

DRAFT RESOLUTION 8.10 (REV.MOP9):
SMALL CETACEAN STRANDING RESPONSE

Recalling that the Conservation and Management Plan annexed to the Agreement stipulates that “each Party shall endeavour to establish an efficient system for reporting and retrieving by-catches and stranded specimens and to carry out, in the framework of the studies mentioned above, full autopsies in order to collect tissues for further studies and to reveal possible causes of death and to document food composition”,

Recognizing that information collected from necropsies of stranded and bycaught animals is crucial for improving the understanding of causes of mortality and other, as well as population health and reproductive status,

Emphasizing the importance of standardizing necropsy protocols throughout the Agreement Area, and if possible beyond, in order to ensure data collected are comparable and of high quality,

Recalling that the Conservation and Management Plan annexed to the Agreement stipulates that “Parties shall endeavour to establish the obligation to release immediately any animals caught alive and in good health”, and *noting* that the principle should apply to live stranded animals as well,

Commending the efforts of stranding networks which have resulted in large numbers of animals having been rescued and returned to the sea throughout the ASCOBANS Area,

Mindful that effective responses to live strandings not only contribute to achieving and maintaining a favourable conservation status of small cetaceans, but also have significant animal welfare implications,

Noting related decisions adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS, in particular Resolution 4.16 *Guidelines for a Coordinated Cetacean Stranding Response*; Resolution 6.22 *Cetacean Live Stranding*; and Resolution 7.14 *Best Practices in Monitoring and Management of Cetacean Stranding*, including the *Evidence-based diagnostic assessment frameworks for cetacean necropsies on specific issues/threats* annexed to the resolution,

Aware of ongoing work on the subjects of necropsy protocols and guidance for stranding responses in the frameworks of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), ACCOBAMS and the European Cetacean Society, as well as of related national and transboundary activities,

Taking note of the recommendations from the Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS/ECS/SPA-RAC workshop (April 2018) on marine debris and cetacean stranding, towards identification of standardized best practises in cetacean stranding monitoring and management,

Taking note of the report of the Joint ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS workshop (June 2019) on harmonisation of best practices for necropsy of cetaceans and for the development of diagnostic frameworks.

The Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS

1. *Adopts the Best Practice on Cetacean Post-mortem Investigation and Tissue Sampling* protocol, annexed to this resolution, arising from the harmonization process in ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS;

2. *Encourages* Parties that have not yet done so to establish long-term national strandings response and investigation networks that provide consistent and geographically comprehensive surveillance of mortalities, fitting to their specific situation which:
 - (a) follow the Best Practice protocol, insofar as applicable and in line with internationally agreed protocols;
 - (b) train volunteers and/or provide guidance on animal welfare as well as on health and safety measures during live stranding events and during the handling of dead cetaceans;
 - (c) operate in connection with one nationwide helpline number, social media and website presence, if feasible, to make it easy for the public to call for assistance;
 - (d) examine a representative subset of stranded cetaceans through diagnostic post-mortem investigations, to establish causes of death, health status, and mortality baselines within the ASCOBANS Area;
 - (e) engage in appropriate tissue sampling, archiving and analysis and make resulting sample archives and datasets available to researchers, contributing to the web-accessed database for marine mammal strandings and necropsy data called for in Resolution 7.4 once this database is defined and created;
3. *Encourages* Parties to contribute data to the web-based strandings database under development;
4. *Further encourages* Parties to liaise with existing networks and the IWC strandings initiative for assistance, and to support their stranding networks with the funds necessary to carry out their work, and to facilitate knowledge exchange and capacity-building between networks;
5. *Encourages* Parties, through national stranding networks and relevant institutes, as appropriate, to share experiences, data, samples and research outputs, with their counterparts in other countries in order to help build capacity throughout the ASCOBANS Area, and beyond;
6. *Requests* that the Advisory Committee and the Secretariat continue to engage actively in the ongoing work on strengthening international strandings response, in particular the frameworks of the Global Strandings Network, the IWC strandings initiative, response to stranding events, and establishment of an updated necropsy examination protocol within the frameworks of the IWC, ACCOBAMS₂ and the European Cetacean Society;
7. *Recommends* that such best practice guidelines for stranding responses and necropsies continue to be developed collaboratively in order to ensure that they are up to date, accurate and relevant to all regions, covering topics such as:
 - (a) appropriate protocols for responses to both live and dead stranded cetaceans;
 - (b) exchange of experiences, case studies, and other relevant information at both a national and international level;
 - (c) training and capacity-building;
 - (d) health and safety considerations;
8. *Further recommends* the Advisory Committee and the Secretariat maintain a watching brief on the ongoing work defining the scope of the IWC and the Global Strandings Network, and engage in this process as appropriate;
9. *Also recommends* that Parties disseminate basic advice to the general public and statutory bodies regarding the capacity of national strandings response networks and the importance of live animal welfare and on-human health and safety during both live and dead animal stranding events;

10. *Calls on Parties* to provide sufficient funding and support for:
 - a. the post-mortem examination of a relevant proportion of the number of available stranded animals;
 - b. research focusing on the further improvement of techniques;
 - c. the periodic revision and update of the protocols as required;
 - d. the creation and maintenance of a web-accessed database for marine mammal strandings and necropsy data called for in Resolution 7.4; and
 - e. facilitating the mechanism for linking data, collected by different strandings networks, including at least basic life history parameters and causes of death, in order to more completely assess changes over the range states of an impacted species;

11. *Requests the Advisory Committee* to continue monitoring new information on the causes of strandings and mortality of cetaceans, as well as best practice guidance on stranding responses and necropsies, and to make recommendations to Parties as appropriate.