

ACTION POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 28TH MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SCIENTIFIC SESSION

(Action Point = AP, Recommendation = R)

Recreational sea use

1. AP) The Intersessional Working Group to continue (see [AC27/AP18](#)) and prepare a draft resolution for the 10th Meeting of the Parties (MOP10).

Climate change

2. AP) Secretariat to establish an Intersessional Discussion Group on climate change to distinguish between impacts from climate change as distinct from other anthropogenic or environmental factors. The group will report to the 29th Meeting of the Advisory Committee (AC29). Members: Mark Simmonds (Chair), Peter Evans, Sinéad Murphy, Ida Carlén, Graham Pierce, WDC; others are welcome to join.

Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoises Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat

3. AP) Secretariat to send a letter from the Advisory Committee to Belt Sea countries about concerns over the Belt Sea population, to be based upon the following:
 - The latest SCANS survey from 2022 provides a new population estimate of 14,403 (CV = 0.21) and indicates a 1.52% decline in the population since 2012, although the data have low power to detect a significant trend below 4.4% (Gilles et al. 2023);
 - The Belt Sea population is distinct from the neighbouring populations based on genetics, morphology and movement data (Sveegaard et al. 2015). However, some movement from the region cannot be ruled out, especially since the general habitat quality within the Belt Sea population area seems to have declined. For instance, several fish stocks e.g. cod and herring within the area are severely depleted (ICES 2022, ICES 2023) likely due to overfishing, eutrophication and increasing water temperatures.
 - HELCOM, in its recent HOLAS-3, has assessed that the sustainable removal level for the Belt Sea population is being greatly exceeded (i.e. a calculated removal level of 73 versus reported bycatch of 805 annually)

Risso's dolphin

4. R) Parties are encouraged to:
 - Conduct systematic surveys and habitat modelling to identify hotspots, particularly offshore.
 - Conduct population estimates from photo-ID and line-transects.
 - Conduct wide-scale surveys of genetic variation throughout North Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea, and better understand population structure using complementary techniques such as acoustics and stable isotopes.
 - Conduct long-term collaborative studies using photo-ID to investigate home ranges, movements, social structure, and life history parameters.
 - Facilitate the use of strandings data to provide more information on life history and causes of mortality.

- Examine further geographical & seasonal variations in diet using stomach contents, fatty acid and stable isotope analysis, eDNA, etc.
- Better assess relative importance of different conservation threats on a geographical basis.

Any other scientific issues

Offshore Renewable Energy Working Group

5. AP) The Offshore Renewable Energy Working Group (OREWG) to assess whether ASCOBANS [Resolution 8.6](#) and [Resolution 6.2](#) need updating, to reflect current concerns. Potential revisions to be presented to MOP10 in 2024.
6. AP) The OREWG to continue its work, to address the implications for small cetaceans within the Agreement Area both in terms of underwater noise from wind turbines, habitat alteration, and associated activities during the construction, operation, and decommissioning phase. Besides wind farm construction there are also plans for other forms of offshore renewable energy including tidal and wave energy, and their potential impacts will also be considered. The working group will take into account initiatives being undertaken within other fora such as ICES WGMME. The OREWG to report to MOP10.
7. AP) The OREWG to appoint a Chair.

Intersessional Working Group on Data Deficient Taxa

8. AP) Upon request, the Intersessional Working Group on Data Deficient Taxa to provide advice for any Party that wishes to take forward a proposal to amend the CMS Appendices.
9. AP) The Intersessional WG to organize a virtual meeting to discuss the following issues, and report to AC29:
 - Which species and populations in the agreement area require further attention,
 - Where the data gaps lie, and
 - How to take work on these populations and species forward in the ASCOBANS context.

The Chair of the Intersessional WG is Mark Simmonds.

Iberian harbour porpoise

10. AP) The Secretariat to establish an Intersessional Discussion Group on the Iberian harbour porpoise. The group will consider the development of a conservation plan for this population. The Secretariat will seek membership via email correspondence. The group will report to MOP10.

Joint Bycatch Working Group

11. AP) The Joint Bycatch Working Group of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS, as a part of its Work Plan, to look at fisheries-generated marine debris. Pine Eisfeld-Pierantonio has offered to lead this work stream.

Important Marine Mammal Areas

12. AP) The Secretariat to invite the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force to present at MOP10.

INSTITUTIONAL SESSION

Prioritisation of Activities Requiring Funding

13. The Advisory Committee agreed to prioritise the following activities from [ASCOBANS/AC28/Doc.18](#), in order of priority:
- Long-term Coordination of the Harbour Porpoise Action Plans
 - Development of a Strandings Database
 - Review of the Conservation Plan for the HP Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat
 - Workshop with NATO and navies
 - Coordination of the SAP for NE Atlantic Common Dolphin.

In addition, the conservation objectives work was highlighted for consideration with regards to fundraising.

Managing workload and expectations around Working Groups

14. Two Intersessional Working Groups (IWGs), Marine Debris workshop and Nord Stream gas leak, have completed their work and can be removed from the list of WGs (see [ASCOBANS/AC28/Doc.19](#)).
15. The following IWGs are anticipated to have completed their work by MOP10 and can then be dissolved: Beaked whales, Recreational speed craft, Lagenorhynchus species, Prioritization of activities (WPA50), Identifying potential duplication/gaps in efforts in ASCOBANS and other organizations (WPA68).
16. The following Intersessional Working Groups will continue beyond MOP10: Offshore Renewable Energy, Data Deficient Taxa, Maritime Spatial Planning (previously 'WG to guide development of the MSP Guidelines').

Date and Venue of MOP10 and AC29

17. The Advisory Committee welcomed the offer of Denmark to host MOP10. It would be held in early September 2024. AC29 would be tentatively held in September in 2025, online, unless decided otherwise.