

**Terms of Reference for the
ASCOBANS Workshop on the Further Development of Management
Procedures for Defining the Threshold of 'Unacceptable Interactions'**

**Part I: Developing a Shared Understanding on the Use of
Thresholds/Environmental Limits**

Background

1. At its second Meeting of the Parties in 1997 ASCOBANS agreed a Resolution on the incidental bycatch of cetaceans. This outlined that the general aim of ASCOBANS 'should be to minimise (i.e. to ultimately reduce to zero) anthropogenic removals'.
2. Work has, for some time, been underway in a number of fora to address the definition of 'unacceptable interactions' and to give greater consideration to if and how thresholds/environmental limits for bycatch could be determined and used. This has included discussions within ASCOBANS, ICES, and the European Cetacean Society (ECS).
3. In 2013, the European Commission requested that ICES 'propose effective ways to define limits or threshold reference points to bycatch that could be incorporated into management targets under the reformed CFP. Limits or threshold reference points should take account of uncertainty in existing bycatch estimates, should allow current conservation goals to be met, and should enable managers to identify fisheries that require further monitoring, and those where mitigation measures are most urgently required.' The ICES response was 'ICES has reviewed the existing procedures to establish limits and reference points (CLA, PBR and 1.7%) several times in the past decade In all cases it was found that the choice of the most appropriate procedure depended on choices by managers in defining precisely the conservation objectives. These objectives essentially describe a societally-chosen balance between exploitation of resources and conservation of protected species. The most appropriate way of working is therefore jointly between managers and scientists to explore and define conservation objectives. Further than that, the choice of the most appropriate procedure to be adopted to achieve the conservation or management goal should be driven by the availability of suitable data.'
4. However, there is concern over the intent and interpretation of this matter, including how thresholds/environmental limits are defined, agreed, and ultimately deployed in managing and protecting cetaceans. This has included questions over their legal, societal, political and practical trajectory, as well as animal welfare aspects. This concern was voiced at the last two meetings of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee and Parties agreed that, it would be beneficial to promote a greater shared understanding and, to this end, Defra offered to host a meeting to help facilitate this.

Meeting Aims

5. The meeting is intended to provide an opportunity for a transparent dialogue on current plans for progressing work on defining 'unacceptable interactions'. This should also provide an opportunity to explore how thresholds/environmental limits for bycatch may work in practice to ensure Favourable Conservation Status (including from a policy perspective), and facilitate the identification of any wider implications for ASCOBANS Parties to consider, potentially including societal acceptance or opposition to any thresholds/environmental limits.

6. This meeting is not intended to take decisions on, or define, thresholds /environmental limits beyond which population declines are inferred. These discussions will form the basis of the planned ASCOBANS Workshop on 'Further Development of Management Procedures for Defining the Threshold of 'Unacceptable Interactions' / Removals of Concern'.
7. The explicit aims of this meeting are to:
 - Provide a platform for an exchange of views and information between scientists, policy makers, and other interested parties on work to define 'unacceptable interactions' and the development of thresholds/environmental limits for bycatch;
 - Aid the development of a common understanding by ASCOBANS Parties on how, thresholds/environmental limits might best be described/defined; and
 - Inform consideration of if, where and when thresholds/environmental limits might be used, flagging up key issues, concerns, and implications for meeting ASCOBANS conservation objectives, including uncertainty and data limitations.

Attendees

8. This meeting is a product of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee and Parties should be invited to send representatives that can contribute to discussions. Concerned NGOs and other appropriate experts should also be encouraged to attend, along with relevant agencies as appropriate.