

Agenda Item 6.1

Cooperation with Other Bodies

Reports by the Secretariat, Parties and
Partners

Information Document 6.1

**Reports from Relevant Meetings back to
ASCOBANS**

Action Requested

Take note

Submitted by

Secretariat

REPORTS FROM RELEVANT MEETINGS BACK TO ASCOBANS

24-26 September 2019, Stockholm, Sweden

13th Meeting of the HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA 13-2019)

The report is available in the [HELCOM Meeting Portal](#).

30 September-2 October 2019, Berlin, Germany

First Marine Regions Forum

Report: Secretariat

Theme: Achieving a Healthy Ocean - Regional Ocean Governance Beyond 2020. The Marine Regions Forum (MRF) 2019 concluded that cooperation, coordination, and implementation in marine regions will be critical to address the immense challenges facing our global ocean and making progress in achieving global agreements. Key messages:

- 1) Address climate change, deoxygenation and ocean acidification in marine regions through ocean-based solutions and adaptive governance.
- 2) Adopt a strong and comprehensive agreement for biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.
- 3) Develop coherent networks of effective and well-managed marine protected areas, including in ABNJ, which are coordinated at the regional level.
- 4) Combat all sources of marine pollution through regionally coordinated strategies across sectors and governance levels.
- 5) Make tourism compatible with a healthy ocean.
- 6) Accelerate action for achieving the ocean dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including SDG 14, through cooperative and coordinated regional ocean governance.
- 7) Scale up science-policy-society interfaces for marine regions and promote integration of all kinds of relevant knowledge in decision-making.
- 8) Develop a robust global post-2020 ocean governance framework supported by strengthened regional bodies.

The Marine Regions Forum (MRF) is a contribution to the Partnership for Regional Ocean Governance, a collaborative initiative between the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI), TMG - Think Tank for Sustainability, and UNEP. Details on the key messages, the comprehensive Conference Report, and a summary report by IISD Earth Negotiation Bulletin are available on the [conference page](#).

8-10 October 2019, Toulon, France

ACCOBAMS Workshop on Sonar and Cetaceans Interactions

Report: Secretariat

Experts and representatives from two navies in the ACCOBAMS area gathered at the French Préfecture maritime for the Mediterranean, who hosted the workshop. The meeting noted that different cetacean species react differently to active sonar. Beaked whales were particularly vulnerable (to all frequencies), because they are a deep-diving species. Since a moratorium in Canary Islands, there had been no more regular mass strandings of beaked whales. The sonar frequency was not the only thing to be considered: modulation, which type of sonar (e.g. linear or algorithmic), repetition rate, whether different types of sonars were used simultaneously, etc. were important factors in assessing impacts. Each navy had their protocols. The overarching document to NATO navies was NATO's 'Code of Conduct for the use of active sonar to ensure the protection

of marine life within the framework of alliance maritime activities' (2018). The [provisional report](#) of the workshop was tabled for information of the ACCOBAMS MOP7.

21-25 October 2019, Latvia

11th Meeting of the HELCOM Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation (State & Conservation 11-2019)

Report: Penina Blankett, Finland

The 11th Meeting of HELCOM State & Conservation discussed following harbour porpoise related issues:

The revision of the Recommendation 17/2 Protection of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea area.

The meeting discussed on the revised recommendation with the comments from EG MAMA and the meeting agreed to submit the revised Recommendation to HOD 57-2019 for approval with intention of submitting it to HELCOM 41-2020 for adoption. At HOD 57-2019 the Meeting took note of comments to the Recommendation provided by WWF and invited WWF to provide the amendments directly to the Secretariat. The Meeting agreed that the Secretariat will incorporate the changes and send the amended Recommendation for intersessional consideration by the experts by 31 January 2020, with the intention to submit it for HELCOM 41-2020 for adoption. HELCOM 41-2020 adopted the recommendation on 5 March 2020.

BSAP update

Meeting discussed harbour porpoise related actions in the BSAP update.

Action project

The Meeting took note of the follow up on ACTION project WP1 on bycatch as presented by the Secretariat. The Meeting took note that Poland will strive to provide data also from small coastal fishing vessels in Polish waters to the project.

Joint OSPAR-HELCOM Workshop on Bycatch indicator development

The Meeting took note of the outcomes of the workshop as presented under the Joint Session. Poland informed also, that the OSPAR/HELCOM Bycatch workshop will, in addition to the workshop outcome, produce a technical report building on the background document prepared for the workshop. The Meeting took note of comment from Poland that it would be good if also the ACTION project WP 1 products could be included in the technical report.

NATO mine clearance in Fehmarn Belt

The Meeting took note of the concerns by CCB, Birdlife International and NABU with regards to NATO mine clearance exercise and its impact on harbor porpoise in the Marine Protected Area Fehmarn Belt, that is situated in the German EEZ and is at the same time a N2000 site and a HELCOM MPA. Germany had a presentation and video footage on effects of the NATO mine clearing exercises on the seafloor and associated specie. Meeting discussed on the issue and Poland commented, that harbor porpoise carcasses have been observed stranded on the Polish coast, and the enquiry from Poland, whether CCB has heard of any increased strandings after the mine clearings. As reply it was stated, that due to weather conditions during the mine clearance events, it is unlikely that carcasses resulting from the mine clearance exercise would have washed up on the German coast. Poland will check the possibility to provide CCB with further information on the Polish strandings with national experts. Germany asked, if other countries have had similar NATO experiences in their national waters, as the NATO mine sweeping of the remaining mines from second world war concerns the entire Baltic Sea area and invited the Contracting parties to provide information on this at STATE&CONSERVATION 13-2020.

Cooperation with other bodies

The Meeting took note of the increased cooperation between HELCOM, ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS and ICES in relation to work on the bycatch indicator.

5-8 November 2019, Istanbul, Turkey
7th Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS
Report: Secretariat

The meeting considered many subjects also of relevance to ASCOBANS, such as interactions between fisheries activities and cetaceans, anthropogenic noise, marine debris, cetacean watching, and best practices in monitoring and management of cetacean stranding. The Secretariat delivered a report on recent developments in ASCOBANS and CMS, which is available in Annex V of the meeting report, accessible on the [MOP7 page](#). As requested by ASCOBANS AC25, the Secretariat suggested adding a point to the ACCOBAMS Programme of Work 2020-2022 on organizing a joint workshop with ASCOBANS on the Common Dolphin at the next European Cetacean Society Conference. This was approved.

Twenty Party countries and two non-Party countries attended. Nineteen resolutions were adopted. Volycons were announced by France (for addressing ship strikes) and Monaco (€120K towards conservation measures). Malta offered to host MOP8 in 2022.

Preliminary results of the the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative ([ASI](#)) were presented. The objective of the project was to obtain sound data on cetacean populations and distribution via a large-scale survey in 2018-2019, which was the first of its kind in the Mediterranean. Surveys were also conducted in the Black Sea and Russia participation through a collaboration with EU-UNDP EMBLAS+ project. One alarming observation from the surveys was the prevalence of marine litter. The project also built national capacity: over 100 scientists were trained on cetacean monitoring techniques and now constitute a regional Task Force which can be mobilized for future cooperation.

12-15 November 2019, Bonn, Germany
4th Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council (ScC-SC4)

Being the last meeting of the Scientific Council before the 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS (COP13), this meeting aimed to provide advice on scientific and technical matters to the COP. Please find more details on the [meeting page](#) and in [this news item](#).

3-5 December 2019 La Carriga, Spain
IWC Marine Debris Workshop

The workshop aimed to progress the IWC's work on this threat by: (i) reviewing the latest evidence on interactions with cetaceans (both ingestion and entanglement) and considering evidence for associated toxicology; (ii) identifying best protocols for gross pathology, pathology for microdebris and the standardised classification of recovered plastics and other debris; and (iii) developing liaison with other relevant expert bodies. Based on its discussions, the workshop made a series of detailed recommendations, including emphasising the importance of long-term studies. The joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS document on 'Best practice on cetacean post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling' was strongly welcomed and commended to the Scientific Committee for its consideration. Please see the [report of the workshop](#) for all recommendations.

4 December 2019, Brussels, Belgium
European Commission: Marine Expert Group Meeting

Topic: Strict protection of marine species under the Birds and Habitats Directives – the impact of incidental catch (by-catch), ship strikes, underwater noise (shipping and seismic surveys), and addressing cumulative impacts in the context of the maritime spatial planning. The report is available [here](#).

7-12 December 2019, Barcelona, Spain
2nd World Marine Mammal Conference (WMMC)
 Report: Secretariat

Under theme 'Together for Science and Conservation', the Society for Marine Mammalogy (SMM) and the European Cetacean Society (ECS) jointly hosted this conference, with local organizers SUBMON and the University of Barcelona. 2,731 registered from 95 countries to attend 45 pre-conference workshops and 1,636 conference presentations (including 412 speedtalks and 1,021 posters). ASCOBANS Secretariat presented a [poster](#) developed together with the Joint ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Bycatch Working Group (JBWG) on 'Intergovernmental Framework for Tackling Cetacean Bycatch'. The Secretariat also provided the WMMC Student Award winners with hard copies of the [Odontocetes - The Toothed Whales](#) book. In the margins of the conference, a mini-meeting of the JBWG and a planning meeting for the ASCOBANS Workshop on Management of MPAs for Small Cetaceans were held.

"The World Marine Mammal Conference offered an unparalleled opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue in order to foster international collaborations that will impact our understanding of marine mammal science and conservation."
<https://www.wmmconference.org>

10-14 February 2020, Barcelona, Spain
Meeting of the ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME)

New and updated information on seal and cetacean population abundance, population/stock structure, management frameworks as well as anthropogenic threats to individual health and population status were reviewed. The latest findings on threats to marine mammals such as bycatch, pollution, marine debris and noise were also reviewed.

ICES. 2020. Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME). ICES Scientific Reports. 2:39. 85 pp. <http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.5975>

15-22 February 2020, Gandhinagar, India
13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS
 Report: Secretariat

CMS COP13 was the largest ever in the history of the Convention, with 2,550 people attending including 263 delegates representing 82 Parties, 11 delegates from 5 non-Party countries, 50 representatives from United Nations agencies, 70 representatives of international NGOs, 127 representatives of national NGOs and over 100 members of both national and international media. ASCOBANS Secretariat provided a [progress report](#) to the meeting. For overview of outcomes relevant to ASCOBANS, please see [ASCOBANS/MOP9/Inf.4.2](#).

COP13 documents, including the report, are available on the [meeting page](#). See also the related [press release](#).

10-13 March 2020, Den Helder, The Netherlands
Meeting of the ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC)

The meeting planned to address seven Terms of Reference, one of which was a special request from the European Commission on emergency bycatch mitigation measures for common dolphin in the Bay of Biscay and harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea (ToR G). For 2018, data received through the WGBYC data call amounted to 82 cetaceans (5 species). Bycatch of marine mammals was observed in all ecoregions and several gears including gillnets, traps, longlines, and trawls. Bycatch was the predominant cause of death of common dolphins stranded in the Bay of Biscay and Channel.

Compliance with the 'pinger' requirements of EU Reg. 812/2004 was difficult to gauge from the submitted reports due to reporting inconsistencies and incomplete information.

ICES. 2020. Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC). ICES Scientific Reports. 2:81. 216 pp. <http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.7471>

11-15 May 2020, online

12th Meeting of the HELCOM Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation

Report: Penina Blankett, Finland

The meeting focused on working with the BSPA update. The BSAP update includes several harbour porpoise related actions. The BSPA biodiversity related actions have been discussed at several online meetings during this time from May 2020 until they will be adopted at the HELCOM Ministerial meeting on 20th October 2021.

11-26 May 2020, online

Annual Meeting of the IWC Scientific Committee (SC68B)

The meeting report can be accessed on [the IWC website](#). See also the related [news item](#).

8-9 June 2020, online

16th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Jastarnia Group

Report: Secretariat

Participants from six Range States and ten institutions / NGOs / IGOs reviewed progress in implementation of the two plans, provided an overview of key activities in each Range States present, and provided other updates across the Baltic and Belt Seas. Status assessment criteria for progress of the implementation of the actions was also discussed. The meeting heard an update on the status of the project proposal for part two of Static Acoustic Monitoring of the Baltic Sea Harbour Porpoise (SAMBAAH II), discussed potential effects to harbour porpoise of the cod fishing ban in the southern Baltic Sea, and saw presentations on trials using acrylic pearls on static nets to mitigate bycatch, on research in Denmark, and on not-previously-analysed necropsy data from Swedish waters. The group also discussed emergency measures for the Harbour Porpoise in the Baltic Sea, including relevant ICES special request advice. One of the meeting outcomes was the decision for the Jastarnia Group to write up [Technical and Scientific Comments on ICES Special Request Advice on Emergency Measures to Prevent Bycatch to the EU Commission](#). For more details, please find the [full report](#) and action points on the [meeting page](#).

7-11 September 2020, online

9th Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS

Report: Secretariat

This was the first-ever governing body meeting of the CMS Family held online. Sixty-five participants attended, and 11 resolutions were adopted. New resolutions were adopted on the critically endangered Harbour Porpoise population of the Baltic Proper, on marine debris, and on food availability and resource depletion. Delegates also approved the *Best Practice on Cetacean Post-mortem Investigation and Tissue Sampling* and approved amendments to existing resolutions on the conservation of the Common Dolphin, bycatch, underwater noise, and stranding response. Please find the resolutions and document on the [meeting page](#). More details can be found in the [meeting report](#).

22-24 September 2020, online
14th Meeting of HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals

The report is available in the [HELCOM Meeting Portal](#).

5-9 October 2020, online
13th Meeting of the HELCOM Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation (State & Conservation 13-2020)

Report: Penina Blankett, Finland

SAMBAH II

Michael Dähne, Germany presented the application process for SAMBAH II – Spatio-temporal Monitoring the Baltic proper harbour porpoise and its habitat quality. He explained to the Meeting that without SAMBAH II, a sufficient monitoring of the abundance and distribution of harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea is not possible. Further he highlighted the importance that all partners secure their financial contribution.

Recommendation 17/2 Protection of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea Area

The Meeting took note of the following national work relevant for the Recommendation 17/2:

- Denmark hopes to include harbour porpoise as a conservation feature in 18 MPAs in Danish waters, this suggestion has been up for public consultation.
- Poland presented the first draft of a reporting form for the Recommendation. The Meeting highlighted that information reported to ASCOBANS can be used in this form as well to avoid double-reporting. Denmark and Sweden will provide written comments on the reporting form.

The Meeting took note of the follow up of ACTION project WP1 on bycatch as presented by the Secretariat. Recalling the information on a NATO mine sweeping exercise presented by Germany at STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019. The Meeting took note of planned national NATO mine sweeping exercises from Germany and noted that Denmark will provide information on national procedures for similar exercises to the meeting in writing.

ICES Advice

The Meeting took note of the ICES Special Request Advice on EU request on emergency measures to prevent bycatch of Baltic Proper harbour porpoise, as presented by CCB. The Meeting noted that the measures in the advice are intended to be implemented together and that though the emergency measures are only valid for a maximum of 6+6 months, long term measures are needed to secure an improved status of the population. It was also informed that a joint Recommendation to implement emergency mitigation measures for harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea is currently being discussed under Baltfish and noted that a proposal with a higher level of ambition compared to the first draft is currently being prepared based on input from the EU Commission. The Meeting took note of a statement on the ICES Advice by EG MAMA. The Meeting acknowledged that the political process regarding the ICES Special request measures is ongoing. The Meeting was of the opinion that Baltfish is the correct forum to discuss the implementation of the emergency measures, as it is tightly linked to fisheries management. The Meeting further highlighted the importance of close cooperation with ASCOBANS Jastarnia Group in this respect. It was also emphasized the dire state of the Baltic Proper harbor porpoise population, as well as the high importance and urgency of implementing measures both to address the immediate risk of extinction of the population and in the long term. The Meeting invited BALTFISH to consider the following statement by HELCOM EG MAMA in their further work:

“EG MAMA AGREES that emergency measures to protect the genetically distinct, morphologically divergent and ecologically separated management unit of harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea are urgently needed. To achieve a Good Environmental Status of porpoises according to HELCOM regulation in the Baltic Proper adequate conservation measures have been recently outlined in the ICES Special Request Advice on emergency measures to prevent bycatch of Common Dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) and Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise

(*Phocoena phocoena*) in the Northeast Atlantic issued on 26 May 2020 and endorsed by the 9th Meeting of Parties to ASCOBANS on 11 Sep 2020.

EG MAMA agrees with and emphasizes the following resolutions made by ASCOBANS:

ASCOBANS URGES the Parties to implement swiftly the recommendations on measures for bycatch mitigation made by ICES in areas of more than occasional Harbour Porpoise occurrence.

ASCOBANS URGES Parties to put in place long-term bycatch mitigation measures in line with the ICES advice both within and outside marine protected areas in areas of more than occasional Harbour Porpoise occurrence.

ASCOBANS ENCOURAGES Parties not to carry out activities shown to cause negative impact on Harbour Porpoises within Baltic Proper Natura-2000 sites.

ASCOBANS URGES Parties to implement monitoring of fishing effort and bycatch in line with ICES advice and to take into account the HELCOM Roadmap on fisheries data in order to assess incidental bycatch and fisheries impact on benthic biotopes in the Baltic Sea.

EG MAMA undertakes work to further develop the HELCOM core indicator on distribution of harbour porpoises. The results of the indicator and other relevant scientific work should be taken into account when defining the term "more than occasional harbour porpoise occurrence".

ASCOBANS has agreed and underlined that pingers are only an interim solution and EG MAMA emphasizes the need for implementation and, when needed, development of fishing gear proven to minimize or avoid bycatch of protected, endangered and threatened species to replace static nets, using the best available technology."

The Meeting considered that the Recommendation 17/2 already covers implementation of measures such as those presented in the ICES special request advice and thus did not support integrating the ICES advice directly into Recommendation 17/2, however the Meeting agreed that the proposed measures should be considered in the implementation of the Recommendation. The Meeting suggested that once decision has been taken in Baltfish, HELCOM should consider including similar measures as actions in the updated BSAP. It was also noted the comment by CCB that the ICES advice is already tempered by fisheries interests, as all stationary net fisheries would need to be fully closed in order to reach levels of by-catch of less than 0.7 animals/year.

3 December 2020, online

2nd Meeting of the ASCOBANS Common Dolphin Group

Report: Secretariat

The group reported on progress in SAP implementation, activities contributing towards its implementation, relevant ICES and OSPAR meetings. The report of the ICES WKEMBYC, including the resulting ICES advice, was discussed at length. It was decided that the Steering Group would develop a short set of recommendations to be sent to the European Commission, re-affirming the conclusion and concerns within the ICES advice, and providing further guidance where required. For documents, please refer to the [meeting page](#).

20-21 January 2021, online

9th Meeting of the ASCOBANS North Sea Group

Report: Secretariat

Parties reported on implementation of the Actions listed in the Conservation Plan, such as investigation of the health, nutritional status and diet of harbour porpoises: the observed long-term

decline - approximately 2% per annum since 2002 - in porpoise numbers in northern German waters was discussed. Concern was raised over the findings that the stranded harbour porpoises had been young. The meeting suggested that regarding monitoring trends in distribution and abundance, Parties should consider doing larger analysis together with many countries. Priority recommendations are available on the [meeting page](#).

1-4 February 2021, online

Meeting of the ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME)

The meeting reviewed regulations for acoustic deterrent devices to mitigate marine mammal bycatch and legislation requirements for monitoring of bycatch along with updated information on bycatch. A questionnaire survey to European stranding networks mapped information pertinent to bycatch assessments. WGMME also reviewed and summarized information on bycatch and strandings included in the reports from the parties submitted to ASCOBANS for the period 2016–2018.

ICES. 2021. Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME). ICES Scientific Reports. 3:19. 155 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.8141>

10-12 February 2021, online

1st Meeting of the Joint Bycatch Working Group of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS

Report: Secretariat

Day 1 and Day 2 of the meeting were open to observers, which brought in 130+ people outside the Working Group, following presentations and participating in the discussions. At the end of Day 2, the meeting drafted recommendations, for example on undertaking regional and sub-regional cooperation projects/programmes, and encouraging to increase current sampling levels in order to achieve better bycatch estimates. Day 3 was dedicated to the WG members, to elaborate on their Programme of Work for 2021 and 2022. [Recommendations](#) and presentations are available on the [meeting page](#).

17-19 and 24-26 February 2021 and 3 May- 9 June 2021, online

CBD 24th Meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA)

Report: Penina Blankett, Finland

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic the planned SBSTTA 24 meeting (18-23 May 2020) was postponed and it was held as online meeting in 17-19 and 24-26 February 2021 and in 3 May -9 June 2021.

Online meeting in 17-19 and 24-26 February 2021

The topic of marine and coastal biodiversity was considered during the fourth segment of the informal session, on 24 February 2021. The available background documents were related to marine and coastal biodiversity; EBSA process, the report on the Thematic Workshop on Marine and Coastal Biodiversity for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework; a compilation of submissions on experiences in the implementation of marine spatial planning, a synthesis of experiences to achieve Aichi Biodiversity Target 10 for coral reefs and closely associated ecosystems, a synthesis of submissions on experiences for the implementation of the voluntary specific workplan on biodiversity in cold-water areas within the jurisdictional scope of the Convention on Biological Diversity, a technical paper updating *CBD Technical Series No. 83* on marine debris, the report of the Expert Meeting on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures in the Marine Capture Fishery Sector and *CBD Technical Series No. 87: Assessing Progress towards Aichi Biodiversity Target 6 on Sustainable Marine Fisheries*. Consideration of the topic resumed during the fifth segment of the informal session, on 25 February 2021. Introducing the item, the Chair recalled that the topic had been considered during the informal session, on 24 and 25 February 2021, at which time

interventions had been made by 32 Parties and regional groups and 14 observers, with written statements also received from 4 other Parties and 5 other observers

Online meeting in 3 May – 9 June 2021

The Subsidiary Body considered agenda item 6 at the second plenary session, on 4 May. Following the exchange of views, the Chair established a contact group regarding the EBSA process, facilitated by Ms. Marie-May Muzungaile (Seychelles) and Mr. Matthias Steitz (Germany), with the mandate to focus on annexes VI, VIII, XI and XIII of the draft recommendations contained in document. Unfortunately there was no time to discuss the outcome of the CG in plenary. There has been planned to have a person meeting in January 2022, but not yet any confirmation on it.

CBD 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity:

COP 15 was originally expected to convene in October 2020 in Kunming, China. Due to the global pandemic emerging in early 2020, the meetings were rescheduled several times. On 18 August 2021, the Secretariat announced that COP 15 will not take place in person in October 2021. Instead, COP 15 will take place **in two parts**. The **first part** will take place in a virtual format, from 11-15 October 2021. Accredited delegates from embassies and organizations already located and based in China may gather in Kunming during this period. **The second part of COP 15 will be a face-to-face meeting in Kunming, China, from 25 April-8 May 2022.**

27 April–14 May 2021, online

Annual Meeting of the IWC Scientific Committee (SC68C)

Report: Secretariat

Key outcomes:

- The Scientific Committee (SC) endorsed recommendations presented by the ASCOBANS Intersessional Working Group (IWG) on Beaked Whales. In addition, the SC recognised the impacts of anthropogenic underwater noise on beaked whales and other cetacean species and encouraged the communication and implementation of the ASCOBANS IWG recommendations by all relevant stakeholders.
- An Intersessional Correspondence Group on Beaked Whales was established and included in the work plan for small cetaceans. It is to “review the opportunities for the Scientific Committee to progress work on the conservation of beaked whale species, including taking into account its previous contributions, and by working with others who are also interested in these taxa, such as ASCOBANS”.
- An intersessional group was formed to coordinate advice on the issue of acoustic interference of pingers with military sonars. Members: Bell, C., Berggren, Bjørge, Carlén (convenor), Cosentino, Dolman, Leaper, Parsons, Plön, Simmonds, Tarzia.
- The SC reiterated its previous recommendation (SC2097) that, as a matter of urgency, all Baltic Sea range states immediately act to eliminate bycatch of the Baltic Proper porpoise; and encouraged countries to make full assessment of any potential interactions between pingers and military sonars, and offers its advice (noting that an intersessional group of the Scientific Committee has been established to facilitate this).

The meeting report can be accessed on the [IWC website](#). See also the related [news item](#).

19-21 April 2021, online

IWC-CMS Workshop on Cetacean Ecosystem Functioning

Report: Secretariat

The workshop was considered a good reflection of today's knowledge about cetacean ecosystem functioning, and in that way served as an excellent starting point for future work. The workshop gathered a list of general questions, hypotheses, and tasks to be accomplished or considered for a

second workshop, such as *inputs needed for a robust assessment of the contribution of cetaceans in “ocean fertilization”, “carbon cycle and sequestration”, “delivery of nutrient and energy”, and “habitat provision” (contribution relative to species other than cetaceans, consumption, metabolism, biodiversity, habitat including deep sea floor)*. The report is available as [IWC/SC/68C/REP/03](#).

3-6 May 2021 online

14th Meeting of the HELCOM Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation (State & Conservation 14-2021)

Report: Penina Blankett, Finland

The meeting discussed indicators for the next Holas assessment namely Holas III.

Harbour porpoise related indicator:

- Harbour porpoise abundance: The Meeting noted the information from Poland that acoustic monitoring of harbour porpoise has started in three areas in 2020. Poland asked to check if Polish national monitoring data from 2016-2018 is missing in the HELCOM database and reports. Germany proposed that it would be useful if the regional assessment, to the extent possible, was aligned with the assessment for Art. 17 under the Habitats Directive.

Sweden and Denmark commented that, for the Belt sea population, it would be encouraged that the indicator evaluation approach be harmonized with that used under OSPAR and the clarification that harmonization has been discussed under the recent HELCOM BLUES workshop on harbour porpoise.

Harbour porpoise distribution: There was further discussion in the recent HELCOM BLUES workshop on harbour porpoise. The Meeting noted that a workshop to further develop harbour porpoise distribution and habitat quality indicators is suggested in Annex 1 of the document 4J-28 and invited the CPs to consider the possibility to host such a workshop and return to the proposal at STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021. The Meeting took note of the comment by Sweden that, should the SAMBAH II project not be funded, an alternative plan for the Belt Sea population might be needed, and that the table 1.1. provided in the document may be erroneous

HOLAS III

The Meeting took note of the assessment of harbour porpoise for HOLAS III as well as of the workshop results for the planned assessment of harbour porpoise for HOLAS III. The Meeting expressed support for the work to harmonize the assessment of the Belt sea population with the OSPAR approach. The Meeting welcomed that Sweden can support the work in 2022 with personnel resources and welcomed the clarification that work in the HELCOM BLUES project will focus mainly on the indicators and the overarching assessment of harbour porpoise for the thematic assessment in HOLAS III would be addressed separately.

Bycatch

The Meeting took note of the Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gear indicator. The Meeting invited the Secretariat to check that the latest version of the monitoring programme is available on the HELCOM webpage. Germany would like to see this indicator listed under vertebrates (birds and mammals) rather than under bycatch. The Meeting noted the clarification by the Secretariat that the difference between subprogramme and monitoring programme is that subprogramme was the term used in the previous Monitoring Manual and has recently been changed to programme as part of the update of the Monitoring Manual. The Meeting noted that in further work towards HOLAS III harmonisation with OSPAR work on the topic was considered valuable, if possible to achieve, and that care should be taken to ensure developments are well aligned with the MSFD (e.g. when grouping species etc). Sweden informed that it can contribute to the analysis for the Belt Sea and that bycatch reports will be available from Denmark in the near future. The Meeting took note of the bycatch assessment. Denmark aims to complete two reports on bycatch of birds in the coming year and will share information once available. Finland informed that a recent national survey to commercial fishermen indicates that fykenets are a cause of bird bycatch at a similar level as other

previously identified gears, further information will be available in the near future and will be disseminated once public. CCB commented that, in future bycatch assessments, trawling should be considered as this is a source of bycatch for marine mammals. The ACTION reports will be made available on the HELCOM project website as soon as this is possible and that all reports are now available. The Meeting noted that the assessment under HELCOM BLUES aims to cover additional areas and species than those covered in the ACTION report and aims to cover other fishing gears where data is available. Germany commented that this indicator has direct relevance under marine mammals and waterbirds, in particular where the MSFD is addressed and should be addressed in the corresponding thematic reports in line with the MSFD rather than opening a separate topic on bycatch. The Meeting took note of the bycatch assessment in the HELCOM BLUES project and request for clarification regarding the model choice in the bycatch assessment will be sent to the Secretariat by Sweden by 7 May.

18 May & 7-9 June 2021, online

ASCOBANS Workshop on Management of MPAs for Small Cetaceans

Report: Secretariat

The interactive [workshop](#) aimed to review and share experiences on best practice approaches to MPA management, taking them beyond being merely 'paper parks'. The [report](#) reflects the discussions, meaning that the lists of proposed conservation objectives and measures are not exhaustive or fully developed. However, they provide food for thought, and should be built upon in the next workshop so that they can be developed into a complete toolbox of conservation objectives and measures.

25-27 May 2021, online

17th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Jastarnia Group

Report: Secretariat

The meeting heard updates from the European Commission, who was working on emergency measures to prevent bycatch of harbour porpoises in the Baltic, as well as working closely with BALTFISH (The Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum) to put in place delegated acts for the same purpose in the long term, in line with the ICES scientific advice of May 2020. The meeting discussed potential next steps to address the concern raised by some Baltic national navies over the use of acoustic deterrent devices and their alleged interference with military underwater acoustic activities. The same news had been received with surprise at the recent meeting of the IWC Scientific Committee. It was suggested that those countries promptly investigate the extent of the issue, to ensure that any decisions that may impact the survival of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise population and/or the fishing industry are made based on scientific evidence. For more information, please refer to the [meeting page](#) and related [news item](#).

28 June-9 July 2021, online

Fifth Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council

Report: Secretariat

Among the key outcomes, the Committee agreed to:

- Create an expert working group on migratory species and health, including zoonotic diseases which have been linked to the exploitation of wild animals and destruction of natural habitat.
- Develop guidelines to prevent or mitigate the growing impacts of light pollution on migratory species.
- Continue its work on the impacts of climate change on migratory species and the benefits of migratory species and healthy ecosystems for mitigating climate change.

For more details, please see the [press release](#) and documents on [the meeting page](#).

14-16 September 2021, online

15th Meeting of HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA 15-2021)

The report is available in the [HELCOM Meeting Portal](#).

21-20 September 2021, online

52nd Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee

Report: Secretariat

The meeting was the first Standing Committee meeting since CMS COP13, and helped make progress on the ambitious programme of work adopted at COP13 by ensuring that decisions are being implemented. ASCOBANS Secretariat submitted a [progress report](#). Among the key outcomes, the Committee agreed to adopt a revised Format for National Reports that will be used by CMS Parties to report on progress at COP14 in 2023. Please see documents on the [meeting page](#), and the related [press release](#).

1 October 2021, Cascais, Portugal

OSPAR Ministerial Meeting 2021

Key outcomes of the meeting included:

- The launch of OSPAR's North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 setting objectives until the end of the decade. It is based around four themes: clean seas; biologically diverse seas; productive and sustainably used seas; and seas resilient to climate change and ocean acidification. It includes a target to reduce marine litter by 50% by 2025 and by 75% by 2030, and a commitment to designate 30% of the OSPAR Maritime Area as MPA by 2030.
- Action to reduce the loss of plastic pellets into the marine environment through pellet loss prevention standards and certification schemes for the entire plastic supply chain. This action is supported by a set of guidelines for Contracting Parties and industry.
- Protection for important carbon sequestering kelp forest habitat to minimise adverse effects from human activities and climate change.

For more details please see the [press release](#) and the agreed [deliverables](#).