REPORT OF THE 27th MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Online, 28-30 September 2022

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

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1. Opening of the Meeting

1.1. Welcoming Remarks

1. Melanie Virtue (Secretariat) welcomed everyone to the 27th meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee (AC27) noting this was the second consecutive virtual AC meeting and hoping it would be possible to meet in person in 2023. She introduced and thanked Katarzyna Kaminska (Poland), current AC Vice-Chair, who had agreed to step up and chair this meeting as the Chair elected at AC26, Jens Warrie (Belgium), had to vacate the role. The Meeting would discuss the position of Chair and Vice-Chair moving forward under Agenda Item 20.

2. Ms Virtue highlighted the busy agenda, meeting at a time when the Baltic Sea and its harbour porpoises were under pressure, including from the current leaks in the Nord Steam 2 gas pipeline. The Secretariat ran through some housekeeping issues, outlining the Online Meeting Protocol (ASCOBANS/AC27/OMP).

1.2. Adoption of the Agenda

3. The AC Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and referred to the Provisional Annotated Agenda and Schedule (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.1.2b/Rev.1). She noted some changes to the order of items and asked whether anyone had any other items to add to Agenda Item 10 (Any Other Scientific Issues) or Agenda Item 21 (Any Other Institutional Issues).

4. Several participants congratulated the Chair on taking on chairing and proposed adding discussions under Agenda Item 10 on: the Baltic Nord Stream 2 pipeline gas leak as an emergency; the Faroe Island whale hunt issue following the ASCOBANS letter sent in 2021; and fast-moving watercrafts in the cetacean habitats. These were all agreed.

1.3. Rules of Procedure

5. The Chair explained that the AC Rules of Procedure (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc1.3) adopted at the 8th Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS (MOP8) in 2016, with an Annex adopted by AC26, remained in force unless an amendment was called for.

1.4. Opening of the Scientific Session

6. Ms Virtue provided guidance on formulation of the action points and recommendations from the Meeting.

2. Review of New Information on Threats and Other Issues to Small Cetaceans

7. Drawing attention to ASCOBANS Resolution 8.1 (Rev.MOP9) *National Reporting,* the 2021 National Reports submitted by Parties, and the Summary Compilation of the 2021 National Reports (ASCOBANS/AC27/Inf.2), Ms Renell (Secretariat) highlighted what Parties had reported as the most successful and most challenging aspects of implementation of the Agreement in 2021. She noted that all ten Parties had reported but Sweden's report had not come in time to be included in the summary. Topics for national reporting in 2021 were designated as per Resolution 8.1 (Rev.MOP9). No further information was added by the meeting participants.

2.1. Bycatch

8. Ms Renell introduced this Agenda Item, noting it referred to Work Plan Activities (WPAs) 1 and 65. Zeynep Karacaoglu (Secretariat) presented a summary of the answers given by the Parties in the national reporting data relating to bycatch for the period from 1 January – 31 December 2021. She noted that all ten Parties had reported but Sweden's report had not come in time to be included in the summary. The Chair opened the floor for comments and additions.

9. Monika Lesz (Poland) added that Baltic Parties to the International Whaling Commission (IWC) had received a letter from the IWC to address concerns about the potential of pingers interfering with military applications in the Baltic Proper, suggesting that pinger signals could be altered to be 'predictable' signals (as opposed to randomized signal) and the strength reduced by 20x. This advice had been passed on to the ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Joint Bycatch Working Group (JBWG) to consider, who expressed doubts about the suggestions.

10. Florian Expert (Invited Expert) recalled that the main task for the AC was to verify relevance of thresholds, namely: mortality of small cetaceans should not exceed 1.7% of the total population size; mortality of small cetaceans due to bycatch should not exceed 1% of a given population; and restoration/maintenance should be 80% or more of the carrying capacity ("K" maximum size the environment could support for a given population). He queried the relevance of the 80% of K figure and wondered whether it should be revised downwards, given the US figure was 50% of K. The Chair suggested there was a desire to be ambitious. Peter Evans, JBWG Co-Chair, noted he would respond to the questions in his presentation.

JBWG Report

11. Mr Evans presented the JBWG Report (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.2.1.a). The JBWG had had a small catch-up meeting on 18 August 2022 online, with 20 participants mainly from the ASCOBANS Agreement Area. Participants had reviewed the 2021-2023 Programme of Work, heard a summary from Anne-Marie Svoboda (the Netherlands) on the CIBBRiNA[1] project and held discussions on how to resolve the barriers to pinger deployment in the Baltic Proper following the concerns expressed by some national navies. Referring to the point that Ms Lesz had raised (paragraph 9), Mr Evans said the JBWG had discussed the IWC suggestions, and were of the opinion that reducing the signal would require more pingers to have the same impact which would cost more and be undesirable for fishers, and so an alternative approach should be considered. The JBWG also highlighted the risk of habituation to 'predictable' signals. The JBWG had also made the point that changes to normal pinger use shouldn't be recommended before testing the outcome of those proposed changes, and were sceptical that pingers should be an issue for Naval anti-submarine sonar.

12. Mr Evans then outlined the JBWG 2021-2023 Programme of Work priority actions and Recommendations from the first meeting of the WG (2021). JBWG1 had made 24 Recommendations, including five recommendations calling for increased, more targeted sampling of high-risk fisheries along with urgent measures in the Black Sea and Baltic Proper, ten to improve monitoring and nine to prevent and mitigate bycatch by greater stakeholder engagement, area-based measures, alternative gears and new technologies. In relation to pingers, the recent meeting had proposed an additional recommendation that, "given the acknowledged urgent need for action to protect the endangered Baltic Sea harbour porpoise, Parties whose navies had expressed an as yet unquantified concern that the use of acoustic pingers in fisheries may interfere with their anti-submarine capabilities, were strongly recommended to ensure that their navy acousticians engage with porpoise acousticians, pinger manufacturers and other relevant experts at a technical level to work on solutions to enable critical porpoise protection measures to be implemented before it was too late."

[1] Coordinated Development and Implementation of Best Practice in Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic Region

13. Henn Ojaveer (ICES) highlighted that the principal term of reference for the ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) was to deliver evidence and synthesise knowledge for advisory purposes. In December 2021, ICES WGBYC had discussed how to approach unclarity in EU and other instruments in ICES member countries on the role of scientists in providing advice on management issues. ICES had decided (as stated within the revised ICES Roadmap for bycatch advice on protected, endangered and threatened species) that, if management objectives were confusing or unclear, it would give advice on the objective to minimise and, if possible, eradicate bycatch of protected species to prevent serious harm to the species concerned.

14. Patricia Brtnik (Germany) reported there had been a first technical meeting between the German navy, the Federal Agency of Nature Conservation (BfN), the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUV) and the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) to discuss possible solutions for the pingers issue and a second meeting was planned for October 2022. Mr Evans welcomed this news but emphasised the need for technical experts to get together to discuss options.

15. Mr Expert asked to clarify whether the main JBWG action to address the 80% of K parameter would be to consider the issue in the workshops planned for 2023 mentioned in Mr Evans's presentation. Mr Evans explained that the intention was indeed to have two Workshops on Conservation Objectives, a first smaller Technical Workshop to consider the conservation objectives and modelling approaches (initially discussed during a joint OSPAR/HELCOM meeting in 2007) followed by a broader Workshop to consider their proposals. He emphasised ASCOBANS' role as a conservation body with the aim of driving bycatch to zero where possible but said there needed to be triggers for action at various stages. He hoped that the work in these Workshops would address Mr Ojaveer's point and stressed the commitment to working closely with ICES and OSPAR.

16. In the ensuing discussion, Sinéad Murphy (Invited Expert) explained that the original intention behind the two Workshops on Conservation Objectives was to re-open discussions on the percentages and consider using a bycatch management framework such as the Potential Biological Removal (PBR) or Removals Limit Algorithm (RLA) and moving away from percentages given the potential for errors and that they did not allow for long-term monitoring of mitigation measures. OSPAR had continued work on this as it was tasked with developing a biodiversity indicator on marine mammal bycatch. As many Parties had already agreed on the ASCOBANS conservation objective of "80% of K," this percentage was agreed within OSPAR, although the conservation objectives could change if new information came to light. It had not been planned initially to reopen discussions on 80% of K in the Workshops and Ms Murphy was not aware that 80% had been considered the maximum that the ecosystem could support and asked Mr Expert to provide more information on this if possible. She also stressed that ASCOBANS was a conservation not a management organisation. Mr Evans added that when the percentages had been set, they were primarily for harbour porpoise and as different species had different parameters they should be assessed individually. Many species are data-poor and other approaches would be considered in the Technical Workshop on Conservation Objectives such that developed by the University of Washington. When the original proposal was made, the discussions focused on overall total anthropogenic removals and as the removal rate for all anthropogenic activities is not known there was a need to use a more precautionary value.

Porpoise Bycatch Assessment and Porpoise Mortality Estimates in Danish and Swedish Gillnets

17. Lotte Kindt-Larsen (Invited Expert) presented on porpoise bycatch assessment and porpoise mortality estimates in Danish and Swedish gillnets. Denmark first carried out trials in gillnets in 2008 and had been monitoring bycatch in gillnets since 2010 (where the main bycatch was porpoises). In this time there had been 18 vessels with a system onboard (with nine currently). For this study, the data from these vessels was sent to DTU Aqua who prepared a map of observed days, calculated the mean bycatch rate, and compared the bycatch porpoise in

numbers by vessel and observed number of fishing days in the area. She noted that the Kattegat was missing from the calculations.

18. Ms Kindt-Larsen highlighted, however, that there was a problem of bias in this method in estimating rare events. As CCTV monitoring was now available, they could collect very detailed data and so they were trying to compare this to logbook data and finding that the logbook data from Denmark and Germany was not good, while the Swedish data was better. They were now carrying out modelling through a generalised linear mixed model (GLMM), using other available data and making expert opinions to scale-up within the model since data was missing from the fleet.

19. Ms Kindt-Larsen then highlighted some results of the study, first looking at the fishing effort in the Western Baltic and the North Sea/Skagerrak. In the Western Baltic they had found a minimum 1/4 reduction in fishing effort and with the closure of cod fisheries this was expected to reduce even further. For the North Sea/Skagerrak, the effort had reduced a little but was more or less stable. She then outlined the predictions from comparison of the two methods (GLMM and Birds Per Unit Effort (BPUE) scale-up models), noting that a paper on these would be published soon. The two model predictions for the Western Baltic more or less followed each other. However, the predictions for Skagerrak and parts of the North Sea were significantly different using the GLMM approach and an interesting result was that it appeared they had been over-estimating the bycatch amount in the North Sea, in particular from the Danish side. This was because they were now separating the data by fishing vessel length. Finally, they had examined the effects of pingers - in Denmark there was an obligation to use pingers in certain territories. Based on initial rough calculations, they had found that regulation was not significantly reducing bycatch.

20. Mr Evans asked whether they knew if pingers were being deployed appropriately, suggesting the lack of desired response could be due to them not being used correctly. Ms Kindt-Larsen explained that, while there had been a slow start, Denmark was now carrying out a campaign of fines for not using pingers, and fishermen were now buying pingers and seeking guidance on how to use them. The Chair noted this was a similar situation in Poland.

CIBBRiNA

21. Anne-Marie Svoboda (the Netherlands) presented on the EU LIFE project proposal CIBBRiNA. While the EU LIFE evaluation of the proposal in May 2022 had indicated a good level of points had been reached it was not sufficient to get the funding - 190 projects had been submitted and only 20 were funded. The project team had decided to proceed with submitting an improved proposal with a deadline of 4 October 2022.

22. They had now discussed all the proposals for amendment and set a budget ceiling per work package to cut the overall budget. They felt that some aspects of the project would fit better to the HORIZON 2023-2024 call which was anticipated in January 2023 with the specific topic of “understanding and reducing bycatch of protected species.” The main changes involved: shifting the main focus of the project to mitigation of bycatch using promising and proven methods and away from general bycatch monitoring/assessment of species behaviours; and adding a separate work package for case studies, bundled by gear-type, and a focus on high priority species. The overall budget had also been reduced 50%. Ms Svoboda then outlined the project structure overview, list of high priority species and case studies.

23. The Chair wished them success. Vincent Ridoux (France) referred to a project in France on the common dolphin which had some common aspects to CIBBRiNA. It had four work packages: ecology of the common dolphin in the Bay of Biscay; ecological drivers that could enhance the risk of bycatch in the area; technical aspects of bycatch and mitigation; and social-economic aspects. The project had already started and would be completed in 2025 but he felt there was a lot to share. Ms Svoboda welcomed his invitation to collaborate and emphasised the collaborative nature of CIBBRiNA.

Update on the IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative

24. Imogen Webster (IWC) provided an update on the IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI) on behalf of the new bycatch coordinator Cecilia Passadore. She highlighted that the Initiative was looking forward to being involved in the CIBBRiNA project. She then outlined two key projects with the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). First, they had been contracted by FAO to produce content for a series of 15 fact sheets illustrating the Technical Guidelines for the Reduction and Prevention of Marine Mammal Bycatch. A workshop associated with this would be convened after IWC68. The second was the four-year Common Oceans 2 programme covering the Indian Ocean (IO) and the Western Pacific Ocean (WPO), the overall objective of which was to improve the understanding and management of cetacean bycatch in the tuna industry in those regions, focusing on areas beyond jurisdiction. There were several steps involved in this, looking at gap analysis for cetacean bycatch and local mitigation measures applying the information from the gap analysis. Discussions were ongoing with the Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) in the region in relation to this, including the IO Tuna Commission, Committee of Fisheries, and the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Association. The Initiative had also participated in the multi-taxa bycatch workshop for the IO focusing on drift and gillnets which would hopefully feed into the Common Oceans 2 programme.

25. Other developing areas included: the capacity building programme with proposed workshops and an apprenticeship programme (similar to the entanglement programme); and a library of equipment for bycatch mitigation. Pilot projects had been in discussion for some time such as possible training and mitigation in Peru. She concluded by inviting participants to submit information on projects and any new research to the IWC Scientific Committee.

MSC Certification Scheme and Fisheries Review Process

26. Rohan Currey (Marine Stewardship Council, MSC) presented updates on the MSC Certification Scheme and Fisheries Review Process. He outlined improvements for endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species under the MSC Fisheries Standard Version 3.0 following the most comprehensive review of the MSC Fisheries Standard to date. This reflected four years of work, the evolution and uptake of fisheries management best practice around the world, and a review of how fisheries were working to solve the problem, raising fisheries' performance for key issues including for ETP species. He highlighted three key changes: introducing new ETP species designation requirements; stricter requirements to minimise mortality and enable population recovery; and clarification of ETP scoring to ensure reflection of best practice to get and maintain certification.

27. In relation to designation requirements, the precautionary assumption had now been made that all marine mammals be automatically designated as ETP, in part due to the variability in how countries treated ETP species as well as the fact that ETP species were outside the MSC Plan scope, so they were not expected to be targeted by fisheries seeking certification. For fish and invertebrates, the MSC accepted reclassification of some fish and all invertebrates when stock status stock management and life history criteria were met.

28. The MSC now worked to the reference point of 'Favourable Conservation Status' in the requirements for certification. This would enable evaluation of fisheries to a 50% threshold. The life history of species was now explicitly considered, and fisheries were required to show how mortality was minimised. Indirect impacts and unobserved mortality would now be assessed as part of the Standard.

29. In addition, Mr Currey explained, the MSC were had now introduced a new Evidence Requirements Framework to ensure that the information which underpins fisheries assessments, fisheries and ETP species bycatch management was based on a stronger basis. This included a new method for systematic evaluation of information quality and accuracy, to increase confidence in assessment of environmental impact. They were introducing an

expectation of 30% independent observation for high seas fisheries to meet the best practice threshold. The intention of these measures was to make the ways in which people could address the issue much clearer.

30. MSC had also introduced much more explicit treatment of gear loss and ghost fishing, with a new requirement to better assess ghost gear impact, requiring fisheries to demonstrate they have a management strategy in place to minimise gear loss and ghost gear impact, and extending definition of ghost gear to cover fish aggregation devices (FADS).

31. These changes were being rolled out and the Standard V3.0 would be released by end of October 2022 to be applied in practice for fisheries entering assessment for the first time in from 1 May 2023. Certified fisheries seeking reassessment must have transitioned to V3.0 by 1 October 2028 but there were incentives to join as soon as possible as there were aspects of the Standard relating to harbour strategies.

32. The Chair opened the floor for questions, noting that it was difficult to get MSC certification in the Baltic Sea as stocks were in such a bad state. Ms Lesz agreed that the situation in the Baltic Sea was not good and wondered what Mr Currey's opinion on the status of the Baltic Sea in light of depleted resources. Mr Currey explained the MSC did not undertake the fisheries assessments but rather was a separate certification body training the experts in carrying out the assessments for certification. He had been informed about the challenges in the Baltic, including historical overfishing and environmental changes and he suggested the management systems might not have responded to the ICES Advice quickly enough. This was similar in some North-East Atlantic stocks. What the MSC was trying to do was to introduce harvest strategy requirements to deal with multijurisdictional fisheries as they had seen this phenomenon play out in the past and considered it was only going to get worse due to climate change as fish stocks would move. The Baltic was an important example of a problem being seen more broadly.

33. Mr Evans requested a meeting with MSC on behalf of the ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Joint Bycatch Working Group to consider ways in which ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS could work together on bycatch certification. Mr Currey said the MSC was carrying out awareness raising activities relating to the certification and encouraged the involvement of scientists as peer reviewers and so on.

34. Ms Murphy asked how many fisheries would meet the new requirements. Mr Currey responded they were yet to find fisheries that would fail but there were many that would need to make improvements to maintain their certification. Ms Murphy then wondered what the percentage observer coverage was outside the high seas to which Mr Currey responded there was not a fixed threshold in place, but the minimum requirement of "some observers" was considered to be best practice, with the amount to be decided by the management agency to address the outlined objective. Ms Murphy asked where the 30% figure had come from and Mr Currey responded it was based on sensitivity analysis. He referred participants to the MSC website for detailed project information.

ICES Activities Update

35. Mr Ojaveer briefed on ICES activities, highlighting that ICES would arrange two workshops in 2023 regarding the Special Request Advice for the European Commission DG Environment on effective bycatch monitoring for protective species, and invited attendance.

UK Update

36. Emma Day (UK) gave an update from the UK Government and Devolved Administrations. She highlighted that they had recently published the Marine wildlife bycatch mitigation initiative identifying policy objectives and potential actions to meet the Fisheries Act 2020 ecosystem objective that "incidental catches of sensitive marine species are minimised and, where

possible, eliminated." The actions included improving understanding of where and how much bycatch occurs and implementing effective mitigation measures to minimise and, where possible, eliminate bycatch. It included a commitment to engage with international partners on bycatch including through ASCOBANS, RFMOs, and the IWC BMI.

37. The UK continued to fund the Clean Catch project in Cornwall, working collaboratively with the fishing industry to develop and trial bycatch monitoring and mitigation measures in that area. They were trialling two different types of acoustic deterrent devices and lights to test their robustness, practicality and effectiveness at reducing cetacean bycatch. The Arribada Initiative was developing a new passive acoustic reflector which would be trialled in the water soon.

38. In March 2022, the UK had organised the participatory Hauling Up Solutions 2 workshop in Plymouth, to develop recommendations for modifying fishing gear or switching to alternative gear to static nets to address the challenge of wildlife bycatch. The recommendations from the workshop included more evidence-gathering to identify the highest risk areas for wildlife bycatch, developing a code of conduct for industry, and eight potential options to trial which could reduce wildlife bycatch including suggested alternative gears, modifications to gear and modifications to fishing practices. The workshop report could be found here.

39. In 2022, the UK had also gone out to tender for a new contract for its bycatch mitigation initiative. St Andrew's University (in consortium with Cefas, the Centre of Ecology and Hydrology and the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations) had secured the new three-year contract to test how to expand the level of monitoring, diversify the monitoring methods and bring together data from multiple sources to estimate levels of bycatch in UK fisheries.

2.2. Resource Depletion

40. Ms Renell (Secretariat) introduced this agenda item, noting that it related to WPA 6 and referring to the Report of the ASCOBANS Resource Depletion Working Group (RDWG) (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.2.2). Ms Karacaoglu presented an overview of the responses in the National Reports related to resource depletion with the Chair noting that this was a particular issue for the Baltic.

Update from the Working Group

41. Graham Pierce, Chair of the RDWG, presented the report. The working group arose from a mandate from AC24 (2018) and submitted an interim report to MOP9 in 2020, and had recently submitted the final report to AC27. He noted a need for some revisions and suggested submitting a revised final report following the meeting. He outlined the RDWG tasks per TOR:

- TOR A (review of recent information and identification of additional research): The group had sought to define what prey depletion is, finding that it related to prey abundance, availability and quality and could occur at different scales. The causes could relate to fishing, habitat degradation and disturbance and the impacts depended on individual condition and health, fecundity and survival and population abundance. They also found that some species were more important than others and some were more vulnerable than others, more could be learned about cetacean condition, health and diet from strandings and photogrammetry and there was a role for ecological models and a need to know more about prey and predator distribution and abundance. **Recommendation:** focus on mitigation of prey depletion on those prey species whose decline would have the highest potential impact on small cetaceans.

- TOR B and E (sources of information on prey and cetacean distribution and abundance). He outlined some of the findings, including that for prey species survey data were more useful than landings, and that many European fish and invertebrate stocks were overexploited. He highlighted that information on cetacean distribution and abundance was

needed at similar scale and resolution, and that distribution is four-dimensional. The analysis had focused on porpoises and a recent modelling study had mapped the distribution of prey energy in the North Sea showing that the area with more porpoises was not the area with higher prey density. Research was needed to improve methods to relate small cetacean and prey distribution and abundance in a meaningful way. **Recommendation:** collate annual abundance and distribution information for key prey species in consultation with ICES and national institutes.

- TOR C (health and indicators). The group had found there was a need for more data sources to confirm that prey stocks were depleted and to account for other stressors, reproductive status, natural fasting etc. Assessing possible impacts on life history parameters required data from multiple years and further work was needed on appropriate body condition indices. **Recommendation:** ensure that information on health, condition, age and reproductive status is collected for stranded and bycaught cetaceans, preferably under baseline funding for monitoring.

- TOR D (diet). The group found that diet was related to morphology, physiology and habitat and understanding selectivity required information on prey abundance. They had written up methods for diet analysis. They found that funding was needed to work up collected samples and datasets. The report also contained a list of prey species of small cetaceans. **Recommendation:** bring diet analysis under baseline funding for strandings and bycatch monitoring and adopt a standardised protocol.

- TOR G (integrating information from multiple data sources). The group had found that there was a range of different information required to interpret mortality and its relation to resource depletion. ASCOBANS was already receiving information about resource depletion.

- TOR H (mitigation measures). The group considered different approaches to fishery management and suggested that research on the status of important non-commercial prey species might be needed. **Recommendations**: report on stock status for key prey species annually; and validate apparent prey depletion by reference to other information sources, and if depletion is impacting cetaceans, seek improved fishery management measures.

42. Mr Pierce concluded by saying that prey depletion was occurring in the ASCOBANS area, that it was difficult to prove cause and effect, and it was likely that prey depletion was negatively affecting cetacean population status especially for the smallest species in areas where fish stocks were most depleted. Possible additions to routine reporting to ASCOBANS had been identified and an update of the report with an executive summary would soon be available if the AC agreed it was useful.

43. The Chair was interested to learn that harbour porpoise followed prey but tended to stay in areas with low prey abundance. Mr Pierce said that this could be an accurate understanding of what was happening but also it was possible that there was not yet a good way of interpreting prey abundance for harbour porpoises.

44. Mark Simmonds (OceanCare) welcomed the RDWG report and asked whether there was an intention to publish the findings. He also posited that perhaps like other mammals, harbour porpoises habitually returned to areas they knew. Mr Pierce flagged the need to update the report but confirmed that there was a desire to publish.

45. Discussion then focused on the finding that harbour porpoises did not move following prey depletion. Ms Murphy highlighted a 2017-2019 stranding project in Ireland where they had necropsied 84 common dolphins and found that 15% were in good condition, 44% were moderate and 41% were poor to very poor. In the UK she had analysed data from 1990-2006 and found that 64% were in good condition, 26% moderate and 10% were in poor to very poor

condition. It appeared from this that there had been an increase in individuals found in poor to very poor condition and a new doctoral project was looking at the impact of anthropogenic activities and environmental change on the foraging habits of common dolphin. She felt there was a need to revise and update reproductive parameters for the species and proposed a recommendation to do a new round of assessment for the North Atlantic population based on current sample sets.

46. Mr Ojaveer informed the Meeting that ICES was publishing fishery overviews for all ICES regions, suggested there could be some useful information there and invited Mr Pierce to contact him if ASCOBANS had any specific needs in relation to this so he could support with information. He agreed that a definition was needed for resource depletion. Mr Ojaveer noted that the Secretariat's presentation on ASCOBANS national reports demonstrated that different experts were interpreting the same stock assessments in the Baltic Sea very subjectively. Mr Pierce explained that the RDWG did not specifically look at the ecosystem overviews and agreed that prey depletion could be more objectively assessed so a recommendation would be that reference points be developed.

47. During the review of Action Points (Agenda Item 11), Mr Pierce presented a number of proposed action points relating to the RDWG report, including on: exploring with ICES how to investigate or develop prey depletion reference points; encouraging Parties to improve monitoring of cetacean body condition and health; putting more effort into understanding the overlap between predators and prey; developing agreed metrics of body condition; ASCOBANS carrying out regular "horizon scanning" exercises to alert to new technologies. AC27 reviewed, revised and agreed on the action points which can be found in Annex 1.

2.3. Marine Debris

48. The Chair introduced this agenda item. Ms Renell noted that this item related to WPA 14. Ms Karacaoglu then presented an overview of the responses in the National Reports in relation to marine debris.

49. Mr Simmonds referred to the response from one country suggesting that fees in harbours for litter had been removed and wondered if this was correct. Ms Svoboda said that the Netherlands was collecting marine litter data in necropsies and were implementing litter measures and thought that the report was submitted inaccurately. Ms Renell explained that the Netherlands submitted a revised version of their National Report and perhaps the revised information did not make it to the summary in time. Ms Blankett explained that Finland also had mitigation measures in place to prevent litter but was not clear if this information had been added so would consider this for the next report. The Chair agreed similarly for Poland.

50. Mr Simmonds (Invited Expert) presented an overview of the status quo on marine debris in the Agreement area. He provided a global overview with an infographic from a marine debris global review paper looking particularly at pandemic-related debris[2]. The general picture for cetaceans globally was that there were some areas which were hotspots but not within the ASCOBANS area. The two key areas of interactions were ingestion and entanglement. In ingestion it appeared to affect the deeper diving cetaceans the most.

51. The key questions from the review were:
    - Global: where the main hotspots were for cetacean marine debris interactions and strandings work was very important to support and important to encourage people to observe and report; and how to distinguish entanglement in active fishing gear from lost gear and what are the full effects of microdebris; and
    - Local: how ASCOBANS could best contribute to this issue.

[2] Eisfeld-Pierantonio SM, Pierantonio N, Simmonds MP. The impact of marine debris on cetaceans with consideration of plastics generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Environ Pollut. 2022 May 1; 300:118967. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envpol.2022.118967 . Epub 2022 Feb 5. PMID: 35134431

52. Mr Simmonds welcomed the adoption of UNEP Resolution UNEP/EA.5/Res.14 – End Plastic Pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument (March 2022) and said that they continued to work closely with the IWC on marine debris.

53. In the subsequent discussion, Ms Svoboda added that the EU and Member States had submitted a draft resolution on marine plastic to IWC68, recommending that the IWC align with the proposed UN Global Agreement and that the IWC Scientific Committee continue working on it. Mr Ridoux emphasised the need to improve collection of data on marine debris at sea and highlight areas of overlap with cetacean distributions. He recommended that marine debris data be collected in a more systematic/standardised way from ship and aircraft in the same way as the ACCOBAMS survey initiative. Mr Evans agreed with this and proposed a workshop on this issue. Mr Simmonds proposed that the upcoming European Cetacean Society (ECS) conference, which would meet in person in Galicia, Spain in April 2023, might be a good place for the workshop. He proposed that Lonneke IJsseldijk put together some guidance and Ms IJsseldijk welcomed the idea in the longer term, as she would be out of action in the short term while on maternity leave.

2.4. Surveys and Research (biological information, monitoring programmes, other research)

54. The Chair introduced this agenda item. Ms Renell noted this related to WPAs 29, 30 and 31. Ms Karacaoglu presented a summary of the relevant national reporting data.

55. Mr Evans pointed out that countries were interpreting some of the national report questions differently and some information was being lost as a result. He suggested there was a need to revisit the questions again to refine them. The Chair agreed this would be helpful. Mr Ojaveer wondered which monitoring approaches were used to provide information on harbour porpoise presence in Finnish waters. Olli Loisa (Finland) explained that there had been an ongoing acoustic monitoring programme in the Northern Baltic Proper since 2016 and although there were few porpoises, opportunistic sightings had provided more information. Ms Brtnik agreed there was a need to revisit some of the questions in the National Report form and that knowing what time-scale to include was challenging. Mr Evans agreed that time-scales were likely to vary for different questions so there was a need to ensure that the questions/answers related to the appropriate time-scales. Ms Lesz also said the process for inputting and reviewing the relevant information for the National Reports was challenging.

CetAMBICion

56. Mr Pierce gave an update on the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MFSD) project CetAMBICion[3]. The general objectives were to establish a collaborative and cooperative working structure between authorities and stakeholders in Spain, France and Portugal and to coordinate and streamline the implementation of the MSFD. The intention was to establish coordinated measures and their implementation, and the project was divided into six work packages which he outlined:

- Work Package 1 set out to review the MSFD second cycle reports and state-of-the-art for cetaceans. One of the aims was to harmonise how cetaceans were assessed, even where the same criteria were used, the methodology was often different.

- Work Package 2 aimed at proposing a more coordinated subregional assessment approach and GES determination and monitoring strategy for cetaceans. Some of the output from the review of cetacean survey effort in space and time showed good survey effort across the calendar and across years, largely concentrated in the Bay of Biscay. A technical workshop was held in May 2022, aimed at establishing a list of species, indicators

[3] Coordinated Cetacean Assessment, Monitoring and Management strategy in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast sub-region

and scales of assessment with the outcomes expected later in 2022. Proposals were under development to harmonise monitoring and assessment for cetaceans.

- Work Package 3 focused on how to assess and monitor cetacean bycatch. Existing bycatch monitoring (which was found to be inadequate) and methods for risk assessment had been reviewed. There was a low level of sampling effort in onboard monitoring, and they had found that strandings revealed very high levels of bycatch mortality in the area. They were currently developing a risk assessment approach through mapping the overlap between fishing effort and cetacean distribution data.

- Work Package 4 concerned mitigation measures. They were carrying out a series of pilot projects, such as testing the use of cetacean exclusion devices (CEDs) and pingers in trawling fisheries. They had found so far that CEDs were not affecting the fish catch. While they did not make the net easy to handle, using the device was helping prevent the accidental catch of sharks. There were no accidental catches of cetaceans, although bycatch was still relatively rare in terms of how many fishing operations it occurred in, so more trials were needed. Two other pilot projects were being run in Portugal: 1) on fixed nets indicating some success in reducing predation, although habituation as a side effect should be monitored -- fishers were happy but would need financial support and focus on good practices; and 2) on purse seine nets, where mitigating bycatch seemed promising and economically viable. There were some ongoing workshops with fishermen looking at the feasibility of “move-on” rules to mitigate cetacean bycatch.

57. The Chair was interested to hear more about the trials and how they might relate to the Baltic. Ms Murphy asked whether they had run control nets with the CED trials and Mr Pierce said he would ask a project partner and get back to her.

SCANS-IV

58. Anita Gilles (Invited Expert) presented an update on the fourth *Small Cetaceans in European Atlantic waters and the North Sea* survey (SCANS-IV), which started in 1994 and now took place on a six-yearly cycle to parallel the reporting for the MSFD and EU Habitats Directive. The main objectives were to: obtain abundance estimates and trend assessment of the regularly occurring cetacean species through population-wide surveys; provide outputs for Member State reporting, assessment and indicator applications; provide outputs for impact assessments; and develop a governance framework for future SCANS-surveys to ensure long-term sustainable implementation.

59. The project had been funded by agencies and scientific project partners from Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK. It had been administratively challenging to manage the large number of funding streams together.

60. The survey area covered shelf and offshore waters of the European Atlantic. There were eight planes for aerial surveys (using existing surveys teams where possible) and one vessel survey covering mainly offshore waters. They had designed 44 transects across the survey area (1.74M km^3). The Irish ObSERVE survey was a sister project conducted independently of SCANS-IV, but which had undergone the same training so the results could be comparable. There had been a plan to have a ship survey in some offshore Scottish waters in Summer 2022, but due to funding constraints it had not yet happened, if would at all.

61. There had been some issues to start with (cash flow, planes broke down, extreme weather challenges) but ultimately the survey was a huge success, with the highest survey coverage ever in the SCANS surveys. Ms Gilles showed the first draft overview maps that showed 2000+ harbour porpoise sightings in the North and, for common dolphin, sightings in the Bay of Biscay concentrated in the South. There were circa 20 cetacean species sightings and pinnipeds, turtles, sharks, sunfish, tuna, anthropogenic activities as well as circa 800 dead birds (they had shared information with seabird colleagues).

62. Ms Gilles concluded by outlining next steps, saying that they were in the data validation stage and would produce a draft of the first abundance estimates for MSFD by the January 2023, then trend analyses and model-based estimates of abundance and drivers of distribution, development of the governance framework, final reports and dissemination of the results. The AC was the first to see the initial maps.

63. The Chair opened the floor for comments. Ms Carlén congratulated them on the work and commented that, in light of SCANS surveys, she was disappointed that countries demand EU funding (instead of funding from their own budgets) in order to go ahead with SAMBAH II which was just as important as SCANS. Ms Gilles agreed that population-wide surveys were crucial, and the second robust Baltic Proper estimate was lacking.

64. Mr Simmonds asked about the governance framework and suggested that early engagement with NGOs might help. Ms Gilles welcomed the support of NGOs, and said historically scientists had had to initiate the SCANS survey funding and emphasised the need for a clear structure with a team and regular surveys on the political agenda so as not to start from scratch every time. In considering the best approach, they had examined how the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) was done and noted they had scientific partners on board for example.

65. Mr Evans suggested it might help if the surveys started and finished earlier to avoid extreme weather and to take into account movement of animals away from coasts. Ms Gilles said they had started surveys earlier this time (in June), but the weather was hard to predict. The North-West Scotland gap was a challenge which they were still considering how best to address. Geneviève Desportes (NAMMCO) wondered whether the North-West Scotland survey could be done it in 2024 in conjunction with the proposed NASS survey. Ms Gilles said she would take this back to the team, but explained it was also a cashflow issue.

66. Discussion then focused on the future governance structure and how to facilitate the ongoing funding of the surveys which historically had been initiated by scientists. Mr Ridoux suggested finding some way to simplify administration of the project in one country rather than separately in different countries. Mr Simmonds wondered if there was a role for ASCOBANS in this – to perhaps put together a team with NGO or University to manage the project. Mr Expert wondered whether there was another way in which ASCOBANS might play a role in preparing the ground given ASCOBANS was the body for small cetacean conservation and SCANS was such an important survey. Ms Virtue explained that this had already been considered up to the ASCOBANS Executive Secretary level but that unfortunately, unlike ACCOBAMS which sits outside the UN system, the Secretariat was not set up to do this kind of work which would also be too much to take on for the one-person Secretariat.

67. Ms Carlén, supported by Mr Expert, wondered whether ASCOBANS could have a role in initiating the governance process for each regular SCANS survey such as having the SCANS survey funding as a regular point for consideration on the AC agenda. Ms Gilles said ASCOBANS was already doing this but hoped that the SCANS-IV dedicated work package on governance would be an opportunity to work this out. She emphasised the huge administrative workload in running the survey. Ms Svoboda thought there was a role for ASCOBANS help to support planning for SCANS by tabling it in time and encouraged others to do what the Netherlands was doing in setting up a yearly fund to put aside funding for the six-yearly SCANS.

68. The Chair emphasised the AC could support all the preparations and governments, and looked forward to hearing the results of SCANS-IV at AC28.

Joint Cetacean Data Programme (JCDP)

69. Nikki Taylor (UK) presented the recently launched (in June 2022) JCDP which had been funded by the UK since 2019, where the aim was to now involve the broader cetacean

community. The project builds on previous effort to collate and analyse cetacean data to bridge spatial and temporal gaps in individual survey events. A large amount of data was being collected via various means, but access was a challenge. The project vision was to promote and facilitate cetacean data standardisation and maximise value through collation and enabling of universal access through an international platform to host cetacean survey datasets; development of a data standard; facilitation of access; and development of open access data products. The data currently accepted into the system was effort-related ship or aerial observer/digital data from a combination of SCANS-type data but also using platforms of opportunity and trained volunteers.

70. She provided further information on the structure of the Platform, highlighting that it compromises the: Data Portal in the ICES data centre; JCDP Hub which also hosts the universal data standard document (aimed at building on existing standards) and guidance, which had been developed with a wide range of stakeholders and comprised three data tables (Identifiers, Effort and Environment, and Sightings); and the Metadata. In the UK the universal data standard was currently supported through MEDIN, and the working group was looking into other such hosts outside UK.

71. An ICES WG had been established to govern and develop the JCDP which had had its first meeting in September 2022, and agreed the TOR including: continued engagement with data collectors and data users to support data submission and collaborative work; mobilisation of data for use in strengthening cetacean science and policy; development of data products and JCDP resources; and consideration of further development of the portal. Ms Taylor encouraged participants to promote the JCDP in their networks, flag any potential data providers, encourage use of and promote the universal data standard, consider engaging with the WGJDP; and follow and support them on Twitter @CetaceanData.

72. The Chair asked who could see the data and Ms Taylor explained the data was open access, but another level of data was open on submission of a request to access the information, but which she did not anticipate being a barrier.

73. Ms Brtnik asked how to contact the working group. Ms Taylor said through her, for example. The WG was planning a second meeting in March/April 2023 and were hoping now to build the membership beyond the UK.

74. The Chair concluded by asking if any members had additional information on surveys and monitoring to contribute. Robertas Staponkus (Lithuania) said Lithuania had started gathering data on harbour porpoise in Spring 2022 so expected to have real data in Spring 2023, and hoped to be able to submit more data after that.

2.5. Use of Strandings Records

75. Ms Renell noted this Agenda Item related to WPA 40 and 42, and AC26 Action Point (AP) 46. Ms Karacaoglu presented a summary of the national reporting data. The Chair invited comments and additions.

76. Ms Blankett confirmed that all Finnish strandings data were input into the HELCOM/ASCOBANS database and that perhaps this was why it had not been provided in the National Report to ASCOBANS. Mr Ridoux explained that historically in France the strandings data was gathered by veterinarians, but veterinary skills had been unevenly distributed across the network and they had now developed a new strategy strengthening monitoring including four different surveyance methods. Ms Murphy asked whether the necropsy graphs in the presentation were for common dolphins or porpoises. Ms Renell explained that for the UK it was all small cetaceans and for Germany it was harbour porpoises. Responding to questions from Ms Murphy on about distinguishing dolphin species, Mr Ridoux confirmed that by 2023 in France the objective was to have 100 necropsies per annum split through the main species according to the different seaboards and that they were trying to

have information in all seasons but there were huge differences between seasons and so this might be constrained - i.e. more necropsies in the winter due to the lack of carcases in good condition in the other seasons.

Marine Strandings Monitoring

77. Andrew Brownlow (Invited Expert) presented a general overview of the importance of marine stranding networks, noting that monitoring of strandings was required to meet statutory obligations and had been identified by Parties as an important task. By analysing strandings numbers it was possible to derive important information on population status, abundance and distribution, and could begin to identify the role of disease, trauma and environmental factors affecting the populations. There had been lot of work on the assessment of anthropogenic impacts. Cetaceans as apex predators sit at the top of the food chain and are therefore sensors for ecological communities, providing data and samples for research largely unobtainable by other means on ocean health. Many strandings networks have a role in animal health and when animals provided information to long-term strandings datasets, it is possible to obtain useful information on trends over time. All but one Member State maintained a long-term strandings dataset based on the national reports. He also highlighted the increasing role of citizen science.

78. Some work had been done on beginning to standardise these processes which had been presented at MOP9. The related joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS protocol *Best practice on cetacean post mortem investigation and tissue sampling*[4] was a work-in-progress as there was still some work to do in relation to harmonising data from post-mortem.

79. He explained that many strandings networks focussed on determining the cause of death as the "most plausible cause of mortality" through, for example, estimation of bycatch and net marks, pathological indications and evidence of entanglement. There were, however, other things which could be done to build a more detailed picture of the health of the animal through histopathology and diagnostic tests to understand the presence and prevalence of pathogens, life history, feeding ecology and contaminant burden. Ancillary tests on the assessment of environmental factors and the impact of noise and disturbance were also possible, but most networks did not do these routinely, for example due to lack of funding reasons. However, many networks were beginning to carry out in-depth analysis on a subset of cases. The more details available, the more possible it was to inform the assessment of cumulative impacts, understand trends over time and develop indicators. He highlighted ongoing work in many of the networks to integrate information from multiple data sources.

80. Mr Brownlow then flagged some caveats in that the observed mortality was a function of several processes: biological, oceanographic (wind and tide) and social (opportunistic observation systems). He stressed the importance of drift modelling, particularly in the case of offshore strandings and referred to the work of Helene Peltier *et al*. The general feeling was that developing an online strandings data repository would streamline data availability among range state strandings networks, improve spatial scale and sample size for management decisions/indicators, and enable streamlining of reporting of strandings and bycatch information across various organisations.

81. Proposed next steps included: an initial online survey to strandings networks; a subsequent more detailed online survey seeking to understand drivers for the creation of an online database of marine strandings; review of existing or planned databases containing marine strandings data; and organisation of a technical workshop to identify stakeholder requirements/specifications/concerns for any database, consider issues of data ownership, access and the type and detail of data the database should collate, identify technical considerations and operation maintenance, and formulate a design brief including potential outline costs and timescales for the project.

[4] See annex of ASCOBANS Resolution 8.10

82. Mr Ojaveer said ICES had discussed this topic in 2021 and had decided to speed up work on this, so would be very happy to work together to reduce the overlap. He suggested the WGBYC Chairs and others would be interested in participating.

83. Ms Svoboda recalled that there had been funding in the ASCOBANS budget for a strandings database and possibly a workshop. Ms Renell explained that the most recent funding had been for ZSL to develop a database, but then COVID happened and ZSL no longer had the capacity to do the work. This had led to an Action Point from AC26 to have a virtual brainstorming on next steps but there was no funding allocated to contract an expert to take the lead.

84. Mr Ridoux said the strandings database was in line with what France would like to develop within its network so he would be happy to join in this work. He was interested in extrapolating the number of dead animals from carcases, as they had been carrying out work on analysing the proportion of floating carcases at death which could be estimated with tagging for example. This had been done in the Bay of Biscay, but it would be interesting to do similar experiments elsewhere to develop a larger dataset on the buoyancy of carcases.

85. Maÿlis Salivas (ACCOBAMS) also expressed interest in being involved in the database initiative. Mr Evans asked whether they had any plans to try drift-modelling in other regions. Mr Brownlow said they did not but that there are some collaborations going on with SMASS[5] and through the CIBBRiNA project. He agreed on the need to do it by species and ocean temperature as wind had an impact and there was a need more empirical data. He hoped that the CIBBRiNA project would be funded in this regard as it would provide some of that information. Jan Haelters (Belgium) said Belgium had tried to build a database on strandings but had not been successful. He said Belgium would like to be involved in the database but urged ensuring input of only basic strandings data initially so as not to scare off countries that were not in a position to inform the database on the ancillary information.

86. Mr Simmonds asked whether Mr Brownlow had any advice on the Nord Stream 2 leak in the Baltic Sea given the potential impacts of this. Mr Brownlow emphasised the importance of understanding the baseline of stranding numbers if there was a general toxic event going on as well as to look across all taxa baseline information and collate information around where the leak might be. Mr Simmonds proposed a WG to think about how to monitor the situation and, the Chair noted this would be discussed under Agenda Item 10.

87. Mr Evans said a call was scheduled on for ICES WGBYC and WGMME[6] to go over this. WGMME had reviewed the issue and were now considering how best to integrate it with what was existing within WGBYC's TOR on strandings so as not to duplicate work, as WGMME looked at all causes of mortality and not just bycatch so there was a need to integrate this between the WGs.

IWC Strandings Initiative

88. Emma Neave-Webb (IWC) provided an update on the IWC Strandings Initiative (SI), explaining that she had taken on the post of IWC SI Coordinator in March 2022. IWC SI had been running since 2016 with the goal of building global capacity in strandings responses, research and data collection. They were hoping to share information, establish best practice guidelines and provide training. In 2020 they had developed the 2021–2024 Work Plan, including a revised SI structure and strategic objectives, which had been endorsed by the IWC Scientific Committee meeting in 2021 and was being taken to IWC68 for endorsement.

89. Ms Neave-Webb then outlined recent progress. They were involved in emergency response assistance and training requests, with everything being provided remotely and online due to COVID and they were working with local NGOs to provide in-person training on the ground.

[5] Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme
[6] ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology

They had provided remote emergency responses to the Black Sea, Norway, Canada, and Namibia amongst others; established regional focal points to aid emergency response in West Africa, East Africa, the Indian Ocean, East Asia, Central Pacific, and South America to enable real time access and support. They were also in the early stages of developing stranding response training materials to cover live and dead cetacean stranding responses, sampling, how to deal with unusual mortality events and setting up stranding networks. She hoped this would provide remote and in-person support.

90. The four-year Work Plan was guiding the work, although it was running a little behind due to delays with COVID, and as there had not initially been a coordinator in place. She highlighted several projects, including convening an expert panel meeting in person; developing a costed version of the Work Plan; finalising a strandings response training package in collaboration with the Global Strandings Network, Group Maritime Assurance (GMAS), the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR), ASCOBANS, and others. This was expected to include best practice guidelines and beach-friendly materials. They were also identifying main barriers of gaps through national reports and were keen to collaborate on initiatives on strandings databases.

91. Ms Neave-Webb concluded by saying that the IWC SI were in ongoing discussions with IWC BMI, about ship strikes and entanglements, to provide combined training and advice and sourcing funding and in early discussions in recording of marine debris in strandings. A key recommendation was to formulate protocols for a standardised approach to necropsies on marine debris and to record zero values of marine debris and entanglement in necropsy reports and they were keen to collaborate on this. Another objective was to investigate the appetite for the development of tissue archives on a wider international scale as well as maintaining a global list of strandings responders in the global strandings networks.

92. Mr Simmonds suggested that the ECS conference might be a good venue for the expert panel meeting she had mentioned, alongside possibly a meeting to look at the issue of marine debris.

2.6. Other

93. Ms Renell (Secretariat) provided a briefing on the issues raised in 2021 National Reports regarding 'Other Matters', which was intended to be a catch-all for any other issues raised in the national reports. This also related to Work Plan Activity 19. Burning issues included ongoing negotiations to find suitable interventions for live stranded small cetaceans and funding for SAMBAH II. The Chair suggested focusing discussion on renewable energy constructions and development and highlighted the impact of wind farms on small cetaceans.

94. The subsequent discussion focused on the escalating number of new plans for wind farms with participants from Finland, Sweden, Poland, Germany, and the UK expressing concern in particular about the number of proposals in or near to Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Natura2000 areas. Ms Blankett spoke about the number of wind farm proposals in the Baltic Sea and Baltic Proper and urged looking at the cumulative effects. She noted this would be discussed at the upcoming HELCOM-VASAB meeting but that events were developing faster than it was possible to respond. Mr Evans said energy security was uppermost in peoples' minds in Europe and that in the UK tidal energy also was a cause for concern about potential impacts with several projects underway on this.

95. Ms Day provided an update on the status of offshore wind power construction in the UK, and how cetaceans had been taken into consideration. The UK was facing similar problems to others and in April 2022 the government had published the British Energy Security Strategy committing to: accelerate offshore wind deployment with the ambition to deliver 50GW by 2030 including 5GW of floating offshore wind; and develop offshore wind environmental standards as part of the Offshore Wind Environmental Improvement Package under which the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) was developing a standard to reduce noise levels from offshore wind piling activities. Defra was also making progress in the

clearance of unexploded ordnances (UXO), with a joint position statement being published by the UK government devolved nations to demonstrate preference for quieter technologies in the removal of UXOs. However, the expansion of offshore wind would increase underwater noise, and this could be an issue where offshore overlaps with harbour porpoise protected areas. In recognition of this, the statutory nature conservation bodies had engaged with regulators and stakeholders to develop Guidance for assessing the significance of noise disturbance against Conservation Objectives of harbour porpoise special areas of conservation (SACs). They had had a Southern North Sea Regulators Working Group in place since 2020 to enable regulators to get together to manage noise in harbour porpoise SACs.

96. Ms Renell noted the EC presentation under Agenda Item 5 might be relevant to this discussion. Mr Staponkus also noted that there was much activity on wind farm applications and developments similarly in the Baltics region with Estonia's ambition being to have 100% wind power. Ms Blankett noted that one area with planning for wind farms was in the south part of the Åland islands where were harbour porpoises had been detected, and flagged the need to be aware of different impacts in different environments such as shallow areas. Ms Carlén underlined that, while impacts were not fully understood, there was a need to be cautious with the critically endangered population in the Baltic Proper. Ms Brtnik noted there was a lack of information about the impacts during the operational phase, and Mr Simmonds said the issue went beyond construction noise to that relating to the maintenance vessels, operational leaks from the structures that were not well monitored, and the cabling which have to be put on the seabed. Given the level of interest he suggested a WG be established to look at this and provide advice as an urgent action. The Chair agreed with this suggestion.

3. Species Action Plans (SAP)

3.1. Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan)

97. Agenda Items 3.1 and 3.2 were discussed together. Ms Carlén, Chair of the ASCOBANS Jastarnia Group (JG), presented an update on activities of the JG, its 18th meeting (JG18, 28-30 March 2022), and the progress reports for the Jastarnia Plan and Western Baltic, Belt Sea and the Kattegat (WBBK) Plan. Action Points from JG18 had been adopted by AC intersessionally, and were available in ASCOBANS/AC27/Inf.3.1a.

98. She explained that JG18 had heard presentations on genetics and harbour porpoise hunting behaviour (which could be found on the meeting website). She then provided an update on the Baltic harbour porpoise Delegated Act 2022/303 which had come into force in February 2022. The Delegated Act involved closures of static nets in various areas at various times and that finally there were conservation measures in place for the Baltic Proper porpoise for the first time. ICES had initially advised that there should be measures in the entire population range for the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise but, with military concerns on the use of pingers, the ICES advice was likely not to be followed for the time being. BALTFISH was continuing discussions on other measures, including real-time closures upon harbour porpoise sightings, although JG18 had stated that they did not consider real-time closures an effective mitigation measure (JG18/AP19). The challenge was also that porpoises were rarely sighted in the Baltic.

99. BALTFISH was discussing the possible use of pingers in some smaller areas. The Chair added some detail on the BALTFISH Joint Recommendation under discussion including that: Recommendation 3 was planned to concern real-time closures in areas where there was rare occurrence of harbour porpoises in the Northern part of the Baltic; and Recommendation 4 would concern the use of pingers in smaller areas and was mainly discussed for areas where porpoises occurred more often outside Natura2000 sites (Western Baltic and Baltic Proper). The two Joint Recommendations were expected to be finalised during 2023.

100. Ms Carlén then reported that the listing process for the Baltic Proper porpoise in CMS Appendix I was ongoing. Ms Blankett confirmed that Finland had just sent the proposal to the EC and

Ms Carlén said the aim was to submit it to the CMS COP14, provided negotiations within the EU went well.

101. On the MiniSCANS-II survey, Ms Carlén recalled that the point estimate was the lowest since 1994 (17,301). The SCANS team were now carrying out a trend analysis. With a linear trend analysis there was no visible trend, but a Bayesian trend analysis indicated a higher probability for decline than no decline. In light of the results of the 2021 DTU Aqua report on bycatch and the levels of bycatch in the Belt Sea, the indications of a decline were worrying as the calculated mortality limit was 29 individuals and the estimate from the report was 493 per annum.

102. JG18 had also considered the update of the WBBK Plan and decided to request AC27 for funding for a consultant to update the WBBK Plan (JG18/AP28), which would be discussed under Agenda Item 19.

103. JG18 had also agreed that a letter should be sent by the JG to Baltic Proper range states and national navies, raising concerns about the effects of UXOs and providing information about effective mitigation measures (JG18/AP25). The JG had requested AC27 to give guidance on the procedure for ASCOBANS WGs to provide advice on urgent matters to relevant stakeholders including countries. In subsequent discussions, Ms Carlén explained that the JG had drafted a letter, but country representatives had raised concerns about sending a letter as a group as this could put them in a difficult position. Mr Simmonds said it was important not to inhibit WGs in giving expert advice and guidance where needed. It was agreed to continue the discussion on this under Agenda Item 14.

104. AC26 had also agreed to have a workshop on navies' mitigation practice in using sonars and underwater explosions. Ms Renell confirmed that the Secretariat had not progressed this because of the current political climate. In subsequent discussions on whether to go ahead with the workshop given the political climate, Ms Carlén and Ms Blankett volunteered to think about the best strategy, including whether to approach HELCOM Expert Group on Environmental Risks of Submerged Objects (EG SUBMERGED).

105. Ms Brtnik asked whether the letter was only envisaged to be sent to navies or as well to others removing UXO, including those involved with energy construction -- Ms Carlén agreed. On the status of the harbour porpoise population in the Baltic Proper, Mr Ojaveer suggested including the context that harbour porpoises were also found in Finnish waters in the Baltic Proper where the PBR was 0.7 so the loss of one animal would be too much.

106. Mr Staponkus highlighted sea mine disposal as an issue in Lithuania, and wondered about evidence of the impact of this on cetaceans and requested a recommendation on safe removal. Ms Carlén welcomed more engagement by the Baltic States and suggested this be discussed at JG19. The Chair recalled there had been initial discussions at JG18 on bubble curtains as a mitigation measure, and Ms Carlén offered to send Mr Staponkus a document on mitigation measures by Sven Koschinski. Mr Simmonds supported Mr Koschinski as an expert and emphasised the need for an emergency response in the Baltic Sea.

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

See 3.1 above.

3.3. Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea (North Sea Plan)

107. Mr Evans, Chair of the North Sea Group (NSG), presented an update on activities of the group and NSG10 (18-19 January 2022), as well as the progress report for the North Sea Plan. He had presented a progress report and 12 APs of medium and high priority had been discussed. Presentations at NSG10 were made by Sonia Mendes on a UK example of noise management

in porpoise MPAs; Ms IJsseldijk on her strandings research; Signe Sveegaard and Jip Vrooman on harbour porpoises in the Skagerrak and Wadden Sea; and Kristen Meise on porpoise conservation in the Wadden Sea Heritage site. Progress by each Party in implementing each of the priority actions in the Conservation Plan was reviewed and presented in the form of a table using a traffic light system. The criteria for evaluating progress were revised to make them clearer and more ambitious, proposals were agreed to review, and it was agreed to update the Conservation Plan which had not been updated since 2009. A contract was awarded for this review to be undertaken over the coming months.

108. Mr Evans then shared maps drawing on the ICES 2021 review of landings by country and fishing effort by gear type, indicating a decrease in landings in Denmark, Norway, and the UK, with fishing effort by gear type having been fairly stable (2014-2019). Another map showed spatial distribution of fishing gear by gear type (2017-2020) and two estimates of bycatch rates from ICES, as well as estimates following the Workshop on Marine Mammal Mortality in 2021. These did not include Norway and the second estimate removed the Danish component, because of potential bias due to large vessels, but following SCANS-IV the estimates in Denmark were being revised. The majority of bycatch was in static nets. Mr Evans then shared the bycatch risk mapping in the Greater North Sea, which he had been asked to prepare by the EC, showing static gillnet fishing effort determined by automatic identification systems (AIS) with video monitoring systems (VMS) and seasonal overlap between harbour porpoise model densities and static gillnetting effort.

109. Mr Evans illustrated some of the survey and monitoring in the past two years in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and the East of Scotland. Some of the findings reported at NSG10 included: a Norwegian study analysing bycatch rates from coastal gillnet fisheries with 3,500 net km days found a 95% reduction in bycatch for the fishing effort with pingers versus without pingers; the international stranding investigation indicated an increase in strandings between 1990 and 2017 in the central North Sea with a sudden and steep increase since 2005 in the southern North Sea; aerial monitoring of porpoises in Danish waters since 2011 indicated an increase in the southern North Sea and a steep decline in the Skagerrak. NSG10 Priority Recommendations had been adopted intersessionally by the AC, and were available in ASCOBANS/AC27/Inf.3.3a.

110. The Chair asked whether they had considered trying AIS to test small-scale fisheries as they would be cheaper and easier to implement as we have discussed in Baltic Sea. Mr Evans explained that the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) in England had provided relatively cheap in-shore VMS units with grants per unit operating through mobile phone connections, which had worked well but welcomed comparison with the approaches being used in the Baltic.

111. Mr Ojaveer referred to MSFD Descriptor 11 on noise and asked whether indicators had already been developed in relation to the impacts of noise on marine mammals, and could these be linked to MFSD Descriptors 1 (biodiversity) and 11. Mr Evans said it was tricky and expensive to develop such indicators and required fresh animals in relation to hearing damage, which were difficult to obtain. The procedures had been well thought out and standardised and it would be helpful if this could be widely implemented with a system for collecting freshly dead animals. Other indicators of damage included that animals might displace from important feeding areas, and a lot of work had been done around wind farm pilings, for example. This was still a work-in-progress, with work being done in Denmark and the UK and elsewhere to refine the indicators.

3.4. Species Action Plan (SAP) for the North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin

112. Ms Murphy, Co-Chair of the Steering Group of the SAP for the North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin (Common Dolphin Group, CDG), presented an update on the CDG's work, noting that CDG3 was to be held online on 15-16 November 2022, and that they had not met in 2021. They hoped to have an update on the OSPAR indicators, on the CetAMBICion project from Mr

Pierce, and on the upcoming ICES meeting on the common dolphin bycatch mitigation at the end of October 2022.

113. She outlined 11 Recommendations from CDG2, available in ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.3.4, for consideration by AC27, including that:

- For reporting under of the Habitats Directive Art 17 (reporting), a transboundary assessment should be undertaken by Member States in conjunction with third countries by the CDG taking into consideration the OSPAR marine mammal common indicators (there was now funding for a coordinator who could oversee and progress the work);

- The CDG endorsed the ICES advice on Emergency Measures for the Common Dolphin, subject to minor amendments to reflect ASCOBANS conservation objective "to allow populations to recover to and/or maintain 80% of carrying capacity in the long term." The intention was to have workshops in 2023 in collaboration with the OSPAR Marine Mammal Expert Group (MMEG) to review a percentage of best abundance and further develop a bycatch framework approach considering the conservation objectives under ASCOBANS. As had also been discussed under Agenda Item 2.1, the workshops would look into the use of 80% of K as the US used a lower percentage of 50% of K. However, she emphasised being aware of the full US approach under the Marine Mammal Protection act, bearing in mind the ultimate goal was to reduce bycatch to insignificant levels approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate, that, if a stock exceeded the PBR or was deemed a strategic stock Parties were required to implement a take reduction plan to make sure bycatch was reduced to below the PBR level within six months and to the insignificant level within five years;

- While emergency short-term measures were imperative to reduce common dolphin bycatch in the North-East Atlantic, to develop a strategic long-term population level plan to ensure the favourable conservation status of this European protected species in the long term. The strategic bycatch reduction plan, detailing monitoring and mitigation requirements, could be co-developed by the ASCOBANS CDG in association with other stakeholders. This assessment could build on the CetAMBICion project, which was focused on the Bay of Biscay, to look at the scale of population and could be based on the FAO Technical Guidelines which had proposed a marine mammal bycatch reduction plan;

- Parties collect and analyse North-East Atlantic-wide information on life history parameters from strandings and bycaught animals to assess for evidence of temporal changes in those parameters that may have resulted from anthropogenic activities. The last assessment undertaken at the population level used data up to 2006, so there was a need for funding to undertake large-scale assessments again. This and how to standardise would be discussed in more detail at CDG3; and

- Parties undertake a review of aerial survey monitoring techniques to better discriminate small delphinid species to ensure explicit estimates of population size and uncertainty as, for example, in the last SCANS survey it had been difficult to distinguish between common and striped dolphins, so the estimates were not consistent.

114. Ms Murphy concluded by saying the coordinator was being recruited and she hoped the position would begin towards the end of 2022. The Chair welcomed the development of a bycatch reduction plan.

115. Ms Caurant highlighted that France had deployed digital cameras on some flights during the SCANS surveys so there would be some results on the bias of detection at the level of species available for CDG3.

116. Mr Ojaveer highlighted ICES advice (to be issued in January 2023) on the common dolphin in the Bay of Biscay, suggesting the scientific findings could be discussed at CDG3 and encouraged inviting the ICES MMEG Co-Chairs.

117. The AC adopted the CDG2 Recommendations with small edits - the final document can be found in Annex 2 to this report.

4. Special Species Session

118. Ms Renell introduced this Agenda Item, noting it related to WPA 53. AC21 had instructed the AC to have regular sessions dedicated to particular species (AC21/AP32). The Secretariat had not received any suggestions for AC27, however, and so the Meeting was invited to consider whether to nominate a species for the special session for AC28 and if so, which one. She noted that the following species had already been covered: bottlenose dolphin (AC26); beaked whales (AC25); Atlantic white-sided dolphin (AC24); white-beaked dolphin (AC23); and common dolphin (AC22).

119. Mr Evans nominated Risso's dolphin as too little was known, and the species was likely to face pressures from offshore wind turbine developments. Steve Geelhoed (the Netherlands) nominated striped dolphins as it was a warm water species given the potential impacts in light of climate change and potential bycatch in the Bay of Biscay. Mr Evans encouraged involving countries which were not ASCOBANS Parties, and it was agreed that the Secretariat would reach out to them. It was agreed to consider both species. Ms Renell asked for nominations for experts to provide presentations on this. As none were named, the Secretariat would seek nominations closer to AC28.

5. Relevant EU Policy Matters

120. Vedran Nikolić (EC - DG Environment) shared a presentation on the EU Nature Restoration Law adopted in June 2022, and the EU response to climate and biodiversity crisis via the European Green Deal. As part of the European Green Deal in 2020, the EU Biodiversity Strategy was adopted which included a goal to put forward legally binding restoration targets to restore degraded EU ecosystems, in particular those with the most potential to remove and store carbon. Within one year the EC had drafted the EU Nature Restoration Law in response to calls from the European Parliament, European Council and other institutions and from the public which ranked restoration of nature among the most important things the EU should undertake to protect biodiversity.

121. The main aim of the EU Nature Restoration Law was to ensure continuous long term and sustained recovery of nature to ensure its resilience in the face of climate change, with the overarching objective that by 2030 at least 20% of land and sea should be covered by restoration measures and by 2050 all ecosystems should be covered by these measures. In relation to restoration of marine ecosystems, the Law provides that Member States should put in place the restoration measures necessary to improve to good condition areas of habitat types listed in an Annex II which were not in good condition; at least 30% by 2030, 60% by 2040 and 90% by 2050. Recognising some habitats had been lost, Member States should also put in place the restoration measures necessary to re-establish the habitats listed in Annex II in areas not covered by those habitat types. The Annex II list includes marine habitats and tries to address many shortcomings in existing legislation, such as in the MFSD, where many habitat definitions are very broad so not fit for establishing restoration targets. There was a need for time-bound targets as in existing legislation there were more landscape categories so there was a move towards the EUNIS revision of marine habitats in seven habitat type groups, some of which were important for small cetaceans. In addition, the Law asks Member States to put in place restoration measures for marine habitats of species listed in the Habitats Directive Annexes and other legislation.

122. The Law contains obligations to ensure continuous improvement of these habitat types and to ensure they are not deteriorating. Member States are obliged to draw up national restoration plans, undertake research and quantify the area that needs to be restored to reach the restoration targets. The national restoration plans should cover up to 2050 and there are monitoring and reporting obligations. All this builds on existing legislation and sets explicit targets for restoration and links with other protected area targets. The EC saw a need to step up mapping, monitoring and research and for regional cooperation.

123. The Chair thanked Mr Nikolić for his presentation and opened the floor to questions. Ms Blankett asked for advice on how to deal with the Baltic Sea given its current state. Mr Nikolic emphasised implementation of existing legislation, saying the EU Nature Restoration Law was another layer to address the pressures and obligations to address active restoration. Mr Evans asked whether funding was going to be available for Parties to implement these restoration measures and Mr Nikolić said this was not in the proposal, but that Member States should draw up funding needs within the restoration plans. In the planning, the EC had tried to look at what Member States had in their biodiversity budgets until 2027, and considered there was enough EU co-funding available and other funding to be leveraged.

124. Ms Murphy asked where the “90% by 2050” target had come from. Mr Nikolić explained it had been recognised that it was not possible to restore 100% of habitats and so they had aligned with 90% under the Habitats Directive. Ms Murphy asked whether there was any data on habitats improved in the past decade and Mr Nikolić responded that there was little, with mainly negative trends and only local limited examples of habitat restoration.

125. Mr Staponkus asked whether it would be left to Member States to implement the measures or whether there would be some EC oversight, in particular to do with the coherence of MPAs. Mr Nikolić hoped the adoption would go ahead quickly and said Member States would then have two years to outline the restoration plans and the EC would be assisted by the European Environment Agency and other stakeholders in overseeing implementation.

126. The Chair was concerned about whether the proposed Law was suited to the marine environment as there was little historic information on marine habitats and how to measure restoration. Mr Nikolić said the time had come to invest and significantly step-up knowledge so this proposal was intended to incentivize Member States to find out the status and hopefully increase investments into the marine environment.

127. Mr Nikolić then presented on the new REPowerEU Package of proposals, particularly how it relates to small cetaceans, opening by stressing the importance of strategic planning and the role of existing environmental legislation in avoiding conflicts between renewables and biodiversity. EU policy and legislation provides tools to avoid conflicts between renewables and biodiversity and EU nature legislation allows for effective deployment of renewable energy infrastructure and its coexistence with nature protection, such as the Habitats Directive (Article 6.3), allows implementation of projects if they do not harm the integrity of Natura 2000 sites.

128. REPowerEU recognises that renewable energy is of overriding public interest. The package was presented to the EU to reduce dependence on Russian gas, to accelerate the implementation of the European Green Deal, and to address the climate crisis. It has three pillars: diversifying energy sources, saving energy, and accelerating clean energy transition.

129. The proposed Renewable Energy Directive amendments require Member States to identify “renewables go-to areas” on land and sea which are suitable for installation of renewable energy and where renewable projects are not expected to have significant environmental impacts. In identifying the areas, Member States should: give priority to artificial and built surfaces; exclude Natura 2000 sites, identified bird migratory routes, as well as other areas identified based on sensitivity maps and other tools (which could include such areas for cetaceans); and use appropriate tools and datasets to identify the areas where the renewable energy plants would not have significant environmental impact, including wildlife sensitivity

mapping. Once these areas are identified, the plans designating renewables go-to areas will be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment (AA) under the Habitats Directive, and should include mitigation measures to prevent deterioration of habitats and disturbance of species in Natura 2000 sites as well as the killing of protected species.

130. Renewable energy projects in go-to areas would be exempted from the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and AA process unless they are likely to have significant transboundary effects. They will still be subject to screening (15-30 days). Outside go-to-areas everything essentially stays the same.

131. Mr Nikolić emphasized that the idea behind REPowerEU was that conflicts are best avoided through good strategic planning. Member States should rely on good practices in strategic planning of renewables through sensitivity planning. This should already have been done in maritime spatial planning. To assist Member States the EC had started putting together a mapping tool, guidance documents on wind energy development and EU nature legislation, a wildlife sensitivity mapping manual, and a recommendation on speeding-up permit-granting procedures for renewable energy projects.

132. The Chair welcomed the presentation, noting that the "go-to" area approach would make procedures easier. Mr Ojaveer asked how "significance" was defined/measured to ensure risk was minimised and Mr Nikolić responded that, when developing any project outside Natura 2000 sites, the impact on the whole population in the area within the threshold of significance should be considered. Nothing had changed in this regard.

133. Ms Blankett wondered if in considering "go-to" areas Member States should cooperate in looking at the whole and how to approach this in relation to the Baltic Sea. Mr Nikolić said the EC had been concerned about this issue long before the proposal was made. REPowerEU puts emphasis on the huge acceleration of renewable energy projects. HELCOM and ASCOBANS could have the oversight and help Member States to identify "go-to" areas bearing in mind the regional impact. Ms Blankett reported that HELCOM-VASAB would be discussing this issue the week after AC27. Mr Nikolić acknowledged that REPowerEU was not a perfect proposal and still had to be adopted by Member States and could be improved. He suggested this could be an opportunity on a strategic level to specify the areas important for small cetaceans which should not be part of "go-to" areas.

134. Mr Simmonds noted the AC had had some discussion the previous day where they agreed in principle to run a workshop to explore the marine renewables and cetaceans issue. The full ramifications of marine renewables were not really understood, and the focus had so far been on noise of construction and there was a less good understanding of underwater turbines for example. He suggested that a workshop could be convened at the ECS conference in April 2023 to discuss these issues.

135. Ms Murphy asked for clarification whether, for projects subject to EIAs and AA, where a mortality occurred it would be considered incidental and if so, would that principle be applied outside Natura2000 areas. Mr Nikolić affirmed this but noted this was just the EC interpretation of current legislation reflecting current practice; that where all measures to prevent deliberate killing (mitigation measures, best practice and certification) were in place, any residual mortality would be considered incidental, but this would be up to the relevant authority to consider.

136. Ms Svoboda asked for an update on the draft action plan to conserve marine resources and fisheries resources, with Mr Nikolić explaining they were working on the Action Plan with DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, and aiming to adopt it as soon as possible.

137. Ms Murphy asked if there was an intention to set deadlines for the Habitats Directive in bringing species into favourable status. Mr Nikolić said that, following a fit-for-purpose check of the

Habitat Directive in 2015, the EC had decided not to change the Directive but considered that having the deadlines in the Nature Restoration Law would help to bring this in line.

6. Cooperation with Other Bodies

6.1. Reports by the Secretariat, Parties and Partners

138. Ms Renell presented the document Reports from Relevant Meetings back to ASCOBANS 2021-2022 (ASCOBANS/AC27/Inf.6.1), highlighting meeting reports that had been submitted by members and suggested considering for AC28 how to improve the number of meeting reports submitted. There was an online report template, but she encouraged members to provide more responses for AC28 than there had been so far, asking whether there was a different format that would make it easier. Ms Blankett said the online format had made reporting back easy.

139. She also highlighted that a number of activities, including that, under WPA 63, the Secretariat had attended the 15th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, and preparation was underway for the CMS COP14 in October 2023 in Uzbekistan. In addition to the activities mentioned in relation to WPA 64, the Secretariat had attended the ECS Conference in 2022. On WPA 65, several AC members were currently attending ICES WGBYC

140. Célia Le Ravallec (ACCOBAMS) gave a brief update on ACCOBAMS activities, highlighting the ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS cooperation with many areas of common and scientific interests and synergies, and the work of the two agreements complementing each other in many ways. The collaboration had intensified through the two joint working groups, as well as through cetaceans strandings work with the development of the ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS best practices, and ACCOBAMS was keen to contribute to the initiative on an online stranding database. They would be happy to present their results on their work on assessing impacts of marine litter to AC28.

141. She flagged that a draft resolution on scientific monitoring surveys would be presented to ACCOBAMS MOP8 in Malta at the end of November 2022, which would set a framework for future large-scale surveys in the ACCOBAMS area, and foresaw the next regional surveys to be held in 2024/5. ACCOBAMS would be happy to contribute to the discussion on the SCANS survey governance and in general to exchange information. She warmly thanked the Secretariat and Co-Chairs of the Joint Bycatch Working Group for their work in coordinating this WG, and concluded by welcoming the spirit of cooperation.

6.2. Dates of Interest 2023

142. Ms Renell (Secretariat) presented the draft List of Dates of Interest to ASCOBANS in 2022-2023 (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.6.2) relating to WPA 69 and 70, and invited comments on the meetings in the list. She requested AC members to inform about (tentative) representation at relevant meetings and offers to report back to the Secretariat from these meetings.

143. Ms Blankett suggested including the HELCOM-VASAB meeting on 5-7 October 2022 and informed the Meeting t that here is working going on to restructure the HELCOM working structure . Ms Renell said there had been an informal consultation with HELCOM regarding the HELCOM-VASAB meeting as one of the items on the agenda was marine spatial planning (MSP). As one of the AC26 Action Points was to develop guidelines for cetacean-friendly MSP (AC26/AP16), the Secretariat would attend the meeting to ensure that there were synergies and HELCOM was keen on being part of the project. She hoped to report back to AC28 on this. Several other meetings were added as well as details of members who would attend meetings and report back.

144. Ms Carlén emphasised avoiding clashing dates with ICES WGBYC and Mr Evans said he had liaised with the Chair to ensure this did not happen again. The List of Dates of Interest is in Annex 3 to this meeting report. Dates for AC28 were agreed to be discussed under Agenda Item 20.

7. Publicity and Outreach

7.1. Reports by the Secretariat, Parties and Partners

145. Ms Renell (Secretariat) presented the Report of the Secretariat on Outreach Activities (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.7.1), noting it related to WPAs 45, 47 and 48. Many of the activities focused around the 30th Anniversary of ASCOBANS, which officially took place on 17 March 2022. The Secretariat, as advised by AC26, had established an intersessional WG to come up with ideas for the anniversary. The anniversary items included an anniversary video, and social media activities, such as the launch of an ASCOBANS Twitter account, where the most accessed post to date had been the 30th anniversary post. The Secretariat had also built a dedicated anniversary webpage including a press release, messages from UNEP Executive Secretary, video messages received from IGOs and NOGs, and a timeline of the ASCOBANS Agreement.

146. Other activities had included the 20th International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise (IDBHP), which had taken place on 15 May 2022. The aim was that the IDBHP would be observed by at least one notable institution in every country around the Baltic Sea. The Secretariat had attended several meetings such as the 15th International Scientific Wadden Sea Symposium, for which they produced a poster; and co-organised a side event at the UNFCCC Bonn Climate Week. The Secretariat also continued to maintain the website social media accounts. A Season's Greetings card had been produced by the Independent Bonn International School, and Ms Renell invited input for the 2022 card. On publications, the Cost-benefit Analysis for Mitigation Measures in Fisheries with High Bycatch authored by Fiona L. Reid had been published in December 2021 as ASCOBANS Technical Series No.2.

147. Ms Carlén provided an update on the Baltic harbour porpoise petition organised by CCB, which now had over 98,000 signatures and would be delivered to the European Commissioner for Environment later in 2022, with hopefully 100,000+ signatures.

148. Mr Haelters presented the Belgian annual report on marine mammals containing data on aerial surveys, sightings, seals, strandings of harbour porpoise trends, number of stranded animals, causes of death, bycatch which was made available to the public and usually brought to in person meetings. Ms IJsseldijk shared the link for a public outreach magazine produced in 2021 for the Netherlands.

8. Projects and Activities Supported by ASCOBANS

149. The Chair introduced this item and noted there would be presentations on a number of projects and activities supported by ASCOBANS.

Using fishers' knowledge to understand the use of alternative gears to static gillnets in the ASCOBANS Region

150. Fiona Read (WDC) presented a progress report on the project Using fishers' knowledge to understand the use of alternative gears to static gillnets in the ASCOBANS Region which covered the Baltic, South-East England and Spain. They had first reviewed fishers' data to determine the best harbours to approach fishers for interviews, then designed a questionnaire, and translated the questionnaire into German and Spanish. Sixty interviews had been undertaken in Galicia, 43 so far in South-East England with another 16 planned and interviews

would start in Germany in October 2022. They had been offered match funding from Seas at Risk to add a fourth country, and had so far approached France, Denmark and Sweden.

151. The principal observations from South-East England were that: the majority of fishers were polyvalent; bycatch was rarely reported, although seal depredation was an issue for all gear; seabass caught with hooks commanded a higher price, but hooks could only be used in the summer months; and morale was very low with Brexit, fuel prices and no young fishers interested in the industry.

152. The principal observations from Galicia were that: the majority of fishers were also polyvalent; bycatch was rarely reported although bottlenose dolphin depredation causing catch and gear damage; and morale was also very low, with the industry being less profitable than previously, increased regulation, no opportunities for older fishers to change jobs and no recruitment of younger fishers.

153. The next steps were to conduct more interviews in the South-East of England in November 2022, conduct interviews in German in the Baltic, add data to the common database (October-December 2022), carry out data analysis (December 2022-January 2023) and then produce a final report to ASCOBANS at the end of March 2023. Ms Read was also planning to produce a peer review publication.

154. When asked why WDC had not yet progressed with France, Denmark or Sweden, Ms Read explained that she had had no responses. Susanne Viker (Sweden) asked Ms Read to send her the project details so she could try and help. Mr Evans suggested instead trying East Scotland or North-East England and covering a variety of gear types. Ms Read explained that they had originally planned to only approach gillnet fishers, but this was hard, in particular in South-East England, as fishers use a variety of nets. Some fishers wanted to use hooks, but the MMO was not currently granting rod licenses.

Prediction of the cochlear frequency maps of harbour porpoise

155. Maria Morell (ITAW/TiHo) presented an update on the project 'Prediction of the Cochlear Frequency Maps of Harbour Porpoise'. She explained that the project was about the workings of the cochlear inner ear, which contains a spiral with an apex where low frequencies are recorded while high frequencies are recorded in the base. How this is recorded is species-specific. Within the spiral is the Organ of Corti with sensory hair cells.

156. Cochlear frequency maps enable understanding through where a lesion is found as to which particular frequency is impaired and the nature of the hearing loss. If lesions were due to noise exposure, then it is possible to extrapolate the frequency consequences of the source and identify the cause of the damage.

157. Ms Morell then presented images of detail of the Organ of Corti and highlighted that no matter the size of an animal the Organ of Corti is the same size. The project investigates the relationship between the cells in the Organ of Corti and the frequency and whether the relationship is comparable among species if the species have similar hearing range.

158. She explained that the project involved using machine learning techniques to build a predictive model comparing the relative morphometrics frequency, using data from animals they know the frequency for. They had gathered information from bat, rat, mice, and guineapig in collaboration with the Institute of Neuroscience Montpelier (INSERM) to predict the cochlear frequency map for harbour porpoise based on morphometric characteristics of the Organ of Corti. They wanted to include more inner ears of terrestrial mammals to make the predictive model stronger, more detailed information from the most apical region of the cochlear of harbour porpoise and validate the prediction with individuals whose audiograms had already been measured. Once this was done it was possible to extrapolate the same predictive model

to establish cochlear frequency maps and hearing ranges for species whose hearing capabilities have not been measured.

159. They had been using geometric morphometrics and testing the predictive models to find preliminary predictions based on one species to another. Once they had established a learning model, they made a prediction based on the cochlear frequency maps from other animals to develop the cochlear learning map for harbour porpoise. She acknowledged Ms IJsseldijk and the Netherlands Strandings Network as well as ASCOBANS for funding the project.

160. Mr Brownlow asked whether it would be helpful to make changes to the way samples were being collected, to support this research in assessing stranded animals to see if there had been acoustic trauma. Ms Morell said it was just important to collect the ears as soon as possible after the animal dies and that there were more and more people who understood the need to do so. Ms Lesz asked whether one conclusion of the project was that harbour porpoise were not able to adapt to a high level of noise, but Ms Morell said harbour porpoise like other mammals were sensitive to high density noise exposure. The project techniques tested for a hearing impairment to obtain cochlear frequency maps to better understand the cause of the damage.

161. Florence Caurant (France) wondered about the effects of the age of the individuals on the mapping. Ms Morell said that some terrestrial mammals could not hear sounds when they are born and in the first weeks of life the Organ of Corti changes its anatomy, but harbour porpoises have the same hearing capabilities when they are born as when they are adults so she had not seen any change with age.

Second ASCOBANS Workshop on Management of MPAs for Small Cetaceans

162. Ms Carlén presented the outcomes from the 2nd ASCOBANS Workshop on MPA Management for Small Cetaceans, which took place in Helsinki from 31 May to 2 June 2022. There was no report available yet as there was no dedicated report writer for the workshop, but she hoped to develop the report soon.

163. The workshop aims were to strengthen and expand the toolbox from the 1st Workshop (2021), with circa 20 people attending. The intention was to improve on the conservation objectives that had been developed in the 1st Workshop by answering the questions left from the previous meeting, clarifying, expanding and adding descriptions for conservation measures. They had also grouped pressures into two groups: direct threats and contaminants; and prey depletion and habitat quality. They had agreed on suggesting some precautionary measures in case there was limited knowledge available, and did exercises using result chains to explore how measures would work where the perception of what would happen were true as a way to assess progress.

164. The intention was that the report will be an expanded version of the report from the 1st Workshop to have all the results in one report so it can work as a toolbox for MPA managers. The organising committee for the MPA Workshop had discussed the possibility of extracting the actual toolbox to add to a website or something similar, but agreed that currently there was not sufficient time and funding to do this. She suggested considering whether to assign ASCOBANS time and money to do this once the report was available. The report from the 1st Workshop was available on the ASCOBANS website.

165. The Chair opened the floor to questions and consideration of whether to extract the toolbox. Ms Brtnik supported this idea but would prefer to see the report first, and suggested including in the report some recommendation or ideas on how to move forward. It was agreed to put this on the agenda at AC28.

Marine Mammals Management Toolkit/Marine Mammal Twinning[7]

166. Tom Dallison (EU Ocean Governance Project, OGP) presented the Marine Mammals Management Toolkit for MPA managers and policy makers developed by Marine Mammals Twinning, under the OGP, which was funded by the EU and aimed at protecting and restoring marine ecosystems and catalysts for building peace and security and fostering sustainable economies in South-East Asia and the Atlantic Ocean basin. The Marine Mammal Twinning had four main objectives: building technical capacity of MPA managers; providing MPA managers with a toolbox; creating a network of peers; and promoting the developed toolbox and adapting the toolbox for other species such as turtles.

167. In developing the toolkit, a gap analysis was undertaken to understand what tools were already available and it was found that there was no dedicated tool for cetaceans in MPA management. The toolkit is hosted online at www.marine-mammals.info and composed of 5 key elements: fact sheets; a Self-Assessment Tool (SAT); a community of practice soon to be launched to provide MPA forum to exchange information and provide access to the twinning partners as mentors; good practices; and news, newsletter and events.

168. The SAT contained guided multiple-choice questions, allowing an MPA manager to guide adaptive management and understand the impact of new management measures. It was designed to be supportive and interlinked and a lighter version – SAT-LITE – was being developed to aid MPA managers in their understanding of when to take the time to fill out the large-scale self-assessment or review and implement the fact sheets. He stressed the multipurpose nature of the toolkit which could be used: to monitor progress of MPAs; as a checklist for developing management plans; as guidance on understanding weaknesses and successes in management plans; as a capacity building tool for empowering managers; and towards effective management of marine mammals.

169. Mr Dallison encouraged participants to use the SAT, review the toolkit especially the factsheets, submit good practices and case studies and join the community of practice. He shared the links to the Toolkit, Factsheets, SAT Newsletter, and Summary brochure (noting its availability in English, Spanish and French (alongside the SAT)).

170. The Chair thanked Mr Dallison and opened the floor for questions. Mr Evans noted strong synergies with a recently concluded EU project developing a self-assessment toolkit for assessing the effectiveness of management within Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs in Europe. He offered to provide Mr Dallison with links to the outputs. Mr Dallison mentioned several other Twinning projects where there could be links and they agreed to share information.

Status of Iberian harbour porpoise

171. Ms Read gave a brief update on the project assessing the status of the Iberian harbour porpoise, explaining they were in the very initial stages of the project as it had started in August 2022. Currently the focus was on coordinating general project management and logistics. There were circa 80 individual porpoises (from 2011-2022) to be added to the dataset from 1990-2010. In relation to the historical dataset which had been funded by ASCOBANS, it appeared that the animals were reproducing smaller and younger so they were hoping the increase in the dataset would help them to determine whether this was the case. She expected to give a report on the project outcomes to AC28.

Regional harbour porpoise action plans

The progress on the coordination of the regional harbour porpoise action plans is covered under Agenda Item 3.

[7] This project is not funded by ASCOBANS, but with relevance to the ASCOBANS Workshop on Management of MPAs for Small Cetaceans, it was deemed appropriate to include this presentation to the agenda.

9. ASCOBANS Work Plan: Overview of Implementation

172. Ms Renell presented an update on the ASCOBANS Work Plan 2021-2024: Overview of Implementation (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.9). She highlighted activities which still needed attention from AC27, including WPA4 - a host was needed for the Expert Workshop on Conservation Objectives; WPA28 - there was a need to review progress and actions in the Extension Area; WPA50 - the AC was requested to provide advice on how to proceed with prioritisation of WPAs; and WPA68 - she invited the AC to consider whether to establish an intersessional WG, for example, on considering the relationship of ASCOBANS with other organisations to identify areas of duplication or effort and gaps.

173. Mr Evans said WPA4 would involve two parts: one being a technical workshop for modellers which would be better in person, and one broader workshop could be a remote meeting. Both he and Ms Murphy were happy to help organise it. Ms Murphy suggested approaching OSPAR to co-fund as well as ICES and IWC and suggested potentially both workshops could be held in person. Ms Renell agreed the Secretariat together with Mr Evans and Ms Murphy could approach OSPAR and recalled there was a Steering Group set up some years ago to organise a future workshop, and so it was agreed the Secretariat would reactivate this.

174. Mr Evans said he had historically carried out WPA28, had produced reviews by contacting the range states in the Extension Area that were not Parties and always had good responses and, supported by Mr Simmonds, suggested continuing this. Ms Renell suggested putting it onto the AC28 agenda and it was agreed that Mr Evans would continue his work on this and report back to AC28.

175. On WPAs 50 and 68, Ms Renell recalled that a Party at MOP9 had proposed a prioritisation exercise be carried out for the WPAs. She suggested establishing a WG to consider which activities to involve and propose ways forward and it was agreed that the Secretariat would circulate an email to seek a lead and members for the WG. The Chair emphasised the need to clarify the purpose of the prioritisation process. Ms Renell referred to AC26/AP48 which directed the Secretariat to establish a virtual brainstorming group to respond to Activity 68. Mr Haelters pointed out that Belgium tried to deal with duplication by linking to other international fora reports in the ASCOBANS National Report to try and avoid duplication of effort. Mr Evans suggested harmonising reporting periods where possible although Ms Renell noted that this could be challenging, as timelines could be different for various reasons between different agreements. It was agreed to form two WGs in relation to these Activities, for which the Secretariat would seek members via circulating an email.

176. Ms Renell suggested WPA55 (organising workshops, including during the ECS) might come under discussion when considering funding for workshops under Agenda Item 19. Mr Simmonds asked whether the Joint ACCOBAMS Common Dolphin Workshop was still considered a priority and Ms Murphy was keen to have this happen within the next two years but preferred consulting the CDG and ACCOBAMS before deciding. Mr Simmonds supported holding workshops in the auspices of the ECS conference as many relevant people attended which would facilitate participation.

10. Any Other Scientific Issues

177. The Chair introduced this Agenda Item, noting the three issues that had been flagged for discussion in the beginning of the Meeting: the recent Nord Stream gas pipeline leakages; the Faroe Islands cetacean hunt; and fast-moving small watercrafts such as RIBs[8].

178. Many participants expressed their concern about how little was known about the nature of the Nord Stream gas pipeline leakages and potential impacts to small cetaceans and their habitat.

[8] Rigid Inflatable Boat

Mr Simmonds had sent out requests for information to colleagues who might have experience of such an event (such as in the US) and suggested, supported by Ms Blankett and Ms Carlén, establishing a WG to investigate monitoring the effect on small cetaceans and prey species. Ms Carlén referred to the similar situation in the US with oil spills and suggested encouraging countries in the Baltic region to monitor the effects on the environment. Ms Blankett said it would be on the agenda at HELCOM.

179. Discussions continued on how to monitor effects and feed back to the AC and Parties. Mr Brownlow and Ms IJsseldijk suggested urgently implementing active surveillance, with Mr Brownlow saying any increased noise in the region was being monitored. Ms Murphy urged highlighting that there was a critically endangered population in the area and wondered what the obligations were under legislation such as the Habitats Directive. It was agreed to establish an intersessional WG to decide the best way forward.

180. Ms Brtnik had raised the issue of the Faroe Islands cetacean hunt, recalling that Oliver Schall (Germany) in 2021 had brought the issue back to the German National Conference of Environmental Ministries of the Federal State, who had discussed it and a letter had been sent to the Faroe Islands in the name of the German Ministry of Environment. Unfortunately, the Faroe Islands response had not been very informative and was confusing as they had said they had lowered the number of white-sided dolphins to 500 but previous figures had indicated >100. The issue would be discussed again in the National Conference of Environmental Ministries of the Federal State in November 2022. Ms Brtnik wondered what could be done by ASCOBANS and on the national level. Ms Renell noted there had not been a response to the ASCOBANS AC26 letter which had also been sent in 2021.

181. The Chair asked the AC to consider whether to re-send the letter and whether to collaborate with IWC or ACCOBAMS for example. Ms Brtnik thought sending separate letters would be more effective. Mr Simmonds recalled they had had a response from the Faroe Islands in the past and suggested referring to the IWC Scientific Committee review in which they had raised a note of concern in 2021. It was agreed that the AC would send another letter to the Faroe Islands and the Chair proposed a drafting group which was agreed. Ms Day recalled that the UK and Germany had drafted the previous letter so offered to help but asked for work on this to start following IWC68.

182. Ms Carlén had requested the AC discuss the impacts on small cetaceans of small fast-moving watercrafts. The CCB member BUND in Germany had created a fact sheet on this. In addition, NABU had approached the Ministry of Schleswig Holstein to ban or regulate the fast tourist RIBs with speeds up to 100km per hour as they could scare and hit porpoises. The Ministry had asked the Federal Ministry for Digital and Transport to impose a speed limit who had responded with a letter stating that, according to current knowledge including ASCOBANS publications, the harbour porpoise was not at risk from ship collisions. As ASCOBANS was being referred to as saying there is not a problem, Ms Carlén suggested that there was a need to consider how to address this.

183. Mr Evans said this was also a big problem around the UK and Operation Seabird programme, which extended to marine mammals, was addressing the issue. Research indicated that there were significant impacts on harbour porpoise behaviour due to a fear of physical strike, in some cases they had been struck, as well as disturbance to feeding activities in particular. He agreed it was an important problem and there was now quite a lot of data on this topic. Ms Blankett said this was relevant to the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan as well as the HELCOM Noise WG. In Finland the Biodiversea LIFE IP project (2021-2029) was looking at underwater noise and its effects on the biota, and there were some restrictions available in legislation to impose speed limits. Ms Brtnik pointed out that the Ministry of Transport letter referred to both collision and underwater noise, and said speed limits might be possible within the MPA but not in the wider Baltic Sea, and asked Mr Evans to send her the information.

184. Mr Haelters pointed out this was also an issue for other taxa including sea birds and seals. Mr Evans emphasised that disturbance was the greatest issue through fear of collision and that there was a need for outreach and education about this. He suggested establishing a small WG to draft and translate multi-taxa guidelines, based on the education and awareness raising materials that had already been developed in the UK. This was agreed and Mr Evans agreed to take the lead. Ms Blankett noted this was part of Finland's programme of work under the MFSD and suggested also drawing from, for example, the HELCOM Noise WG Roadmap for Underwater Noise so as not to duplicate work.

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

185. The Secretariat presented the draft list of action points and recommendations generated during the meeting, which had been available in the MS Teams environment for review and comments. Each point was reviewed and edited on screen.

186. The revised and final list of Action Points and Recommendations from the Meeting can be found as Annex 1 to this meeting report.

12. Close of the Scientific Session

187. After the customary expression of thanks to all involved in the successful conduct of the Meeting so far, the Chair closed the Scientific Session on Friday at 11:18 CEST.

13. Opening of the Institutional Session

188. The session was opened by the Chair.

14. Advice on Authority of Working Groups to Act on Urgent Matters

189. The Chair opened this agenda item referring to Authority of Working Groups to Act on Urgent Matters – Options for Consideration of the AC (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.14). She invited the Meeting to consider options, as JG18 had requested AC27 to give guidance on the procedure for its WGs to provide advice on urgent matters, such as letters expressing concern to relevant stakeholders.

190. Mr Simmonds opened discussions by proposing that in such situations the WG Chair/Vice-Chair notify the Secretariat who would send out a consultation email to AC members. The Chair agreed that this could work where there was a political issue, for example, the AC could be consulted electronically. Ms Virtue referred members to the two scenarios outlined in the document, such as JG18's discussions on pingers and wondered if it was necessary to consult the whole AC when all the relevant Parties were "in the room". Experts could always write in their own name but that the question under consideration was what authority the WGs had as subsidiary bodies of ASCOBANS.

191. Discussions focused on three options, that: the WG be authorised to decide on whether to send such a document; the WG should inform the AC Chair/Vice-Chair intersessionally who could then sign off on the document; or the WG should ask the AC Chair/Vice-Chair intersessionally who could then sign off on the document and inform the AC electronically in case they had any intervention. There was some support for each option.

192. Mr Evans agreed that the Chair/Vice-Chair should be able to make the decision but copy in the AC so they had the knowledge of what is happening and could make an intervention if needed. Ms Blankett pointed out that the issue was when there was no consensus on whether

to send the letter/advice. Ms Viker pointed out that not all Parties were in all WGs which was a reason to consult with the broader AC. Ms Murphy emphasised the need to clarify the type of WG and it was agreed that it would be groups working on a long-term basis: the JG and NSG. For other WGs such as the JBWG, Ms Renell suggested that this could be an AP for the institutional session that the Secretariat reach out to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to discuss a way forward. She also pointed out the UK and France were the only Parties involved in the CDG. It was agreed for these two WGs the authority issue would be decided on a case-by-case basis. Mr Simmonds, supported by Mr Evans, suggested the option that the WG would send the letter to the Chair/Vice-Chair who could decide whether the letter should be sent, and then advise the AC if there was question asking them to respond for example within 24 hours. Ms Viker suggested the "24 hours" would depend on the urgency which was agreed.

193. Ms Virtue asked what members would want to do in a scenario where the JG for example was invited by the EC for technical and scientific comments in an urgent manner as in 2020, when the JG elaborated comments which were shared to the AC for comments then sent to the EC. Ms Renell suggested this was more about technical comments to a requesting entity, and Ms Murphy pointed out it had not been the opinion of ASCOBANS in this case but rather an expert group opinion.

194. The final agreement (see AC27/AP19 in Annex 1) was that where it was agreed by consensus to send such a document, the JG/NSG would contact the AC Chair and Vice-Chair intersessionally, who could decide whether it should be sent. They would in turn inform the rest of the AC with a short deadline, depending on the urgency. For the CDG and JBWG, it would be decided on a case-by-case basis.

15. Advice on 'Ongoing' Action Points

195. The Chair introduced this item referring to 'Ongoing' Action Points from WGs – Proposal for Consideration of the AC (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.15), noting that it had been raised that some of the APs and/or Recommendations coming from WGs reporting to the AC were carried over from previous years. The Meeting was invited to provide guidance on how APs/Recommendations would be recorded in the future.

196. Ms Virtue explained that this issue had been raised with the concern being that many APs/Recommendations were being rolled over and which might give a wrong impression to uninformed or new readers that all tasks are completely new. She shared a PowerPoint slide outlining three options for consideration.

197. Mr Evans was not in favour with the option to all APs/Recommendations only be retained for a period of three years, as some older Recommendations might remain important. Ms Svoboda proposed making new AP/Recommendations "SMART" by including deadlines. The Chair proposed including a deadline for review. Mr Simmonds felt it was useful to have the opportunity to demonstrate progress, saying the IWC had put together a table of recommendations going back 17 years, indicating where recommendations had succeeded, been superseded, revised, and so on. Ms Blankett recalled this had been done in the past and said HELCOM reviewed its Recommendations and the Baltic Sea Action Plan to include deadlines and follow-up and used a traffic light system. The Chair suggested two types of APs could be listed separately: long-term actions with review cycles to track progress; and new actions with deadlines. Ms Carlén said the JG reviewed and revised/refined APs each year and supported the idea of keeping the history as reference depending on the nature of the AP, feeling review as to whether they were still useful was important. Mr Evans said the NSG did something similar and supported a prioritisation process such as a simple traffic light system. Ms Virtue warned that prioritisation could be a lengthy process.

198. The Chair summarised the ideas discussed as: a) separating out short-term and long-term APs/ Recommendations; b) including a deadline (SMART) in new APs/Recommendations

where appropriate; and c) prioritisation through a simple traffic light system. It was decided to incorporate (parts of) each idea. Ms Renell agreed to draft an AP on this for finalisation under Agenda Item 23.

16. Status of Accession and Acceptance of the Agreement's Amendment

199. Ms Renell (Secretariat) introduced the status of accession and acceptance of the Agreement area Amendment to the meeting. Belgium and Lithuania had not yet formally accepted the Amendment and were invited to inform the Meeting on the progress made. Ieva Čaraitė (Lithuania) updated that the acceptance process was still ongoing. Belgium was not available for an update.

17. National Reporting Form

200. The Chair introduced this item. Ms Renell asked for Parties' feedback on the online national reporting system referring participants to the 2021 National Report Form (ASCOBANS/AC27/Inf.17). She highlighted that Mr Evans had raised on Day 1 that countries were interpreting the questions differently and suggested that revision of the questions could be done at AC28, before MOP9.

201. Ms Day gave the feedback that in completing the reporting form that it automatically populated the fields which hindered the process and that, as the national report included different topics each year, information on some topics was being missed over several years. Ms Renell said the Secretariat was trying to resolve the issue with automatically populating fields, and noted that the topics rotated as per Resolution 8.1 (Rev.MOP9). Mr Evans proposed including guidance to make it clear that countries could report on the full term since the topic had previously been included. Ms Renell noted that all the fields were accessible on each reporting form and so if Parties wanted to input information on all topics for the calendar year, they could do so.

202. Mr Evans also suggested revisiting the form intersessionally to tighten up the questions and including some guidance on interpretation. He noted that the persons filling it the form on behalf of their country were not picking up on activities in their countries so were missing out information. Ms Blankett said that in Finland there were not many strandings, for example, so it was challenging to complete the form on this topic. Participants discussed whether to have a separate guidance document, with Ms Viker asking for short information text under each question rather than a new document. It was agreed to establish an intersessional WG on national reporting with several people agreeing to be involved.

203. The Chair referred to HELCOM Recommendation 17/2 (harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea Area), noting that during the previous EG MAMA meeting, some participants wondered whether the ASCOBANS reporting formats could be made available to HELCOM to align formats. Ms Renell agreed and pointed out that all national reports were accessible on the website.

204. Ms Renell then presented the sections for the 2022 National Report which would feed into the discussion focus for AC28. The National Report deadline was 31 March 2023, but at the request of Parties, it was agreed to extend the deadline to end of May 2023. Mr Evans encouraged Parties to give guidance to the person completing the forms. Ms Brtnik asked whether the list of country experts for each topic could be reactivated, and Ms Renell agreed to circulate the list for update.

18. Financial and Administrative Issues

18.1. Administrative Issues

205. Ms Renell (Secretariat) presented the Report on Administrative Issues 2021-2022 (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.18.1) to the Meeting, noting there had been no changes on staff arrangements except that the Secretariat had received support from four interns with a further one just having joined the CMS Aquatic Species Team. The Secretariat had administered five projects which had been discussed under Agenda Items 3 and 8. Umoja costs had been discussed at AC26. The Secretariat had also raised the question of potential usage of annual overall balance towards conservation projects and had found that UNEP/ASCOBANS/Resolution 9.6 enables the Secretariat to allow such usage. The Secretariat had identified €10,000 in the balance under operating costs, which could be put towards the activities requiring funding under Agenda Item 19. This was agreed.

18.2. End of Term Report on Budgetary Issues 2020

206. Ms Renell presented the End of Term Report on Budgetary Issues 2021 (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.18.2) to the Meeting, and expressed her appreciation for the voluntary contributions from Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK. The carry-over from the 2017-2020 budget period had been circa €100K, most of which was allocated to conservation projects after MOP9, which was why AC26 had been able to allocate funds to activities. However, AC26 took place late in the year so the Secretariat had not been able to get all the projects started by the time of the report. The expenditure recorded was circa €205K and balance circa €115K.

207. Mr Kammer queried what had led to the higher personnel expenses and Ms Renell explained that the administrative assistant line was higher in this reporting period, because the staff member had worked 50% for CMS since August 2021 and the salary had been initially all charged to ASCOBANS. This had now been corrected (which would be shown in the next report). The AC approved the report.

18.3. Mid-term Report on Budgetary Issues 2021

208. Ms Renell (Secretariat) presented the Mid-term Report on Budgetary Issues 2022 (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.18.3), noting there had been no voluntary contributions by the time of the report, but since then Germany had provided a voluntary contribution. There was one outstanding Party contribution to the Trust Fund. Carry-over from 2021 was circa €115K, and expenditure at the end of June 2022 circa €127K, and the balance at the end of June circa €217K.

209. Ms Lesz asked whether there would be money spent on conservation projects. Ms Renell explained that contracts had been signed for most of the initiatives selected by AC26 for funding, and they would consume the conservation projects line. There were still a few pending and so this expenditure could not yet be seen in the projects line. The report was approved.

19. Prioritisation of Activities Requiring Funding

210. Ms Renell presented Activities Requiring Funding (ASCOBANS/AC27/Doc.19). She invited participants to prioritise seven initiatives that amounted to circa €70,000. The first initiative was an ongoing activity concerning coordination of all three harbour porpoise action plans. One coordinator coordinated the North Sea Plan, and one coordinated the Jastarnia and WBBK plans. The Scoping Phase of a strandings database, Workshop on the Common Dolphin and European Scientific Workshop were proposed at AC26, but not prioritized, so the Secretariat had brought them back into the list. She explained that the figures in the estimated costs column included the 13% project support cost and that the Secretariat had identified

€10,000 from the annual overall balance so the balance under funds needed was ca. €60,000. She invited comments and voluntary contribution pledges.

211. Poland, Germany, and Finland supported the long-term coordination of the harbour porpoise action plans as high priority. Mr Expert asked whether the NATO/navies Workshop concerned noise and if the Joint Noise Working Group of CMS, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS (JNWG) had been mobilized in relation to this. Ms Renell noted a workshop had initially been requested by AC26 concerning sonar, UXO and bycatch mitigation and said if the AC wanted the Secretariat to mobilise the JNWG, she would do so. Ms Svoboda recalled there had been a previous joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS workshop about navy sonar and noise and Ms Renell said there had been an ACCOBAMS workshop in 2019 where they had invited national navies, but only some came. The Netherlands, supported by France, proposed holding a joint meeting with ACCOBAMS and agreed about inviting a representative of the JNWG to the meeting. Mr Evans said there had been another noise workshop that addressed active sonar in which NATO and navies took part, but there were now new issues including pingers. He emphasized the need to engage with navies first to see if they were interested in participating. Ms Carlén, supported by Mr Evans, suggested starting with the UXO and sonar discussion and if that went well to lead into discussing pingers. Ms Lesz acknowledged this might not be the right moment to organize the workshop, but would go with others' opinion on this. Ms Day prioritized the workshop given the UK Ministry of Defence willingness to engage on the issue but appreciated it might not be the right time to do it. Ms Brtnik prioritized the workshop but as Germany was working on guidelines for UXO removal and there had been some initial discussions on the pinger issue, it might be useful to have some results on it first.

212. Several Parties prioritised the Scoping Phase of the Strandings Database. Mr Evans agreed that the database should be a high priority and wondered whether ICES would fund some support for that. Mr Expert wondered whether the joint ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Workshop on the Common Dolphin could be considered under the umbrella of the JBWG. Ms Renell suggested it would be for the CDG and the JBWG to decide on this and several participants agreed it needed to be considered by the WGs first. Ms Murphy confirmed that CDG3 would consider this in their meeting in November 2022. Mr Evans, supported by Ms Day, proposed changing the details for the Workshop to review of conservation units and their delineation for "small cetaceans".

213. Mr Evans asked for clarity on the European Scientific Workshop, with Ms Renell explaining that it had been carried over from AC26 and had initially been suggested by JG17 as a European Workshop on the Baltic and the North Sea on consolidating views from the scientific community on minimum standards, thresholds, cumulative impacts and information needed for impact assessments for small cetaceans. Mr Evans said some of this had been separated out into the workshops to be organized by the JBWG in 2023. Cumulative effects and some other issues would still need to be addressed in a separate workshop.

214. In relation to voluntary contributions, Ms Day said the UK might be able to announce a voluntary contribution closer to the end of the financial year. Ms Svoboda announced that the Netherlands was happy to pledge €10,000 to divide between the Scoping Phase of the Stranding Database, the NATO/navies Workshop and Joint Common Dolphin Workshop, should one be organised. Mr Expert announced that France could make a voluntary contribution of €5,000 towards the NATO/navies Workshop provided it was organized with ACCOBAMS, and the same amount towards the Scoping Phase of the Strandings Database. Ms Blankett said she would check whether there could be a €5,000 voluntary contribution from Finland towards the long-term coordination of the harbour porpoise action plans.

215. The Meeting then concluded the prioritisation of initiatives, which was agreed as follows:
    1) Long-term coordination of the harbour porpoise action plans - voluntary contributions from Finland, Germany, the Netherlands (more needed to cover both coordinators);
    2) Scoping phase: Database for Marine Mammal Stranding and Necropsy Data - voluntary contributions from France, the Netherlands;

3) Workshop with NATO and navies (coordinated with ACCOBAMS) - voluntary contributions from France, the Netherlands;
4) Workshop to review conservation units and their delineation for small cetaceans;
5) Joint ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Workshop on the Common Dolphin (pending decision of CDG3) - voluntary contribution from the Netherlands;
6) Review of the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat;
7) 'European Scientific Workshop'.

216. The AC supported the Joint ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Marine Debris Workshop and Offshore Renewable Energy Workshop and agreed there was no need to prioritise funds for them, if they would be held in parallel with the ECS conference.

20. Election of Chair of the Advisory Committee 2023-2025

217. Ms Virtue explained that the Chairperson elected at AC26 had changed duties and could not take on the role anymore and that Ms Kaminska, who had been elected as Vice-Chair had agreed to step in as AC27 Chair. Therefore, it was necessary to elect a Chair from among the Committee Members or their advisers, in accordance with Rule 4 of the Rules of Procedure.

218. Ms Blankett and Ms Viker proposed Ms Kaminska be elected as Chair, which was agreed. Mr Geelhoed then nominated Ms Svoboda as Vice-Chair which was agreed. The Meeting congratulated both for taking on these roles.

21. Any Other Institutional Issues

219. Mr Kammer noted that Oliver Schall would retire at the end of November and, in his absence, thanked him for his cooperation and good spirit as the German focal point for ASCOBANS. This was echoed by other meeting participants, and interventions were finalised by a round of applause for Mr Schall.

22. Date and Venue of the 28th Meeting of the Advisory Committee

220. Ms Renell showed on screen the historical AC meetings and MOPs and which country had hosted. She invited Parties to propose dates for AC28 in late 2023 and offers to host. Hosting offers were not raised at the meeting.

221. Ms Renell shared the dates of interest 2023 document from Agenda Item 6.2 to avoid an overlap with several other meetings, although not many dates were available as yet. Tentative dates were agreed as 26-28 September 2023. The full list of dates is in Annex 3 to this meeting report.

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

222. Ms Renell presented a draft list of Action Points and Recommendations for approval. The agreed Action Points and Recommendations from the Institutional Session are included in Annex 1 to this meeting report.

24. Close of the Meeting

223. After the customary expressions of thanks including from members to the Chair for stepping in, the Chair declared the Institutional Session of the meeting closed on Friday 30 October 2022 at 16:10 CEST.

Annex 1:

ACTION POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 27TH MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SCIENTIFIC SESSION

(AP = Action Point, R = Recommendation)

Bycatch

1. R) Relevant[9] Parties are strongly urged to ensure as a matter of urgency, that their Navy acousticians engage with porpoise acousticians, pinger manufacturers and other relevant experts at a technical level to work on solutions to enable critical porpoise protection measures[10] to be implemented before the population goes extinct.

Resource Depletion

2. R) Parties are encouraged to:
   - Contribute to development of the definition of prey depletion in relation to small cetaceans, including consideration of prey quality and reference points, which could be done in collaboration with ICES;
   - Support a thorough investigative analysis of stranded and bycaught cases to ensure that detailed information on cetacean health, body condition, age and reproductive status, pathogen presence and impact, and contaminant burdens, is collected. This is needed to both fully characterise energy balance (body condition) and provide an overall assessment of health, and not just proximal cause of death. Such analyses should be embedded within funding for monitoring of strandings and bycatch;
   - Support work to identify the most appropriate cetacean body condition indices for quantification of the impacts of prey depletion, coordinating with other interested parties
   - Support research on abundance and spatiotemporal overlap of cetaceans and their prey, including non-commercial species, accounting for the vertical dimension of distribution and considering appropriate scales at which to quantify overlap;
   - Ensure that stomach contents and other relevant samples (e.g. tissues for stable isotope analysis) are collected from stranded and bycaught animals during necropsy and that funding is made available for analyses, recognising that knowledge of cetacean diet is not only relevant to identifying prey depletion but also for detecting regime shifts in marine community and ecosystem structure;
   - Where there is evidence of depletion of key prey for cetaceans, recommend appropriate management measures to rebuild depleted prey stocks.

Marine Debris

3. AP) Parties and Secretariat to continue to work closely with IWC on this issue.

4. R) Parties are encouraged to undertake the following activities to improve collection of data on marine debris at sea and highlight areas of overlap with cetacean distributions:
   - To make the collection of data on marine debris more systematic and more standardized.
   - To incorporate floating marine debris as an additional explicit technical objective into existing cetacean or marine megafauna surveys, either ship borne or aerial. This is

[9] Parties whose Navies have expressed a concern that the use of acoustic 'pingers' in fisheries may interfere with their anti-submarine capabilities.

[10] ASCOBANS Res.9.2; ASCOBANS Res.8.3; ICES Special Request Advice - EU request on emergency measures to prevent bycatch of Baltic Proper harbour porpoise

already in place in a number of cases but effort in standardizing methods would enhance quality and comparability of data sets.

5. AP) The Secretariat to establish a Working Group to organise a Marine Debris Workshop, jointly with ACCOBAMS, aimed at better understanding the effects of marine debris on cetaceans and the relationship between marine debris and fisheries. This includes fully developing Terms of Reference to run the workshop (Chair, speakers, invitees). The workshop would be held as the next conference of the European Cetacean Society to consider *inter alia* the following:
   - How to improve collection of relevant data from stranded cetaceans, including identifying guidance for appropriate pathology;
   - How to best investigate the relationship between fishing gear and marine debris;
   - Best practice for debris recording for both ingested and entangled materials;
   - Best practice for sampling and recording of micro-debris; and
   - How to best share information between interested scientists.

   Members of the Working Group include: Andrew Brownlow, Peter Evans, Christina Fossi, Celia Le Ravallec, Emma Neave-Webb, Mark Simmonds.

Surveys and Research

6. AP) Secretariat to put SCANS and SAMBAH on the agenda of each Advisory Committee meeting. This would facilitate preparations for future surveys, lessons learned on practical and analytical considerations, and reporting on results.

Use of Strandings Records

7. AP) Regarding the web-accessed database for marine mammal strandings and necropsy data, the Secretariat to coordinate with Andrew Brownlow / University of Glasgow to arrange:
   - An initial online survey to gauge interest in joining a collaboration which would seek to explore the advantages and challenges in developing an online web-accessed data repository for strandings information.
   - A more detailed online survey seeking to understand drivers for the creation of an online database of marine strandings.
   - A review of existing or planned databases containing marine strandings data.
   - A technical workshop to:
     a) Identify stakeholder requirement / specifications / concerns for any database;
     b) consider issues of data ownership;
     c) Identify technical considerations and operation maintenance;
     d) Formulate a design brief, including potential outline costs and timescales for the project.

8. AP) ASCOBANS to liaise with ICES, IWC, HELCOM, OSPAR, and ACCOBAMS going forward.

Offshore Renewable Energy

9. AP) Secretariat to establish a Working Group to review the interactions between all forms of marine renewables and small cetaceans, given the considerable current interest in the further rapid development of marine renewables all across the agreement area. The Working Group would:
   - Provide a report to the next meeting of the Advisory Committee considering the full range of possible impacts and also appropriate mitigations.
   - Consider whether holding a workshop at the next ECS conference would help in this process and if so, to organize such a workshop.

- Taking into account ASCOBANS Res.8.6, seek to establish criteria for identifying areas of high sensitivity for cetaceans, including consideration of their prey and habitats, with respect to offshore renewable energy development.

10. AP) Parties, with advice from appropriate experts, to identify areas of high sensitivity for cetaceans, including consideration of their prey and habitats, with respect to offshore renewable energy development to inform national planning.

11. R) Parties are encouraged to undertake long-term monitoring following the installation of renewable energy devices to assess potential displacement of cetaceans.

12. R) Parties are encouraged to implement all aspects of ASCOBANS Resolution 8.6 *Ocean Energy* as a matter of high priority in light of the recent developments in offshore renewable energy construction.

ASCOBANS Work Plan: Overview of Implementation

13. AP) Secretariat to seek a lead and members for an Intersessional Working Group for Activity 50. *Undertake a work prioritization exercise, involving ranking the different activities of the Work Plan how the Advisory Committee sees fit*. The IWG to report back to AC28.

14. AP) Further to AC26/AP48, Secretariat to seek a lead and members for an Intersessional Working Group for Activity 68. *Consider the relationship of ASCOBANS to other organizations (e.g. OSPAR, HELCOM, IWC, EU Commission, European Topic Centre for Nature Conservation), in order to identify potential duplication or gaps in efforts. Any observations to be communicated to MOP10 in the form of a draft resolution*. The IWG to report back to AC28.

Any Other Scientific Issues

Nord Stream gas leak

15. R) Parties are requested to urgently implement active surveillance of effects of the Nord Stream gas leaks in the Baltic Proper. Monitoring should include effects on the critically endangered Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise and pinnipeds, for example through examination of stranded animals, as well as effects on sea birds, fish, benthic habitats and water chemistry as well any increased noise in the region.

16. AP) Secretariat to establish a small Working Group to gather additional information on the likely impacts and what should be monitored and report back to the AC as soon as possible. Members of the Working Group to include: Penina Blankett, Lonneke IJsseldijk, Katarzyna Kamińska, Susanne Viker, Andrew Brownlow, Ida Carlén, Maria Morell, Sinéad Murphy, Mark Simmonds, Sandra Striegel.

Dolphin hunt in the Faroe Islands

17. AP) Advisory Committee to send a follow-up letter to the Faroe Islands regarding the mass hunt of Atlantic white-sided dolphins in 2021, including more recent information. First draft (by end of October 2022) will be prepared by Germany, Poland, UK, OceanCare.

Recreational speed crafts

18. AP) Secretariat to establish a Working Group to provide guidance materials to interested Parties on the best ways to mitigate impacts in light of rapid increases in recreational speed craft (RIBs, power boats, and personal watercrafts) in many parts of the ASCOBANS Agreement Area, and concerns for the potential negative impacts upon small cetaceans and other marine wildlife through disturbance (including risk of physical injury). Members of the

Working Group include: Penina Blankett/Olli Loisa, Iwona Pawliczka, Ida Carlén, Peter Evans, Sven Koschinski, Mark Simmonds, Sandra Striegel, Dagmar Struss.

INSTITUTIONAL SESSION

Authority of Working Groups to Act on Urgent Matters

19. The Advisory Committee agreed that if a Working Group / Steering Group concurs by consensus that they need to urgently respond to a burning issue with a letter, the letter shall be shared with the AC Chair and Vice-Chair for review and approval. The AC Chair and Vice-Chair then inform the rest of the Advisory Committee, with a short deadline (that can be decided on a case-by-case basis by the AC Chair and Vice-Chair) according to the urgency of the issue. Technical and scientific comments requested urgently from Working Groups can be submitted without consulting the AC. The above applies to the long-standing ASCOBANS groups, namely Jastarnia and North Sea Groups. For other Working Groups, such communications shall be considered on a case-by-case basis.

20. ASCOBANS Secretariat to discuss with ACCOBAMS Secretariat regarding the procedure for Joint Working Groups to issue letters and other communications. Secretariat to report back to AC28.

Action Points from Working Groups

21. The Advisory Committee agreed that Working Groups may continue producing Action Points and Recommendations from their meetings as they wish, but mark the points that have been carried over, noting the meeting where the point was listed. Where appropriate, the Working Groups shall also mark whether the points are long-term or short-term, add deadlines, incorporate prioritisation, and assess whether existing ones have been implemented.

National Reporting Form

22. The Secretariat to establish an Intersessional Working Group to look at the questions in the current National Report form and assess whether they need to be clarified or additional guidance provided, including to the multiple options for answers. The IWG members include: Penina Blankett, Steve Geelhoed, Katarzyna Kaminska, Monika Lesz, Susanne Viker, Peter Evans. The IWG to report back to AC28.

23. The Secretariat to circulate the list of potential experts for National Report consultations, for update by the AC Members, their advisers, and Chairs of ASCOBANS Working Groups. Deadline: 31 October 2022.

Prioritisation of Activities Requiring Funding

24. The Advisory Committee agreed to prioritise the following activities, in order of priority:

- Long-term Coordination of the Harbour Porpoise Action Plans
- Scoping phase: Database for Marine Mammal Stranding and Necropsy Data
- Workshop with NATO and navies (coordinated with ACCOBAMS)
- Workshop to review conservation units and their delineation for small cetaceans
- Joint ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Workshop on the Common Dolphin
- Review of the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for the HP Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat
- 'European Scientific Workshop'

25. The Advisory Committee endorsed the proposals for Workshops regarding Marine Debris and Offshore Renewable Energy, which do not require any substantive funding, but would offer small financial support if necessary, and if available.

Election of Chair of the Advisory Committee

26. The Advisory Committee appointed Katarzyna Kaminska (Poland) as Chair and Anne-Marie Svoboda (the Netherlands) as the Vice-Chair of the AC, for the period from 2023 to 2025.

Date and Venue of the 28th Meeting of the Advisory Committee

27. The Advisory Committee agreed that the tentative dates for AC28 will be 26-28 September 2023. The Secretariat welcomes offers to host this meeting.

Annex 2:

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 2ND MEETING OF THE COMMON DOLPHIN GROUP

(Adopted by the Advisory Committee)

1. For reporting under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive, it is recommended that a transboundary assessment should be undertaken by Member States in conjunction with third countries; an assessment that could be undertaken by the ASCOBANS CDG and consider marine mammal common indicators developed by OSPAR.

2. The CDG endorses ICES advice on Emergency Measures for the Common Dolphin in the North-east Atlantic, subject to minor amendments to reflect ASCOBANS conservation objective '*to allow populations to recover to and/or maintain 80% of carrying capacity in the long term'*.

3. While emergency short-term measures are imperative to reduce bycatch of Common Dolphins in the North-east Atlantic, a strategic long-term population level plan is recommended to ensure the favourable conservation status of this European protected species in the long term. The strategic bycatch reduction plan, detailing monitoring and mitigation requirements, could be co-developed by the ASCOBANS CDG in association with other stakeholders, including Advisory Councils and the fishing industry.

4. Parties as encouraged to continue to review and test a range of mitigation options to reduce bycatch of Common Dolphins, including acoustic deterrents, gear modifications, fishing practices, time-area closures, move-on procedure etc., mitigation measures that could be implemented at the fleet level.

5. Parties are encouraged to conduct further analysis towards fine-scale risk-mapping to better understand factors determining high bycatch and to direct resources to high-risk areas and times.

6. Parties are encouraged to consider the geographic coverage of largescale transboundary surveys, such as SCANS, as it is crucial to cover as much range of the North-east Atlantic population as possible, to assess population shifts resulting from environmental change.

7. Parties are recommended that North-east Atlantic-wide information on life history parameters be collected and analysed from strandings and bycaught animals to assess for evidence of temporal changes in those parameters that may have resulted from anthropogenic activities.

8. Parties are recommended to undertake a review of aerial survey monitoring techniques to better discriminate small delphinid species to ensure explicit estimates of population size and uncertainty.

9. The Steering Group should identify the added value of its scientific advice compared to the other scientific fora, in order to avoid duplication of effort.

10. Letters of invitation to be sent from the Secretariat to request Non-Party Range States' participation in implementation of the SAP on Common Dolphins.

11. SAP Range States to complete the 'Achievements Table' by end of the year to identify data gaps, as well as actions and funding that are required going forward. The Steering Group should then set priorities for each country. Gaps to be potentially addressed by the CetAMBICion EMFF project led by Spain and any relevant national projects.

Annex 3:

List of Dates of Interest to ASCOBANS 2022-2023

Date	Organiser	Title	Venue	Participation / Report
2022				
5-7 Oct 2022	HELCOM-VASAB	Informal Consultation Session of the Joint Maritime Spatial Planning Working Group	Hamburg, Germany	Secretariat
6 Oct 2022	CMS	2nd Workshop on Conservation Implications of Animal Culture (Part I)	Online	
10-14 Oct 2022	HELCOM	17th Meeting of the Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation (STATE & CONSERVATION 17)	Karlskrona, Sweden	Penina Blankett, Katarzyna Kaminska
13-21 Oct 2022	IWC	68th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC68)	Portorož, Slovenia	Secretariat
17-19 Oct 2022	OSPAR	Intersessional Correspondence Group on Offshore Renewable Energy Development (ICG-ORED)	London, UK	
18-20 Oct 2022	OSPAR	Intersessional Correspondence Group on Marine Protected Areas (ICG-MPA)	Madrid, Spain	
19-20 Oct 2022	CMS	53rd Meeting of the Standing Committee (StC53)	Bonn, Germany	Secretariat
24-27 Oct 2022	OSPAR	Intersessional Correspondence Group on the implementation follow up of measures for the protection and conservation of species and habitats (ICG-POSH)	tbc	
25-28 Oct 2022	CBD / FAO / UNEP	3rd Meeting of the Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) Global Dialogue with Regional Seas Organizations and Regional Fishery Bodies	Busan, Republic of Korea	
27 Oct 2022	CWSS	Workshop - Trilateral Wadden Sea Stranding Network	Büsum, Germany	Lonneke IJsseldijk
2-3 Nov 2022	HELCOM	Informal Consultation Session of the Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries	Helsinki, Finland	
6-18 Nov 2022	UNFCCC	27th Conference of the Parties (COP27), 17th Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP17) and 4th Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA4)	Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt	
14-25 Nov 2022	CITES	19th Meeting of the Parties (COP19)	Panama	Catherine Bell
15-16 Nov 2022	ASCOBANS	3rd Meeting of the ASCOBANS Common Dolphin Group	Online	Secretariat
28 Nov - 2 Dec 2022	ACCOBAMS	8th Meeting of the Parties (MOP8)	Malta	Secretariat
3-5 Dec 2022	CBD	Fifth Meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (WG2020-5)	Montreal, Canada	Penina Blankett

Date	Organiser	Title	Venue	Participation / Report
7-19 Dec	CBD	Part Two of the Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Tenth meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol and the Fourth meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol	Montreal, Canada	Penina Blankett
7 Dec 2022	OSPAR	Intersessional Correspondence Group on Noise – workshop on scoping a RAP-Noise	Online	
12-15 Dec 2022	OSPAR	Biodiversity Committee (BDC)	Berlin, Germany	
2023				
17-18 Jan 2023	OSPAR	Intersessional Correspondence Group on Noise (ICG-Noise)	The Hague, the Netherlands	
31 Jan - 1 Feb 2023	ASCOBANS	11th Meeting of the North Sea Group (NGS11)	Online	Secretariat
3-9 Feb 2023		Fifth International Marine Protected Areas Congress https://www.impac5.ca/	Vancouver, Canada	
15-16 Mar 2023	HELCOM	44th Meeting of the Helsinki Commission	Helsinki	
20-22 Mar 2023	ASCOBANS	19th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group	Online	Secretariat
20-24 Mar 2023	OSPAR	Environmental Impact of Human Activities Committee (EIHA)	Norway	
16-20 April 2023	ECS	34th Conference of the European Cetacean Society (Workshops 16-17 April)	O Grove, Galicia, Spain	
17-21 Apr 2023	OSPAR	Biodiversity Committee	tbc	
24 Apr-7 May 2023	IWC	Meeting of the Scientific Committee	Bled, Slovenia	Mark Simmonds
May/June 2023	OSPAR	Intersessional Correspondence Group on Marine Litter (ICG-ML)	The Netherlands	
26-30 June 2023	OSPAR	OSPAR Commission	Oslo, Norway	
12-14 Sept 2023	HELCOM	Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA)	Stralsund, Germany	
26-28 Sept 2023 (tent)	ASCOBANS	28th Meeting of the Advisory Committee	tbc	
Oct 2023	CMS	14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS (COP14)	Samarkand, Uzbekistan	Secretariat

Annex 4:

List of Participants

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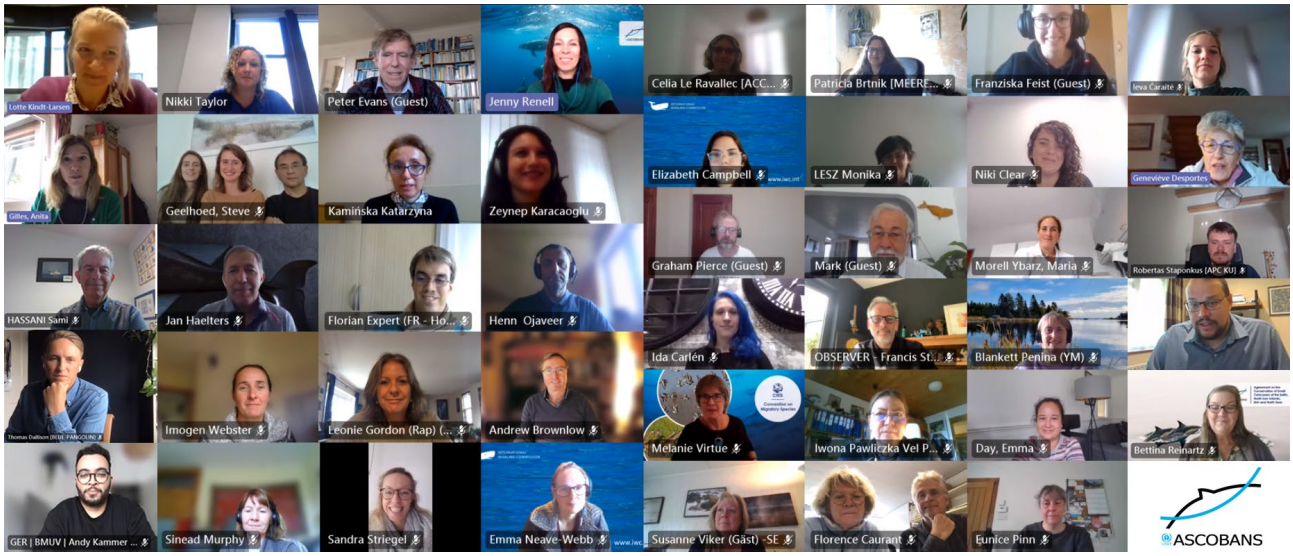
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