation in meetings by ASCOBANS did not always have to be by Secretariat members or Parties. Others from the ASCOBANS network could be nominated to participate in meetings on behalf of the Agreement.

9.2 Marine Stewardship Council (*covered under Agenda Item 2.1.6*)

9.3 Cooperation and Joint Initiatives with CMS

295. Ms. Virtue (Secretariat) presented document [AC24/Inf.9.3.a](#) summarizing the outcomes of CMS COP12 (October 2017) that were relevant to ASCOBANS, and gave a [presentation](#) summarizing their content.

296. Ms. Blankett (Finland) asked whether Resolution 12.15 on aquatic wild meat, complemented activities relating to bushmeat undertaken by CBD.

297. Ms. Virtue (Secretariat) said that CBD had taken part in CMS Working Groups on terrestrial bushmeat, and it was hoped that they would show an interest in Resolution 12.15, which would raise the profile of bushmeat in aquatic habitats and stimulate conservation activities.

298. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) said that funding had been received for CMS to participate in three workshops, first in Asia, then Brazil, then Africa, where cetacean wild meat issues would be discussed.

299. Ms. Dolman (Whale and Dolphin Conservation) presented document [AC24/Inf.9.3.b](#), in which modifications were suggested to listings in Appendices I and II of CMS, and to the descriptions of the geographic ranges of species in the CMS listings in the ASCOBANS region.

300. The [presentation](#) 'Readdressing the CMS listings of species in the ASCOBANS region' suggested listing Baltic proper and the Iberian population of Harbour Porpoise as a separate populations in Appendix I, and the Marine Atlantic population of Harbour Porpoise, and populations of Striped Dolphin, and Cuvier's and Sowerby's Beaked Whales, in Appendix II.

The document also suggested extending the geographic range descriptions of Long-finned Pilot Whale, White-beaked, Atlantic White-sided, Risso's, Common, and Bottlenose Dolphins to include the North-east Atlantic.

301. Ms. Virtue said that this was a really useful exercise, and that CMS welcomed the corrections to the listings in its Appendices. The errors and omissions had probably partly arisen as a result of the history of ASCOBANS, which had only covered the Baltic and North Seas in its early years.

302. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) said that his recent reviews of species in the Agreement area had been used when drafting the revised listings. The geographic ranges listed in the Appendices were incomplete, and for the sake of clarity, it would be best if possible to make the global distributions clear in the listings, and then separate the ones that need special attention.

303. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) pointed out that the CMS Scientific Council had an Aquatic Mammals Working Group, and this group should be involved in the revised listings of small cetacean species in the ASCOBANS region.

304. A process was discussed under which Ms. Dolman and her co-authors would discuss their proposed revisions to the listings in the CMS Appendices with the chair of the Aquatic Mammals Working Group of the CMS Scientific Council. The revisions could be circulated to the ASCOBANS Parties for comment in parallel to their consideration by the Working Group. The revisions would be reviewed intersessionally, and a final version of a full proposal produced, and submitted by one of the Parties in time for CMS COP13. The deadline for proposals to be submitted for consideration at COP13 was in September 2019.

305. The Chair confirmed that the AC would go ahead with this process for the revision of the CMS Appendices relating to cetaceans in the ASCOBANS region.

Action Point – Cooperation with CMS

7.) Encourage Parties to submit species proposals for CMS COP13 in line with the paper on "Readdressing the CMS listing of species in the ASCOBANS region" ([AC24/Inf.9.3.b](#)).

9.4 Dates of interest 2018/2019

306. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) ran through the list of meetings included in document [AC24/Doc.9.4](#). She said that no formal reports had been received from participants representing ASCOBANS at meetings since AC23, but that informal communication had been adequate.

307. Ms. Carlström (Sweden) recalled that Mr. Nikolic had agreed on behalf of DG Environment that an ASCOBANS representative could participate in Regional Coordination Meetings. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel said that the Secretariat would ask Mr. Nikolic for details.

10. Publicity and outreach

10.1 Reports by the Secretariat, Parties and Partners

308. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) presented document [AC24/Doc.10.1](#), the report on the Secretariat's publicity and outreach activities since AC23. And gave a [presentation](#) summarizing the highlights.

309. An Exhibition 'the last 300' about Harbour Porpoise in the Baltic proper had been displayed at Hörnum, Sylt, Germany, and then moved to Leck on the Danish border.

310. The 15th International day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise (20 May 2018) had seen a wealth of events taking place across the Baltic region, including an annual parade in Middelfart, Denmark.

311. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) had written a book about the role of the ASCOBANS Agreement in conservation of European cetaceans to mark its 25th Anniversary, which would be published by Elsevier in 2019.

312. A talented intern had prepared a lot of excellent graphics, banners etc. for ASCOBANS.

313. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) had designed the 2017 Christmas card, and volunteers were sought for 2018.

314. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) reported on the 17th year of the Sea Watch Foundation's annual Whale and Dolphin Watch in the UK. A total of 13 cetacean species had been recorded, with over 1,200 sightings involving about 6,500 animals. Publicity around the event had raised public awareness of cetacean conservation.

315. Ms. Lesz (Poland) suggested that Parties might wish to present related points from their national Reports under this Agenda item at AC25.

11. Funding of projects and activities

11.1 Progress of Projects Supported by ASCOBANS

316. Ms. Carlén (Coalition Clean Baltic) introduced document [AC24/Inf.11.1.a](#) on the BALHAB Project on Baltic Sea Harbour Porpoise foraging habitats, and gave a [presentation](#) summarizing the outcomes of the project.

317. The aim of the project had been to find areas within the Harbour Porpoise distribution in the Baltic that were most important for foraging, but no clear spatial pattern for finding important foraging areas had emerged.

11.2 Prioritization of Activities Requiring Funding

318. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) presented document [AC24/Doc.11.2](#) and opened discussion of funding of projects and activities. The list of possibilities for funding consisted of five priority items, noting that there were many other mandates which required financial support: Long-term coordination of the Harbour Porpoise Action Plans, Development of the 2019 national reporting questionnaires, Revision of Harbour Porpoise Action Plans, Further development of the children's pages on the ASCOBANS website, and printing of outreach and information materials.

319. The Long-term nature of the Coordinator position required the establishment of a system for rotating voluntary contributions.

320. The priorities for annual reporting in 2019 were reviews of new information on whale watching, recreational sea use, pollution, ship strikes, climate change, physical habitat change, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and education (see Resolution 8.1).

321. The meeting agreed that a long-term Coordinator for the Harbour Porpoise Action Plans was the highest priority. The need for revision of Harbour Porpoise Action Plans had not been

mentioned by any of the Working Group Chairs, and this was a cost for 2019 that could probably be removed from the priority list.

322. Ms. Carlén (Coalition Clean Baltic) said that the Jastarnia Plan had recently been revised, and that a decision about the need for revision of the WBBK Plan would be made in 2019. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) considered the North Sea Plan to be due for revision after 2019. This meant that no funding was needed for revision of the Harbour Porpoise Conservation Plans before AC25 in 2019.

323. Ms. Brtnik (Germany) said that a student in Bonn was willing to do a one-month internship for ASCOBANS and was especially interested in supporting the development of the children's webpage.

324. Ms. Kühli-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) found this potentially very helpful but pointed out, that it might be complicated by regulations concerning internships.

325. ASCOBANS information materials in Lithuanian were due to tour the country, together with the ASCOBANS exhibition at the visitor center that was the venue for AC24. This would raise awareness of Harbour Porpoises and other matters concerning whale and dolphin conservation in Lithuania.

326. With regard to the funding proposed for a workshop to prepare a template for the 2019 national reporting, Mr. Evans said that it might be more cost-effective for the chairs of AC24 sessions and Working Group chairs to work on this intersessionally.

327. Ms. Kühli-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) pointed out that the template had to be ready for use from March 2019, and Ms. Macleod (UK) noted that intersessional work on the template had been tried with limited success before and thought a workshop might be useful to focus minds and produce an output.

328. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) noted that the national reporting template would be discussed further under Agenda item 17, and that the results of that discussion might have a bearing on the amount of funding required.

329. Ms. Macleod (UK) recalled that the meeting had agreed on the need for a coordinator for the new Common Dolphin SAP. She proposed that there might be scope for the Harbour Porpoise Action Plan to be widened to include all ASCOBANS Action Plans. The tasks outlined for the North Sea Porpoise coordinator were all activities that were also relevant to the Common Dolphin SAP.

330. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) considered this to be an idea with potential. He could see a lot of synergy between the plans, but the TORs of the position would need to be extended to allow for the additional work.

331. Mr. Hassani (France) preferred the option of a specific coordinator for the Common Dolphin plan, but this would be much more expensive. If all the plans were aggregated under one coordinator it would be more work, and a full time position would probably be needed.

332. Ms. Lesz (Poland), Ms. Carlström (Sweden) and Ms. Brtnik (Germany) were all concerned about the potential workload involved in coordinating an additional Action Plan and the specific expertise and network required, and therefore preferred to retain the option of the Coordinator working only on Harbour Porpoise.

333. Ms. Kühli-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) said it was clear that more funding would be required for the Common Dolphin Action Plan, and that this would be an important item for discussion at AC25.

334. Mr. Evans suggested that having species-focused Action Plans might not be the most effective way forward, and thought it might be better if they focused more on issues such as bycatch.

335. The Chair concluded that the meeting agreed with the proposed priority order for activities except that the third item, Revision of Harbour Porpoise Action Plans, would not be necessary. An important activity for 2019 would be resourcing the implementation of the Common Dolphin Action Plan. The Harbour Porpoise Coordinator should continue to work exclusively on Harbour Porpoises in the meantime.

12. Any other business

336. Ms. Stockin (International Whaling Commission) gave a [presentation](#) about the new IWC Whale Watching Handbook which had been approved by the recent IWC meeting in Brazil. It was an online, searchable resource with a user-friendly interface in multiple languages.

337. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) congratulated IWC on a very impressive product with many beautiful images that was more than just a handbook.

13. Adoption of the List of Action Points of the Scientific Session

338. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (Secretariat) presented the draft list of Action Points. After discussion and minor amendment, these were adopted and can be found in Annex 1 to this report.

14. Close of the Scientific Session

339. The Chair thanked the participants for their positive cooperation, declared the scientific session closed and handed over the chair to Ms. Blankett to preside over the Institutional Session.

15. Opening of the Institutional Session

340. The Chair said that she had not been notified of any additional items to be included in the Agenda.

16. Accession and Agreement Amendment

341. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) recalled the Amendment to extend ASCOBANS to the west that had been tabled in 2003. This had been ratified by all but two Parties, and she encouraged Belgium and Lithuania to ratify the Amendment.

342. Ms. Janulaitienė (Lithuania) reported that Lithuania was planning to ratify the Amendment in 2019.

17. Development of the national reporting format covering 2018

343. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) gave a presentation summarizing ideas for a process to develop the content of the 2018 national reporting format. An intersessional Working Group would address the questions of what information was needed and how the data could be improved. An online reporting system was preferred, and funding would be sought for this.

344. Ms. Uldal (Denmark) recalled that AEWA had produced a national reporting format for their International Goose Platform by circulating a draft around relevant agencies and ministries, and this seemed to have produced a good result.

345. Ms. Uldal then pointed out that CMS had an online system for national reporting and asked whether this could be made available to ASCOBANS.

346. Ms. Kühli-Stenzel (Secretariat) replied that all the CMS instruments had access to this online system, but that this was not practical for the large tables included in the national report formats covering 2016 and 2017.

347. Mr. Evans (Sea Watch Foundation) thought two main issues needed to be considered, firstly, What was the purpose of the national Report? and secondly, Who would use it?

348. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) said that the principal aim of the national report was to assess the quality of implementation of the Agreement from year to year. The requirement was for something more like a questionnaire than a database. The principal users of the data were the Secretariat and the Delegates at the COP, and not scientists.

349. Mr. Pierce (Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas) was conscious that the discussion of Resource Depletion had potentially increased the work required for national reporting. He thought an alternative approach might be to ask ICES if the Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME) would like to become involved.

350. Ms. Macleod suggested that for national reporting, the emphasis should be more on the impacts of Resource Depletion on cetacean populations.

351. Ms. Virtue said that a useful first step would be exploring the option of using the CMS system. An external solution should only be sought if the CMS system was found to be unsuitable.

352. Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) said she was happy to take the lead in developing the 2018 national reporting format, and formed an intersessional working group with Ms. Macleod, Ms. Königson, Mr. Evans, Mr. Pierce and Ms. Svoboda.

18. Financial and Administrative Issues

18.1 Administrative issues

353. Ms. Kühli-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) introduced document [AC24.Doc.18.1](#) and reported that the most important news under this item was the recruitment of Ms. Jenny Renell as the new ASCOBANS Coordinator. She had been introduced under Agenda item 1.1.

18.2 Accounts for 2017 and 2018

354. Ms. Kühli-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) presented the budget report for 2017 (document [AC24/Doc.18.2.a/Rev.1](#)) and the mid-term budget report for 2018 (document [AC24/Doc.18.2.b](#)). She mentioned that payment of subscriptions by Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands had been delayed, and looked forward to receiving these contributions as soon as possible.

355. The 2018 mid-term report showed that approximately €35,000 remained available for conservation projects. This budget line was replenished from savings on other lines, and the balance was expected to be topped up again, meaning that the situation for 2019 was looking promising.

356. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) drew attention to Paragraph 7 in document AC24/Doc.18.2.b. explaining that an additional sum of €2,490 needed to be paid in 2018 as a result of funds related to AC22 that were committed in 2015 but not yet charged to ASCOBANS. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel proposed to take this sum from the conservation project budget line, where all surplus funds are regularly allocated to.

357. Ms. Virtue raised the issue of the frequency of meetings under ASCOBANS. There were three meetings a year, one of which (the AC) involved all the Parties. Preparation of documents for these meetings used a lot of Secretariat capacity, and a lot of the funds provided by the Parties. The meetings cycle was heavy compared with all other CMS instruments. If the Parties wished, the MOP could decide, for example, to reduce the frequency of AC meetings.

358. Parties agreed that compared to, for example, AEWA, the Sharks MoU, and CMS itself, the burden of meetings for ASCOBANS was high, and that a reduction in this burden might result in more funds being available for scientific and conservation work on the ground.

359. Some Parties expressed support for the principle of reducing the number of meetings. Concern was, however, expressed, particularly about the necessity for higher quality intersessional working, and the greater amount of preparation that would be required for less frequent meetings.

360. Ms. Carlström (Sweden) pointed out that some of the challenges of less frequent meetings could be met by new ways of working, such as Skype meetings.

361. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) supported by Ms. Carlén (Coalition Clean Baltic) expressed concern that activities under the Agreement might lose momentum if the AC did not meet annually. Other treaty bodies had moved to less frequent cycles and it would be worth looking at the impact on their effectiveness. Parties might also want to consider how they would respond to urgent developments. When IWC moved to a less frequent meeting cycle, it put alternative arrangements in place to allow a response to urgent developments.

362. There was general consensus that it would be helpful to skip the institutional session of the AC at every other meeting to reduce the above-mentioned workload and cost implications.

363. Ms. Virtue thanked the Parties for expressing their views, and suggested that the Secretariat could investigate possibilities, and come up with options and comparative costs of an amended meeting cycle, for presentation to AC25 in 2019, and consideration by MOP9 in 2020.

19. Project funding

19.1 Project Plan on the Coordinator of Harbour Porpoise Action Plans

364. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) noted that one of the key items for funding listed in document [AC24/Doc.11.2](#) was continuation of funding for the Coordinator of Harbour Porpoise Action Plans. She then Introduced the Project Plan for this activity, document [AC24/Doc.3.0](#).

365. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel recalled that there was a sum of €35,000 available in the conservation projects line of the budget which could be used to fund the position of Harbour Porpoise Action Plan Coordinator. Additional voluntary contributions earmarked for the Harbour Porpoise Coordination had been pledged by Poland (€5,000), Germany (€3,000), and Finland (€6,250), and the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK had expressed a commitment to providing contributions but were not yet able to provide details.

366. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel confirmed that there were sufficient funds in the budget to be able to employ the Action Plan Coordinator, and that the voluntary contributions already pledged left €21,555 in the conservation projects line of the budget to spend on additional activities. This could be topped up by further committed voluntary contributions.

367. Discussion ensued about priority activities for the remaining budget, and it was agreed that the National Coordinator for Harbour Porpoise Action Plans, and development of the national reporting format were the most important activities.

368. It was also agreed that the process outlined by Ms. Scheidat (Netherlands) under Agenda item 17 was likely to lead to cost savings in the proposed budget for national reporting, but details remained unknown.

369. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) suggested that initiating implementation of the Common Dolphin Action Plan should be a high priority, and that a nominal line could be established in the budget, pending voluntary contributions, to make a start with implementing the Action Plan. It was agreed that 3,000 euro be allocated to kick-start the work.

370. Mr. Hassani (France) suggested that a recently established French agency for biodiversity conservation might be interested in supporting the Common Dolphin Action Plan.

371. Mr. Simmonds (Humane Society International) raised the possibility of increasing spending on education and outreach, including the children's pages on the website. He felt that the educational potential of ASCOBANS had still not been realized.

372. Ms. Blankett (Finland), Ms. Macleod (UK), Ms. Carlén (Coalition Clean Baltic) and Ms. Pinn (Seafish, UK) recognized the value of the outreach work, but thought that ASCOBANS had higher priorities, such as a strandings workshop in 2019.

373. Ms. Virtue (Secretariat) considered the core role of CMS to be the convening of governments. Education was not a core strength, and NGOs and national institutions were often the best organizations to coordinate these activities.

20. Any Other Institutional Issues

374. Ms. Virtue (Secretariat) said that Mr. Vagg, the usual report writer at AC meetings, was recovering from the illness that had prevented his participation in AC24 and passed on his best regards to everybody. The delegates passed on their best wishes for a speedy recovery in return.

21. Date and Venue of the 25th Meeting of the Advisory Committee

375. Ms. Brtnik (Germany) said that it was likely that Germany would be able to offer to host the 2019 AC meeting in late September, with a venue still to be decided. Looking ahead to MOP9, Germany would have the EU Presidency in the second half of 2020. It was suggested Belgium to check whether they could host MOP9, possibly in Brussels.

22. Adoption of the List of Action Points of the Institutional Session

376. Subject to a series of minor amendments, the Action Points from the Institutional Session were adopted by the meeting. These Action Points are attached to the meeting report at Annex 1.

23. Close of Meeting

377. After expressing thanks to the hosts, the Secretariat, and all who had contributed to the organization and smooth running of the meeting, the Chair gave special thanks to Ms. Kühl-Stenzel, for whom this had been the last meeting in the role of ASCOBANS Coordinator.

378. Ms. Virtue thanked both the chairs for their efficient management of the meeting, and especially thanked Ms. Kühl-Stenzel for her hard work and dedication on behalf of ASCOBANS.

379. The Chair declared the institutional session of the meeting closed at 18.00 precisely.

Action Points – Institutional Session

31.) Requests the Secretariat to prepare an options paper for AC25 looking at the periodicity and content of AC meetings and other approaches to working (e.g. Working Groups), in order to determine if annual meetings covering both scientific and institutional issues are the most effective way to proceed.

32.) Agree that the presentations at AC25 summarizing the national reporting data for the individual sections reviewing new information on threats to small cetaceans (e.g. whale watching, pollution) are prepared in the same format.

33.) Establish the Intersessional Working Group on National Reporting in line with the process outlined in Annex 5. Agree that the Group will be chaired by Meike Scheidat and assisted by Peter Evans, Sara Königson, Kelly Macleod, Graham Pierce, Anne-Marie Svoboda and the Secretariat. The Group may choose to invite others to join at a later stage.

34.) Parties agree to actively participate in the test session of the new draft national report format for 2019 in January 2019 (see Annex 5).

Annex 1: List of Action Points from AC24

Scientific Session

1. Approve and finalize the Species Action Plan for the North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin and agree to circulate it to the Parties for adoption in line with Resolution 8.4.
2. Reconfirm the Steering Group to support the implementation of the new Species Action Plan for the North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin in close liaison with the Secretariat, with emphasis on the activities outlined in section 1.5 of the Action Plan.
3. The Secretariat will write to the Faeroese authorities on behalf of the Advisory Committee, requesting further information about the opportunistic hunt of Atlantic White-sided Dolphins in the Faeroe Islands. The draft letter will be shared with Parties and AC24 observers and sent in November at the latest.
4. ASCOBANS Parties are encouraged to address the following six research questions presented in the review of the Conservation Status of White-beaked Dolphin at AC23, updated at AC24:
 - a. Studies of life history parameters (ages, lengths at sexual maturity, reproductive rates, life spans) from stranded and bycaught animals;
 - b. Better abundance estimates in the northern North Atlantic;
 - c. Further investigations of population structure;
 - d. Studies of diet through stomach contents, stable isotope and fatty acid analyses;
 - e. More contaminant studies;
 - f. Studies of likely effects of climate change.

To facilitate joint analyses, a high priority should be an inventory of necropsy and other samples held by each country. Andrew Brownlow is tasked to intersessionally liaise with other stranding networks regarding samples and to report back to AC25.

5. Hold special species sessions on Beaked Whales and Bottlenose Dolphins at AC25.
6. Encourage Parties and ASCOBANS stakeholders to submit EU LIFE project and other relevant applications targeting ASCOBANS species. The Secretariat shall explore opportunities for such proposals.
7. Encourage Parties to submit species proposals for CMS COP13 in line with the paper on "Readdressing the CMS listing of species in the ASCOBANS region" (AC24/Inf.9.3.b).

Bycatch

8. Parties to work nationally (e.g. through EU data collection work plans) and regionally (through DCF Regional Coordination Groups) to improve the quality and availability of fishing effort data (e.g. by region, gear-type, net length, vessel size category, season, and country).
9. Agree to commission a cost-benefit analysis of available and potential monitoring tools aboard fishing vessels (e.g. observers, mobile REM) that will investigate options for more robust and cost-effective bycatch monitoring in the ASCOBANS region, in liaison with Parties and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. EC, HELCOM, ICES, IWC, OSPAR). The method needs to also be suitable for vessels less than 15 metres in length.
10. Parties should draw on fisheries funding from the EU (e.g. EMFF) to jointly implement better bycatch monitoring and mitigation, with assistance from the European Commission.

11. Parties to make sure that their financial needs for ASCOBANS' species conservation actions are properly reflected in the Prioritized Action Frameworks (PAFs) under the Habitats Directive for the next EU multi-annual financial framework by the end of 2018 at the latest.
12. Agree to commission a review of available mitigation methods applicable to high-risk fisheries within the ASCOBANS Agreement Area, to investigate gear- and area-specific solutions to mitigate bycatch, including alternative fishing methods. Throughout this process those engaged in the review are to closely liaise with Parties and other stakeholders, including the IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI).
13. Identify pilot studies for bycatch mitigation, taking into account the outputs of the review, in close liaison with the IWC BMI.
14. Parties to address the challenges for monitoring cetacean bycatch as a consequence of working under the EU DCF-MAP. These include an appropriate sampling design (e.g. taking account of areas, metiers, number of vessels to be sampled, amount of sampling days/hauls), and ensuring that trained and dedicated observers are deployed in sufficient numbers and adequately engaged in monitoring cetaceans, drawing upon knowledge of high-risk areas and fisheries. Noting that additional dedicated monitoring may be required. The Secretariat to address these issues through participation in RCGs as observers, if feasible.
15. Parties to influence the discussion on EU Fishing Regulations (e.g. control regulation) in order to include monitoring requirements to be used for monitoring of small cetacean bycatch.
16. Parties to pass on recommendations for bycatch monitoring and mitigation within their own country to the appropriate persons, to facilitate engagement internationally, particularly in discussions with the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) and the European Commission.
17. Parties to continue supporting the international strandings database aiming to provide supplementary information on causes of death, to assess the scale of bycatch and its potential impacts.
18. Parties to decide a management procedure approach to ensure that ASCOBANS objectives (e.g. minimising bycatch whilst working towards a zero-bycatch target) are met. Quantitative triggers for action may need to be established [in line with requirements under EU environmental legislation].
19. Parties to take mitigation action as soon as possible where it is already known that particular fisheries are resulting in notable bycatch.
20. The Secretariat to ask the European Commission for advice on how to classify semi-drift nets at metier level IV, so that EU Member States can be clear on their usage in particular regions.

Resource depletion

21. Establish a Working Group on Resource Depletion to review new information on resource depletion and its impacts on small cetacean populations and to make recommendations to Parties and other relevant authorities for further action, to follow-up on Work Plan Activity 5 (2017-2020). The Working Group membership should include veterinary and fishery science expertise as well as cetacean ecology and conservation expertise. Additional members may be added, notably from HELCOM and ICES.
22. The Secretariat is to finalize the Terms of References for the new Working Group to be approved intersessionally with the Co-Chairs of the AC and then establish the Group. The Working Group shall continue its work and report to MOP9 in 2020.

Marine debris

23. Requests Mark Simmonds to report to MOP9 on the outcomes of the marine debris workshop at the 2nd World Marine Mammal Science Conference in Barcelona in December 2019.
24. Convene AC members and experts interested in the impact of marine debris on small cetaceans to prepare draft Recommendations on marine debris for AC25.

Surveys and research

25. Parties are encouraged to commence preparatory work for a SCANS-IV survey in 2020 and to secure funding accordingly. The actual boat and aerial survey should be no later than 2022, noting that the next MSFD assessment is due in 2024.
26. Requests Parties to support an increase in frequency of international SCANS-type surveys to six years instead of every decade. The increased frequency will improve the power to detect trends for more species and within shorter time periods which will better support assessments for the reporting cycles of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Habitats Directive.
27. Requests Parties to actively pursue the coordination of national surveillance programs of small cetaceans between countries throughout the species' ranges, with regards to the methodology used and timing of the programs. This will allow improved assessment of abundance and distribution at meaningful scales.

Use of Bycatches and Strandings

28. Recommends that Parties support a workshop in early 2019, which will bring together relevant experts from nations across the ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS region. This workshop shall contribute to harmonizing best practice guidelines for stranding events and necropsy methodologies to ultimately facilitate the comparison of national results.
29. Recommends that Parties assist progress with the ASCOBANS strandings database initiative with additional support and provision of appropriate data during its implementation phase.
30. The Secretariat will send a letter on the behalf of the Advisory Committee to the relevant Ministries of Defense (copying in NATO, EC and International Organization of Oil and Gas Producers) regarding the possible role of noise-generating activities in the recent (i.e. 80+) and historical Unusual Mortality Events affecting beaked whales in the North Atlantic region. Before the end of September 2018, Mark Simmonds will prepare a first draft of the letter expressing concerns about the scale of the mortalities and urging collective investigations of possible causes.

Institutional Session

31. Request the Secretariat to prepare an options paper for AC25 looking at the periodicity and content of AC meetings and other approaches to working (e.g. Working Groups), in order to determine if annual meetings covering both scientific and institutional issues are the most effective way to proceed.
32. Agree that the presentations at AC25 summarizing the national reporting data for the individual sections reviewing new information on threats to small cetaceans (e.g. whale watching, pollution) are prepared in the same format.

33. Establish the Intersessional Working Group on National Reporting in line with the process outlined in Annex 5. Agree that the Group will be chaired by Meike Scheidat and assisted by Peter Evans, Sara Königson, Kelly Macleod, Graham Pierce, Anne-Marie Svoboda and the Secretariat. The Group may choose to invite others to join at a later stage.
34. Parties agree to actively participate in the test session of the new draft national report format for 2019 in January 2019 (see Annex 4).

Annex 2: Adopted Action Points of the Jastarnia and WBBK Plans

Reference	Action Point (old reference)	Jastarnia Plan		WBBK Plan	
		Applies	Mandate	Applies	Mandate
JG14/AP1	Parties shall establish or further improve local and national monitoring programmes for Harbour Porpoise occurrence and to further ensure these are aligned in terms of timing and methodology between countries, in order to complement large-scale international monitoring activities. (JG13/AP8)	X	MON-01: Implement and harmonize long-term continual acoustic Harbour Porpoise monitoring	X	Objective d: Monitoring the status of the population
JG14/AP2	Parties are strongly encouraged to support SAMBAH-II, specifically in terms of fundraising, in order for a project proposal to be submitted in 2019 and for the project to start in 2020. Noting that management authorities are likely to be required to be formal partners for Life+ applications. (JG13/AP9/JP)	X			
JG14/AP3	Parties are strongly encouraged to continue to undertake and cooperate on inter-SCANS surveys of the WBBK Harbour Porpoise population and evaluate trends in population density and abundance. (JG13/AP9/WBBK)			X	
JG14/AP4	Parties are strongly encouraged to use the data provided by SAMBAH, in particular in connection with the establishment of MPAs for Harbour Porpoises, as well as with regard to management plans and mitigation measures. (JG13/AP37)	X	MIT-06: Expand the network of protected areas for Harbour Porpoises, improve its connectivity, and develop and implement appropriate management plans including monitoring schemes for these areas		
JG14/AP5	Parties are asked to undertake baseline studies of underwater noise, relevant for Harbour Porpoises, as a reference point for future EIAs and other assessments. (JG13/AP30)	X		RES-07: Improve knowledge on impact of impulsive and continuous anthropogenic underwater noise on	X

JG14/AP6	Parties should investigate possible detrimental effects of various types of sound and disturbance on Harbour Porpoises (including pinger signals, noise from vessels, seismic surveys, wind parks or construction). Parties should initiate and support studies on the effect of anthropogenic noise on the Harbour Porpoise both on the individual and on a population level. (JG13/AP31)	X	Harbour Porpoises, and development of threshold limits of significant disturbance and GES indicators	X	
JG14/AP7	Parties are encouraged to adopt regulations on the reduction of sound emissions associated with construction of offshore wind farms and to set an upper limit for pile driving operations. The results of current studies should be reflected both in the national legislation of Parties and in the relevant Indicators for Good Environmental Status to be developed for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. (JG13/AP32)	X	MIT-05: Implement regionally harmonized national threshold limits and guidelines for regulation of underwater noise	X	
JG14/AP8	Parties should promote research on the consequences of impacts on prey communities for Harbour Porpoises. (JG13/AP38)			X	Rec.10: Include monitoring and management of important prey species in national Harbour Porpoise management plans
JG14/AP9	Parties are required to establish a system to monitor bycatch covering all sizes of fishing vessels. The Jastarnia Group would welcome a discussion at AC24, including a presentation on relevant outcomes from WGBYC, WGCATCH and PETSAMP. (JG13/AP15)	X	MON-03: Monitor and estimate Harbour Porpoise bycatch rates and estimate total annual bycatch	X	Rec.6: Estimate total annual bycatch
JG14/AP10	Parties should consider the recommendations of the October 2015 ASCOBANS Workshop on Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) and implement this technique for bycatch monitoring as appropriate in the national context. Invite AC24 to revisit the recommendations. (JG13/AP11)	X	RES-03: Improve methods for monitoring and estimation of Harbour Porpoise bycatch	X	
JG14/AP11	The respective steering group shall assess the uncertainty in bycatch rates and thereafter	X		X	

	estimate the required effort for bycatch monitoring and to report back to JG15. (JG13/AP13)				
JG14/AP12	Parties are strongly encouraged to carry out spatio-temporal risk-assessments of Harbour Porpoise bycatch using Harbour Porpoise distribution and fishing effort data. (JG13/AP16)	X	RES-04: Carry out a spatio-temporal risk assessment of Harbour Porpoise bycatch	X	
JG14/AP13	Parties should undertake or continue efforts to test and implement pots, traps and other porpoise-friendly gear. Parties shall from the beginning engage all relevant stakeholders in mitigating bycatch, including in research and development. (JG13/AP17)	X	RES-05: Further develop and improve fishing gear that is commercially viable with no Harbour Porpoise bycatch MIT-01: Implement the use of fishing gear that is commercially viable with no Harbour Porpoise bycatch	X	Objective b: Mitigation of bycatch
JG14/AP14	Parties should promote the development of pingers not audible to seals and alerting devices other than pingers. (JG13/AP18)	X	RES-05: Further develop and improve fishing gear that is commercially viable with no Harbour Porpoise bycatch	X	
JG14/AP15	Parties should monitor the use of deterrent and alerting devices. (JG13/AP26)	X	MIT-03: Continue or implement the use of acoustic deterrent devices (pingers) and acoustic alerting devices proven to be successful when and where deemed appropriate	X	
JG14/AP16	Parties shall eliminate bycatch, for example through replacing gillnets and introducing alternative gear that is considered less harmful, especially in Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs. (JG13/AP20)	X	MIT-01: Implement the use of fishing gear that is commercially viable with no Harbour Porpoise bycatch		
JG14/AP17	With respect to recreational fisheries, Parties should work towards banning or limiting the use of those types of gear known to pose a threat to Harbour Porpoises. (JG13/AP22) .	X	MIT-02: Reduce or eliminate fishing effort with gillnets or oer gear known to cause porpoise bycatch in areas with higher Harbour Porpoise density or occurrence, and/or in areas with higher risk of Harbour Porpoise bycatch, according to	X	Rec.3: Protect Harbour Porpoises in their key habitats in minimizing bycatch as far as possible Rec.5: Where possible replace gillnet fisheries known to be associated with high porpoise bycatch with alternative fishing gear known to be less harmful

			spatio-temporal risk assessments		
JG14/AP18	Parties are strongly encouraged to coordinate and standardize their monitoring efforts and determine the appropriate number of stranded or bycaught animals to be collected for necropsies. (JG13/AP33)	X	MON-04: Collect dead specimens and assess health status, contaminant levels, cause of mortality and life-history parameters of Harbour Porpoises	X	Rec.8: Monitor population health status, contaminant load and causes of mortality
JG14/AP19	The animals collected should be necropsied, tissue sampled and examined with regard to health, contaminant load, life-history parameters and causes of mortality. (JG13/AP34)	X		X	
JG14/AP20	All Parties and range states should establish programmes for recording opportunistic sightings, bycatch, necropsy and strandings for inclusion in a national database, preferably in a coordinated way for all Baltic Sea States, and report annually to the ASCOBANS/HELCOM database. (JG13/AP4)	X	PACB-01: Improve communication and education for increased public awareness and collection of live observations and dead specimens of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise	X	Objective d: Monitoring the status of the population
JG14/AP21	Parties and range states shall establish standardized interfaces between their national strandings, bycatch and necropsy databases and the new ASCOBANS web-accessed database for marine mammal stranding and necropsy data by 2019. (JG13/AP5)	X	6.5: Monitor and assess population status	X	
JG14/AP22	The Jastarnia Group promotes further cooperation with HELCOM SEAL and will strive to cooperate with the HELCOM Fish Group. The Jastarnia Group should invite HELCOM to its meetings. (JG13/AP7)	X	COOP-02: Strive for close cooperation between ASCOBANS and other international bodies	X	Rec.2: Cooperate with and inform other relevant bodies about the Conservation Plan
JG14/AP23	ASCOBANS should join efforts with HELCOM in seeking to influence Baltfish once the new EU Regulation on the conservation of fishery resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures is adopted. (JG12/AP10).	X		X	
JG14/AP24	Coordinating Authorities of the countries hosting the Group's meetings are asked to ensure the attendance of an expert on the Common Fisheries Policy	X	Other	X	Other

	(CFP) at the respective meetings of the Group. The Secretariat should recall this recommendation to the Coordinating Authority of the host country in good time before the meeting. (JG13/AP39)				
JG14/AP25	The Jastarnia Group agrees to align the agenda of its future meetings to the updated national reporting structure and cycle (see Resolution 8.1). Those issues which the AC would focus on, the Jastarnia Group would also focus on, unless there are other pressing matters. (JG13/AP40)	X	Other	X	Other
JG14/AP26	Parties are encouraged to take turns hosting the meetings of the Jastarnia Group and to ensure that the necessary funding for this purpose is made available. (JG13/AP41)	X	Other	X	Other

Annex 3: Draft Terms of Reference for a Cost-benefit Analysis of different forms of monitoring (i.e. Remote Electronic Monitoring vs Marine Mammal Observers) aboard fisheries of concern in the ASCOBANS Agreement Area with regards to cetacean bycatch

Background

The ASCOBANS North Sea Group, as well as the ICES Working Group on Bycatch of protected Species (WGBYC), have both highlighted gaps in knowledge regarding bycatch estimates for small cetaceans in European waters. Reliable bycatch estimates are needed to determine if current bycatch levels of small cetaceans in fisheries conducted in the ASCOBANS area constitute a conservation risk. Dedicated observer schemes are used in some countries to monitor cetacean bycatch. Members of the ASCOBANS North Sea Steering Group suggested that Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) could be used to compliment dedicated schemes or be an alternative to such; they may be a cost-efficient and reliable way to monitor cetacean bycatch on fishing vessels, in particular where there are practical limitations to using dedicated at-sea observers on board. This could help address monitoring gaps and reduce uncertainty in bycatch estimates.

A Workshop on Remote Electronic Monitoring was held in October 2015 in The Hague, The Netherlands. Its aim was to discuss the current status, potential shortcomings, and new developments in remote electronic monitoring (REM) techniques that could be used to help improve cetacean bycatch monitoring. One of the main conclusions of the workshop was that from a technical perspective, REM could be used successfully to monitor small cetacean bycatch, but decisions whether REM was the best and most cost-effective option would depend on the specific situation. This was influenced by the type of monitoring being conducted, the fishing fleet that was targeted, as well as personnel and technical costs which could vary greatly between countries. If a large proportion of the effort in a certain fleet was to be monitored, new solutions might have to be found with regards to lowering the costs for the REM systems and developing a more flexible system that, for example, could be used by multiple boats. In some cases, it might be useful to apply different methods simultaneously, such as observers and REM systems, as the data collected could be of complementary value. It was clear that in some cases for very small vessels (without a wheelhouse or a hard structure for mounting), the current REM systems were not suitable right away, and the boats needed modification to adjust for cameras on board, or alternative REM systems might need to be developed. When considering a new REM project, a number of key points need to be considered. These include stakeholder involvement, sampling design, data collection, and analysis, as well as the use of the most appropriate technique for addressing the questions being asked. Details of these are provided in the workshop report.

Terms of Reference

The study should address the following questions:

1. What are the costs per vessel of deploying REM in each of those fisheries posing high risk of cetacean bycatch? How do those costs vary between ASCOBANS Range States?
2. What are the costs per vessel of alternative monitoring methods such as Marine Mammal Observers, for each of the Range States experiencing where levels of small cetacean bycatch may be a concern?
3. What level of sampling is needed to generate robust estimates of bycatch?
4. How do the benefits of the different monitoring options compare with one another?

The study will need to take into account the prospects of stakeholder engagement, sampling design, costs of training both in data collection & analysis, logistical issues (particularly aboard small vessels), and analytical costs (including reviewing digital footage).

Annex 4: Draft Terms of Reference for cost analysis for mitigation measures in fisheries with high bycatch

Following on from a review presented at CMS COP12 on “Review of Methods used to reduce Risk of Cetacean Bycatch and Entanglements” (UNEP/CMS/COP12/Inf.15), the Bycatch Working Group would like a study conducted to estimate the costs of applying specific mitigation measures in a number of fisheries known to have high bycatch levels in the ASCOBANS region. Such a study would significantly advance policy discussions, since concrete estimates will be available on how to reduce bycatch in individual fisheries. Pilot studies could evolve from such studies, with an immediate impact on the ground.

Specific ASCOBANS mandates that this works contributes to:

1. North Sea Plan/Jastarnia Plan/Belt Plan
2. Resolution 8.5 on bycatch
3. Work Plan 2017-2020: activities 1 (Review new information on bycatch and associated strandings, bycatch mitigation and monitoring measures, including remote electronic monitoring and any further new techniques as well as local initiatives, and fisheries effort. Make recommendations to Parties and other relevant authorities for further action.), 19 (Contribute to the development of risk maps showing the spatial and temporal (by season) distribution of activities that have an impact on cetaceans, including information provided in National Reports, taking into account the work done by other organizations (funding may be required).)

Outputs:

The study should provide answers to the following questions:

1. Are there any gear modifications (including pingers), that could reduce risk. If so, what might be achieved in terms of risk reduction and at what cost?
2. Is the fishery likely to be subject to effort restrictions in order to preserve the target species. If so, how can these be implemented in a way that achieves the greatest reduction in bycatch risk?
3. Are there alternative gears that could be used for the same target species. If so, what are the costs including catch for a given effort, and are there likely to be other implications of gear switching?

Annex 5: Intersessional Working Group on National Reporting (NRWG)

In 2016, the ASCOBANS Meeting of Parties agreed to Resolution 1², implementing a new format of National Reporting. The aim of Resolution 1 is to ensure that national reporting is done “*through meaningful national reporting*”, striking a “*right balance ... with respect to the information desired and the use to which the data will be put, consulting experts on the subjects to ensure that essential information is gathered in a form that standardizes responses and lends itself to statistical analysis*”. The aim of the submitted information is to use it to “*assess progress in the implementation of the Agreement and make recommendations to Parties*”.

At AC24 a number of session chairs (covering agenda items under 2.) were asked to collate all national reports for specific topics and to present the results. This process led to general feedback on what kind of issues were encountered when reviewing and combining the data provided in the national reports. We are proposing a list of actions to adapt the national report format so these problems are remedied to increase the quality and to facilitate national reporting by Parties.

Two main questions were identified:

1. What information is needed in the national reports to allow an assessment of the implementation of the Agreement (as defined in Resolution 1, 2016)?
2. How can the data received be improved in terms of quality, comparability and completeness?

Recommendations:

Convene an intersessional working group (NRWG) with representatives from the Secretariat, Parties as well as advisors with the aim to design an adapted national report format by 31 March 2019. Provide funding for a meeting of the intersessional working group and travel funds.

If possible, use the existing CMS framework to allow the online entry of data for Parties. If needed, provide funding for technical assistance with the design of the system, including the functionality of automated data analyses in time for MOP9 in 2020.

Action points & time line:

#		Lead	Deadline
1	Convene the national report intersessional working group (NRWG)		Oct 2018
2	Define the data needed to meet the requirements defined in Resolution 1 (“standardized” to allow “statistical analysis” and” assessment of the implementation of the Agreement”).	NRWG, secretariat	Oct 2018
3	Review the national reports provided at AC24 regarding their suitability to meet the requirements defined in Resolution 1 and identify the main causes for lack in data quality and compliance.	NRWG	Nov 2018

² https://www.ascobans.org/sites/default/files/document/MOP8_2016-1_NationalReporting.pdf

4	Provide adaptations to the report format based on point 3, including the complete work plan of the AC (with priority to be given to AC25).	NRWG, AC	Dec 2018
5	Meet with the CMS technical experts to convert the draft report format into an online data entry portal.	NRWG, CMS technical experts	Dec 2018
6	Conduct one or more test session(s) with (part of) the new report format with the AC Parties as well as outside non-experts from other fora. Identify and solve and remaining issues.	AC, NRWG	Jan 2019
8	Implement the final format to be used in the online portal	CMS technical experts	Mar 2019
9	Analyse data quality of the national reports for AC25	NRWG	AC25 (Sept 2019)

The NRWG consists of the following members: Peter Evans, Sara Königson, Aline Kühl-Stenzel, Kelly Macleod, Graham Pierce, Meike Scheidat (convener) and Anne-Marie Svoboda. For advice on specific sections of the report experts will be identified and approached when needed

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