

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

1-5 November 2021, online IWC Pollution 2025 Workshop

Report: Mark Simmonds

The workshop on Pollution 2025, was an initiative of the IWC Scientific Committee's sub-committee on Environmental Concerns. Its aim was to study how cumulative impacts from exposure to multiple stressors could best be investigated, which new methods and techniques could be helpful, and which mitigation measures might be recommended. To this end, several frameworks and models were discussed, as well as the utility of tissue culture techniques, aerial and drone photogrammetry, -omics biomarkers, adipocyte index, epigenetics and novel in silico and in vitro techniques. Additionally, several case studies were presented, including the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, on health assessments of bowhead whales, a Spanish project on stressors involving trophic interactions, and a monitoring project of harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea. The participants agreed on the need to understand the biological processes on all levels of the organisms up to the population level. Baseline data, e.g. on adult survival rates, and health measures should be generated more systematically. The full report can be found here: https://iwc.int/document_3733

8-10 November 2021, online HELCOM 25th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach

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

16-17 November 2021, online 23rd Meeting of the Joint HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial Planning Working Group

Report: Penina Blankett

On the *Agenda Item 5 Intergovernmental cooperation and follow-up progress in regional MSP* the Meeting took note of the 14th meeting of the HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA 14-2020) (presentation 5 and document 5-2), raising the importance of cooperation between countries with regard to the presented planning of wind farms in the direct vicinity of MPAs, and how to ensure that the needs of harbour porpoise are accounted for in planning. The Meeting recalled that there are two different populations of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea. The Meeting took note of the information from Finland that regarding the distribution of harbour porpoise the outcome of SAMBAH Life + project should be used. The meeting welcomed the ASCOBANS AC26 decision on establishing an intersessional working group (IWG) to elaborate on how to best develop guidelines for cetacean-friendly MSP and a draft resolution for MOP10. The Meeting was of the opinion that regional guidelines are vital for strategic level decisions in this matter above the national MSP process. The Meeting pointed out that there are many matters to consider related to the MSPs and considering small cetaceans, e.g.

- in licensing of the wind farm building, there is a possibility to issue temporal restrictions for noise-inducing activities like pile driving related to the building;
- there could be mutually exclusive mitigating actions for different species groups (e.g. porpoise and some birds)

The Meeting invited the HELCOM Secretariat to submit a document to HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG 24-2022 on the last information regarding this topic under the frame of ASCOBANS for further discussion by the HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG. The Meeting took note of the shared national experience on how the spatial aspect of the conservation of harbour porpoise is taken into account when planning offshore wind farms:

- Sweden and Poland have had cooperation on offshore wind activities possibly colliding with harbour porpoise and birds to exchange experience from national point of views, and to discuss the transboundary aspect with relevant experts;
- In Sweden the environmental strategic assessment in MSP includes qualitative assessment of impacts on harbour porpoise. Temporary effects like impulsive noise from establishment of offshore wind power is not yet included in the Swedish cumulative impacts modelling tool Symphony. The Swedish Agency for Water Management (SwAM) is also commenting in the licensing processes for offshore windfarms in terms of impacts on harbour porpoise and mitigation.
- Germany uses the current scientific knowledge to assess impacts of offshore windfarm planning on harbour porpoises. Germany also has in the North Sea a designated reserved area for harbour porpoise but there is no such area for the Baltic Sea Area, however existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) were designated priority areas. German MSP includes strict measures for the mitigation of pile driving.

22-26 November 2021, Monaco / online
14th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee
 Report: Secretariat

The meeting considered many subjects also of relevance to ASCOBANS, such as interactions between fisheries activities and cetaceans, anthropogenic underwater noise, marine debris, and cetacean watching.

The Secretariat highlighted the outcomes of the ASCOBANS AC26 that had taken place earlier that month, including the virtual brainstorming meeting on strandings and necropsy database (invitees of which would include ACCOBAMS); requests made to the Joint Noise Working Group of CMS, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS; invited ACCOBAMS to support the implementation of the Species Action Plan to North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin; and indicated that members from Portugal and Spain would also be welcome in the Intersessional Working Group on the development of proposal for listing the Iberian harbour porpoise to CMS Appendix I and II.

The ACCOBAMS Preliminary Work Programme for 2023-2025 now includes ASCOBANS in Conservation Action CA 1 a (Improve knowledge about the status of cetaceans: *Harmonize monitoring and reporting considering other obligations of countries (MSFD, Barcelona Convention, Bucharest Convention + other regional Agreements such as ASCOBANS and Pelagos)*).

The meeting report is available [here](#).

23-26 November 2021, Gothenburg, Sweden
OSPAR Intersessional Correspondence Group on Marine Litter (ICG-ML)

The summary record is available in the [OSPAR meeting archive](#).

29 November - 3 December 2021, online
IWC Climate Change Workshop
 Report: Mark Simmonds

The joint IWC Conservation Committee/Scientific Committee Climate Change Workshop took place virtually in three three-hour sessions on November 30th and December 1st and 3rd. In total there were 20 presentations and 66 participants attended from 21 countries. The workshop heard and discussed a variety of issues, including: (i) details of the IPCC's most recent assessments, (ii) rebuilding baleen whale ecosystems; (iii) the development of IMMAs (Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs)); and

(iv) recent developments related to climate change in the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Sea. Cavanagh and colleagues from the British Antarctic Survey also presented on the effects of climate change on Southern Ocean ecosystems, with a focus on synergies between the work of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and the IWC.

Further to review by its participants, the workshop report was posted online in March 2022¹ The workshop report acknowledged that, due to its shortened and virtual nature, not all elements of its planned agenda had been completed. The Scientific Committee received the report of the workshop at its 2022 meeting (SC68D) and endorsed its recommendations but could not support an in-person workshop at this time.

The workshop [report](#) is available online.

30 November - 3 December 2021, online
15th International Scientific Wadden Sea Symposium
Report: Jip Vrooman

Introduction

The full symposium report can be found [here](#). The International Scientific Wadden Sea Symposium (ISWSS) aims to bring together scientists active in and around the Wadden Sea, “*to present their research and to discuss how they can become (further) involved in the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC)*.” The theme of the 15th ISWSS was “*Importance of science for the management of the Wadden Sea World Heritage in the context of climate change.*”

There were thematic sessions on birds, marine mammals, alien species, sublittoral habitat, sustainable development – eco and sustainable development – socio. There were also some general lectures to ‘set the scene’, discussing, i.a., the “trilateral Climate Change Adaptation Strategy”, trilateral research priorities and climate adaptation and restoration in the Wadden Sea. Furthermore there were general lectures focussing on a more international perspective (beyond the three border states); discussing collaboration across World Heritage Sites, assessing climate vulnerability of the Wadden Sea using the Climate Vulnerability Index (CVI), and cooperation with South-Korea on the Yellow Sea and with west-African states on African Eurasian Flyways.

Harbour porpoise

Concerning marine mammals, only the harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) is currently of relevance to the region. There were lectures on anthropogenic pressures on marine mammals (both seals and harbour porpoise) in the Wadden Sea, on trilateral health monitoring of the harbour porpoise, on current information on harbour porpoises in the region based on telemetry, aerial surveys, strandings and passive acoustic monitoring, and on effects of noise from anchor vibration operations (during the construction of seed mussel collectors). There were two posters dealing with harbour porpoises presented during the poster session; one on microplastics in marine mammals in the German North Sea and one on potential synergies between ASCOBANS and the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation.

During break-out sessions, for every theme the groups were asked to come up with three recommendations for science and three recommendations for management. The research recommendations concerning harbour porpoises covered further research into the genetic population structure, distribution and habitat use, and resource needs of harbour porpoises in the region. Furthermore research into physiological, behavioural and ecological adaptations of marine mammals to climate change was considered urgent to predict adaptive capacities and resilience of species. The management recommendations suggested to ensure implementations of management protocols, action plans and national and international agreements to reduce anthropogenic impacts, as well as enforcing MPA’s for marine mammals in the North Sea and the Wadden Sea. Last but not

¹ <https://iwf.int/resources/media-resources/news/climate-change-workshop-report-is-published>

least it was recommended to secure funding for Wadden Sea wide, effective, well-coordinated and long-term monitoring, consisting of various research methods.

General conclusions

Overall the symposium reiterated that climate change poses a serious threat to the Wadden Sea, and certain changes are already visible. The Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation is considered to provide a base for adaptive management decisions on an ecosystem level. However, exchange of information and, where possible, harmonisation of monitoring between the three countries should be intensified. Improved trilateral collaboration in research and monitoring will benefit the protection of the area as well as the worldwide recognition of the management of the site. A close link between science and management is desirable.

19-20 January 2022, online

OSPAR Intersessional Correspondence Group on Noise (ICG-Noise)

The summary record is available on the [OSPAR meeting archive](#).

28 February - 2 March 2022, Nairobi, Kenya, United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) 5.2

For the outcomes, please refer to the [UNEA5.2 webpage](#), such as UNEP/EA.5/Res.14 *End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument*.

13-29 March 2022, Geneva, Switzerland

Resumed sessions of CBD SBSTTA24, SBI3, and WG2020-3

Report: Penina Blankett

Item 6. Marine and coastal biodiversity

The Subsidiary Body considered **agenda item 6** at the *second plenary session of part I of the meeting, on 4 May 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. Some observer organizations could not deliver their statements due to limited time but were made available on the meeting web page.

Following the exchange of views, the Chair established a contact group co-chaired 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 regarding EBSA issues.

During the *ninth plenary session of part I* of the meeting on *9 June 2021*, **Parties highlighted the importance of marine issues and of the need to ensure they are fully reflected in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework**. Following the co-chair's report, the Chair said that, owing to a lack of time, consideration of the draft recommendations, which reflected statements made and submissions received during the informal session and at the current meeting, and the outcome of discussions in the contact group, would be deferred to *part II* of the meeting, to be held in person at a later date.

At the *second plenary session of part II* of the meeting, on 14 March 2022, the Subsidiary Body agreed to reconvene the contact group established during *part I* of the meeting to continue discussions on the two draft recommendations, with Mr. Adam van Opzeeland (New Zealand) replacing Mr. Matthias Steitz (Germany) as co-chair.

Conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity

Part II, 5th plenary session 23 March 2022

The Subsidiary Body considered a draft recommendation on conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity, submitted by the Chair. Statements were made by the representatives of Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Denmark, France, Italy, Jamaica, Morocco, Norway and the United Kingdom.

Part II, 6th plenary session 25 March 2022

The Subsidiary Body continued its discussion under the agenda sub-item. Statements were made by the representatives of Chile, France, Jamaica and the Russian Federation. The representative of Switzerland expressed his concern that there was not enough time to give adequate consideration to issues of marine and coastal biodiversity at the present meeting given the importance of focusing on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, which was being developed concurrently by the Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. He suggested sending the recommendation as currently drafted directly to the Conference of the Parties. Responding to concerns expressed by several representatives that the Parties had been unable to make substantive interventions on the draft recommendation or consider changes to the text, the representative of Switzerland suggested that Parties be allowed to make submissions of additional text, which would be compiled and then considered by the Conference of the Parties. He specified that his suggestion was not meant to set a precedent for the future but was a response to the extraordinary circumstances resulting from the limitations on in-person meetings caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to urgently negotiate the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the need to accommodate representatives who had participated in the recent fourth session of the intergovernmental conference on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. The representative of Turkey agreed with the proposal of the representative of Switzerland, but expressed her concern at the lack of discussion of the recommendation, which meant that she would be unable to advise her Government on what position to take, and she wished that noted in the report of the meeting. The representative of Denmark, supported by the representatives of Chile and Colombia, said that Denmark was deeply concerned with how marine and coastal biodiversity was being handled during the meeting and that it was unfortunate that the agenda item was not being discussed, as it was directly relevant to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. She reluctantly agreed to the proposal and the Chair said that her reluctance would be noted in the report of the meeting. The representative of Chile, asking that his remarks be reflected in the report, said that the time devoted to the agenda item had been severely constrained and she was supporting the proposed way forward on the understanding that sufficient time would be allocated for discussion of the issue during part II of the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Following the discussion, the draft recommendation, as orally amended, was approved as draft recommendation CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.12, for formal adoption by the Subsidiary Body, and it was agreed that further text proposals submitted to the Secretariat on 25 March 2022 would be compiled and made available.

Part II, 8th plenary session 27 March 2022

The Subsidiary Body adopted recommendation CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.12, as orally amended, as [recommendation 24/9](#). The text of the recommendation, as adopted, is contained in section I to the present report.

Ecologically or biologically significant marine areas

Part II, 5th plenary session 23 March 2022

Co-chair of the contact group reported on the progress made on the review of the text on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas. She said that not all issues had been resolved and she suggested that the remaining issues should be addressed by the Subsidiary

Body in a plenary session. The Chair said that a revised text would be prepared reflecting the work of the contact group.

Part II, 6th plenary session 25 March 2022

The Subsidiary Body considered a revised draft recommendation on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas, submitted by the Chair. For the reasons described in the text of [Part II, 6th plenary session 25 March 2022](#), the draft recommendation was approved, as draft recommendation CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.11, for formal adoption by the Subsidiary Body, and it was agreed that further text proposals submitted to the Secretariat on 25 March 2022 would be compiled and made available.

Part II, 7th plenary session, 27 March 2022

The Subsidiary Body considered recommendation CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.11. Statements were made by the representatives of Malaysia, Seychelles and Turkey.

Part II, 8th plenary session 27 March 2022

The Subsidiary Body adopted recommendation CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.11, as orally amended, as [recommendation 24/10](#).

18-19 January 2022, online **10th Meeting of the ASCOBANS North Sea Group** Report: Secretariat

The meeting discussed key priorities such as the implementation of existing bycatch regulations and investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on harbour porpoises. The monitoring of distribution and abundance of and the investigation of the health, contaminant burdens and diet of harbour porpoises were also reviewed.

During the discussions on bycatch, it was noted that submission of data to ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) was improving in comparison to earlier years, and bycatch events, fishing effort, and monitoring effort had been submitted by most countries. Comparison of fishing effort of various fishing gears was found to yield similar results between VMS and AIS (two methods of tracking fishing vessels) in the North Sea (2015-2018 data). This encouraging finding may lead to improved monitoring efforts for those small vessels (<15m length), which carry AIS transmitters. It also enables more ready access to better measures of fishing effort than simply adding up days at sea.

A concern, however, were revised bycatch estimates provided by the ICES Workshop on Estimation of Mortality of Marine Mammals due to Bycatch (WKMOMA). Estimates ranged upwards of 1,600 animals per year for the Greater North Sea, and largely exceeded the thresholds indicated from RLA analyses. Two issues were raised. Bycatch estimates are mainly calculated from "days at sea" and omit relevant information such as length of net used and soak times (the duration that gillnets are in the water). Second, monitoring effort is very low and is not targeted at high-risk areas and times. Both of these may lead to significant errors in estimates of bycatch rates. Furthermore, the fact that small vessels are generally not monitored could underestimate bycatch. Great uncertainty therefore remains around all bycatch estimates in the region.

The meeting acknowledged the need to revisit the ASCOBANS conservation objectives to incorporate a timeframe, and to take account of the requirement to drive anthropogenic removals to zero. It was agreed that common solutions to fulfil conservation aims should be reached by engaging and taking into regard stakeholder interests.

With regards to alternative pingers and gear modifications, pingers were reported to effectively work in Norwegian and Swedish commercial fisheries, and the technical issues arising from these mitigation measures were likely caused by the setup and adherence to operational guidelines. A study conducted by Sweden found that Future Ocean pingers exceeded the bycatch reduction rates

of Banana pingers, although the latter were more practical in their implementation. Mobile remote electronic monitoring (REM) systems were also being trialed in several countries, and methods to improve their cost-effectiveness were discussed. Testing of bycatch mitigation actions at a fleet level, and implementation of those that are effective and practical, was identified as a priority.

Participants expressed their concern with regards to population level impacts of noise levels and exposure duration. The meeting heard updates from JNCC, who presented their guidance on noise limits based on six years of retrospective data. The overall advice was to limit the amount of noise in both time and space within SACs, and avoid lengthy periods of anthropogenic disturbance. It was recommended to use deterrence ranges for harbour porpoises based on empirical evidence on the species' displacement ranges. A 10-20% noise limit approach was suggested, which will be regularly reviewed by JNCC to assess its feasibility. Sub-bottom profilers were also mentioned as a significant disturbance source, and further research on high-frequency equipment with high ping rates was advised. Overall, Parties and non-Party Range States were encouraged to harmonize noise thresholds for regulatory purposes on an international level.

Dr Lonneke IJsseldijk from the Netherlands presented recent findings on the mass stranding event that occurred on the Dutch Wadden Sea Islands in August 2021. Two-hundred harbour porpoises, in similar stages of decomposition, had stranded within 10 days. Necropsies from 22 of them have not brought up evidence of a direct anthropogenic impact. Preliminary results indicate the cause of death to have been septicemia by a bacterial infection (*Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae*), although a direct link between the microbiological results and the gross pathological findings still has to be established. The meeting urged Parties to seek to facilitate rapid collaboration with stranding networks in the event of future unusual mortality events.

Other activities conducted by Range States included tagging programmes and telemetry studies of harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea. The aim of these studies was to gain an insight of movements of individuals within this population since there was some indication that porpoises may be resident within the Wadden Sea., Future studies on genetic structure and habitat use were welcomed. A declining abundance trend between 2017-2020 in the waters of Skagerrak was also highlighted, in contrast to the relatively stable abundance estimates of porpoises in the Danish North Sea. The cause for the decline in the Skagerrak is to be determined although bycatch may play a role.

The meeting concluded with the review and agreement on the Priority Recommendations from the North Sea Group, available [here](#).

24-28 January 2022, Copenhagen, Denmark
28th Meeting of the NAMMCO Scientific Committee
 Report: Secretariat

Abstracts from the [Report of NAMMCO SC28](#):

“7. INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS
7.1 ASCOBANS

Desportes provided an update of activities in relation with ASCOBANS.

Former NAMMCO Scientific Secretary Fern Wickson participated in the ASCOBANS Working Group on Beaked Whales and made the WG aware of the abundance estimates generated by the NASS surveys series over the 38-year period (the WG report is available as SC/28/FI16). The topic of beaked whales was raised in ASCOBANS in September 2020, because of the apparent increase in strandings that had occurred in the UK, Ireland, Iceland, the Faroes, and elsewhere in the region with several Unusual Mortality Events (UMEs) recorded over the last 30 years. The WG concluded that powerful sonars deployed in or close to important beaked whale habitat were likely in part responsible for these UMEs, and provided recommendations for monitoring and mitigation of noise

Desportes and Middel observed the 26th meeting of ASCOBANS Advisory Committee (AC) in November 2021. The main point of interest to the NAMMCO Scientific Committee was the decision of AC26, following the killing of Atlantic white-sided dolphins in the Faroe Islands, to establish an Intersessional Working Group on Lagenorhynchus sp. to: 1) Review the available information about the population structures and trends, distributions, abundances, mortalities, reproductive outputs, health, diet, behaviour, and data gaps related to both species in the NE Atlantic; and 2) Review issues that pose a conservation threat to the species and their populations. Desportes had informed the AC that the NAMMCO SC had planned to hold a WG on dolphins in 2023 to review the status of the species in the North Atlantic and possibly conduct assessments. She had suggested that a joint review might be a possibility, as a fair amount of information will come from the NASS survey series and the study conducted in the Faroe Islands. [...]

It was noted that several beaked whales strandings also happened in the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Norway in the period 2000–2020 but were not included in the WG dataset. Desportes asked whether it would be meaningful to facilitate the exchange of data between the two organisations when dealing with poorly-known species of concern. The SC agreed that, although there are no NAMMCO countries represented in ASCOBANS, it would be valuable to have an exchange of data for species with a broad distribution. It was suggested this could be done between the Secretariats of NAMMCO and ASCOBANS, who could then circulate the data to members of the SC. “

“11.3.2 Dolphins Working Group

A Dolphin Working Group is scheduled for 2023 in the work plan.

The SC agreed that more information than ever from the NAMMCO areas now exists on the Lagenorhynchus species, in particular the availability of abundance estimates for all areas. However, the analysis of data to determine life history parameters was still not completed in the Faroe Islands. A genetic study, by the University of Edinburgh, based on live samples and strandings of both Atlantic white-sided dolphins and white-beaked dolphins (Lagenorhynchus albirostris) from the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Norwegian waters as well as other locations of the Northeast Atlantic was on its way. A fine-scale population structure study was ongoing for white-sided dolphins (with 40,000 single nucleotide polymorphisms from 92 white-sided dolphins), with also an existing dataset for white-beaked dolphins. Gose and Brownlow (2021) had presented a review of the available data and samples for different analyses, as well as ongoing studies to the ASCOBANS AC26.

Information on other dolphin species, which were little or not hunted by member countries, was still very sparse. The SC agreed therefore that a Dolphin WG should concentrate on the status review and the assessment, when possible, of Lagenorhynchus species. Considering the data in the pipeline, the SC considered any status review of the genus in 2022 as premature. The dolphin WG was kept on the planning for 2023 and all member countries should provide a detailed review of available information and data to SC29. The SC also agreed that Lagenorhynchus sp. would be added to the agenda of the Harbour Porpoise WG planned in 2022, so that the WG could evaluate the quality of the available data with regards to performing an assessment and identify knowledge gaps that should be filled in before a WG in 2023 (see section 11.4.2).”

7-10 February 2022, online

ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME)

Report: Julia Carlström

The meeting reviewed and reported on new and updated information on seal and cetacean population abundance (including information on vagrant species), population/stock structure, management frameworks, and anthropogenic threats (including cumulative effects) to individual health and population status in the North Atlantic. In collaboration with ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC), aspects of marine mammal-fisheries interactions were reviewed, assembling data and qualitative information from sources not fully covered by WGBYC (notably strandings).

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

11-12 February 2022, Brest, France
One Ocean Summit

Report: Secretariat

The first One Ocean Summit sought to step up the international community's ambition on maritime issues and put into practice our shared responsibility for the oceans. The high-level segment brought together Heads of State and Government, leaders of multilateral institutions, business leaders and civil society representatives to make ambitious commitments. <https://oneoceansummit.fr/en/>

28-30 March 2022, Gothenburg, Sweden
18th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group

Report: Secretariat

The meeting heard about the progress under the Jastarnia Plan and the Western Baltic, Belt Sea and Kattegat Plan. Country representatives provided overviews of key activities in their countries. Members discussed the extent of implementation of the plans, shared successes and identified challenges, and prioritised actions.

Discussing measures to mitigate bycatch of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise, BALTISH announced that dialogue on a third Joint Recommendation about possible additional safeguards measures were ongoing. It was also highlighted during the meeting that the complete closure of already identified key areas, during certain time periods, would be perhaps the only solution to minimize bycatch. The Meeting also heard updates on overview of HELCOM matters related to harbour porpoises, results of the *Mini-SCANS II*, and OSPAR approach for bycatch threshold setting:

HELCOM updated the participants on matters related to spatial conservation measures, and the conservation of species, as well as on themes directly related to harbour porpoises, such as underwater noise and fisheries management.

Denmark presented on Mini-SCANS II, reasserting that the results could be the most precise abundance estimate. Their project was carried out between June-July 2020 on a survey area that covered more than 50,000 km². The abundance estimate was 17,301 harbour porpoises, which was significantly lower compared to the abundance estimates from previous surveys.

OSPAR had developed a mortality threshold for the indicator on bycatch for the Belt Sea population of harbour porpoises, by using a modified version of the Potential Biological Removal (PBR), originally developed under the United States Marine Mammal Protection Act. The threshold was obtained by tuning the original PBR to the ASCOBANS conservation objective of keeping harbour porpoise population at or restored to 80 % of their carrying capacity within 100 years.

On recent [research](#) by Johanna Stedt and Sara Ortiz on harbour porpoise behavior, which were observed with the use of drones, it was revealed that they are more social than previously thought, and seem capable of sophisticated collaborative behavior when hunting. Another [study](#) on genetic analysis by Enrique Celemin Amaro confirmed the previously identified three distinct populations in the Baltic Sea Region and indicated that there is considerable spatial overlap between populations.

The Meeting also reviewed the progress assessment criteria for implementation of the harbour porpoise plans, based on some of the changes made by the [North Sea Group](#) in its most recent meeting (January 2022). Updated criteria can be found in the report annex on the [meeting webpage](#) in due course. Participants also used the meeting to discuss a possible revision of the conservation plans of both Jastarnia and Western Baltic, and recommended the latter to be reviewed as a matter

of priority. Action Points from JG18, intersessionally adopted by the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee, are available [here](#).

5-7 April 2022, online
33rd Annual European Cetacean Society Conference

The full book of abstracts is available [here](#).

5-6 & 11 April 2022, online
IWC Workshop on Socio-Economic Values of the Contribution of Cetaceans to the Ecosystem Functioning

The report is available [here](#); news item [here](#); and the recordings are available in YouTube ([Day 1](#), [Day 2](#), [Day 3](#))

25 April - 8 May 2022, online
IWC Annual Scientific Committee Meeting (SC68D)

Report: Mark Simmonds

Topics on the agenda at this year's virtual meeting of the IWC Scientific Committee in May included assessments of specific populations, environmental issues and human impacts such as climate change, ship strikes and bycatch. There were approximately 500 attendees (compared to an average in-person total of 150-200).

There was discussion around how the SC provides its outputs focused on making them more accessible, including a proposal to increase awareness of the real risks of cetacean extinctions ('the extinction initiative') intended to flag concerns regarding specific populations in a clear, public and timely way. The Committee received reports and recommendations from workshops on climate change, the cumulative impacts of pollution and the role of whales in the ecosystem. A review of the global trade in small cetacean (and other marine megafauna) wildmeat was also presented. New information was available on the surge in marine debris.

Of particular interest to ASCOBANS will be the discussions about small cetaceans in and close to the Agreement area. On the issue of cetacean hunting in the Faroe Island the SC issued this comment:

*"The Committee **draws attention to the serious concerns expressed via IWC Circular Communication (IWC.CCG.1488)34 and by the ASCOBANS Advisory Council with regards to the high number of Atlantic white-sided dolphins (Lagenorhynchus acutus) reported as direct takes in recent years, particularly by the Faroe Islands in 2021, which have occurred without a full assessment of the status of the Atlantic white-sided dolphin at species and population level.***

*The Committee **reiterates its longstanding recommendation that no small cetacean removals (live capture or directed harvest) should be authorised until a full assessment of status has been made (e.g., IWC 2021b)***

*The Committee **recommends that the Secretariat write a letter to the Faroe Island Government stating concern with regards to the sustainability of the Atlantic white-sided dolphins hunts and to convey this Committee's advice that no small cetacean removals should be authorised until a full assessment of the status of this dolphin population has been undertaken.***"

The SC also considered in some detail the situation of the Baltic porpoise and has 'repeatedly stated its serious concern for the survival of the Critically Endangered Baltic Proper harbour porpoise subpopulation'. It was also noted that climate change is now likely to be exacerbating this situation. One paper submitted (SC/68D/HIM/05) evaluated the response of relevant EU member states to the ICES advice regarding measures to minimise bycatch of the Baltic Proper subpopulation of harbour porpoise. In February 2022, a Delegated Act under the EU Technical Measures Framework came

into effect, closing static net fisheries in some Natura 2000 areas and other areas deemed as important for the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise.

The Committee welcomed this Act as an important first step toward protecting harbour porpoises, but noted that it falls short of the complete ban on static nets or the alternative measure to mandate pingers on all static gear in Baltic harbour porpoise habitat, that was recommended by ICES. The Baltic Sea Regional Fisheries Body (BALTFISH) has proposed dynamic closures in response to reports of porpoise presence as an alternative to gear bans and pingers. However, the Committee considered that this approach is unlikely to reduce bycatch for a number of reasons (i) there is a lack of evidence of similar approaches being effective in other areas, (ii) there are practical and logistical barriers to effectively detecting this inconspicuous species, and (iii) it seems unlikely that it will be possible to effectively communicate detections to fisheries in the area and establish logical geographical and temporal boundaries within which fishing activities would be curtailed in relation to detected porpoises.

The Committee also discussed the apparent impasse with regards to the deployment of pingers in the region due to concerns that pingers could interfere with military operations. Letters were sent by the IWC Secretariat to the relevant contacts in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, Poland, Russia, and the EU Commissioner. However, the IWC has thus far been unable to obtain a satisfactory technical explanation of what aspects of pinger operation are considered a security risk, and whether design modifications would adequately address any security risks. It was noted that seal scarers currently used in coastal aquaculture operations emit much louder, higher frequency sounds, but do not appear to be considered a problem for the military. The Committee commented that *“Given current military developments in the region, it may not be realistic to expect to advance this issue in the immediate future, and the Committee sees a clear need for alternative measures for bycatch mitigation in the entire population range.”*

9-23 May 2022, Berlin, Germany

16th Meeting of the HELCOM Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation (STATE & CONSERVATION 16)

Report: Penina Blankett

Harbour porpoise related issues were discussed under following items:

Updated ecosystem component maps

The Session took note of the updated Ecosystem Components Maps on grey, harbour and ringed seals distribution as well as distribution areas of importance for harbour porpoise (document 5J-15). The Session discussed the possibility of having two different maps for harbour porpoise to highlight the distribution of the two distinct populations occurring in the HELCOM Area. The Session invited the EG MAMA harbour porpoise abundance and distribution team to discuss the relevance of having two different maps for harbour porpoise and also invited the Secretariat to create new maps, if required. The Session highlighted the need of having additional information to improve the definition of the “importance level” for harbour porpoise to clearly define the difference between importance and distribution as stated in the document 5J-15.

The Session noted the following proposed changes for the maps:

- Common occurrence and reproduction of harbour seal in German waters
- Estonian waters should be dotted (esp. Gulf of Riga) for harbour porpoise
- Altering the color coding as the two darkest colors are so close in color they are difficult to differentiate.

and invited EG MAMA to review the maps in light of the provided proposals and conclude on their use in HOLAS 3.

The Session discussed the feasibility of, in addition to presenting current distribution, display changes in distribution over time. The Session supported the suggestion in principle, however, acknowledged that the data does not allow for this. The Session discussed the importance of clearly

describing the relevant data components, noting for example that such information could be included in relevant metadata descriptions when published for HOLAS 3 (e.g. withing MADS). The Session recommended the use on these maps once the changes reflected by the Session are added to the document. The Session proposed that for HOLAS 3, there should be separate maps for Western and Baltic Proper populations of harbour porpoise, as well as a the possibility to prepare a joint map including both populations, through SPIA. The Session noted that the joint map would show the overlap between the populations. The Session took note that the levels of importance are based on data from telemetry and visual surveys (Belt Sea) and passive acoustic monitoring (SAMBAH and national surveys) and national expert judgement (Baltic Proper).

Topic specific indicator and assessment issues

Topic: Marine Mammals

The Session took note of the progress made on the harbour porpoise abundance / distribution indicator (document 5J-34). The Session discussed the feasibility of including the upcoming SCANS survey result, to be held in June – July 2022, in HOLAS 3 to update the latest figure on trends in abundance of the Belt Sea harbour porpoise. The Session acknowledged that the timelines of the two processes means that it is unlikely that the survey information will be available in time for inclusion in the thematic assessment however welcomed the information from Germany that even though the current schedule is tight, the indicators lead / co-lead will try to utilize the latest figures deriving from the upcoming SCANS survey for HOLAS 3.

The Session took note of the brief update on the qualitative assessment of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise abundance and distribution (document 5J-49). The Session took note of the next step for the development of a distribution indicator for harbour porpoises (document 5J-50). The Session took note that Finland, Germany and Sweden can support the proposed merging of the distribution and habitat quality criteria to one indicator to facilitate future work. The Session noted that Denmark required further time and is carrying out an evaluation of the proposal nationally. The Session took note of the expert-based qualitative assessment of the Belt Sea population of harbour porpoises (document 5J-51). The Session recalled that if time allows, the results of the upcoming SCANS survey could be used to support this qualitative assessment.

Topic: Bycatch

The Session considered the developments related to the HELCOM bycatch indicator (document 5J-35). The Session recommended the approach as described in the document, noting that there may be further clarification needed and that data limitations are expected to be significant. The Session took note of the ongoing work on estimating a mortality threshold for the Belt Sea population of harbour porpoises (documents 5J-52 and 5J-55). The Session in principle recommended the approach and methodology proposed, however noting that further discussions were however needed to define the quantitative threshold value to be considered. The Session noted that Denmark placed a study reservation from Denmark on the mortality threshold. The Session took note of the comment from Sweden that the best available scientific knowledge should be the basis for bycatch threshold for the Belt Sea population of harbour porpoise, that the establishment of a threshold value for HOLAS 3 is by Sweden considered as the first step in a management chain which culminated in measures. The Session discussed the mortality threshold value and invited the Secretariat to find a suitable date for a follow-up informal session on this topic in the coming two weeks. The Session noted that Germany, Denmark and Sweden expressed interest in joining the discussions. The Session noted the comment from CCB that this is a key issue and they encourage CPs to work towards a solution to implement a threshold value for HOLAS 3.

16-17 May 2022 Seville, Spain

OSPAR Intersessional Correspondence Group on Marine Litter

The summary record is available on the [OSPAR meeting archive](#).