

Agenda Item 5.4

Strategic and Institutional Issues

Options for Future Meetings of the
Advisory Committee

Document 5.4

**Options for Future Meetings of the
Advisory Committee**

Action Requested

- Consider the options presented
- Agree on a way forward

Submitted by

Secretariat



Note:

Delegates are kindly reminded to bring their own document copies to the meeting, if needed.

OPTIONS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. The purpose of this document is to present options looking at the periodicity of intervals between meetings and content of meetings of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee (AC), and other approaches to working, as requested by the 24th Meeting of the Advisory Committee (AC24). Options were presented at AC25 in September 2019 (see [ASCOBANS/AC25/Doc.20](#)). This document presents option 1, revised option 2, option 3, and a new option 4, as requested.
2. ASCOBANS has an AC meeting every non-MOP year, usually with the Steering Group for the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea (North Sea Group) meeting back-to-back, a day prior. The AC meetings include both scientific and institutional sessions and involve all Parties. Preparations for these AC meetings use considerable Secretariat capacity and funds provided by the Parties. The meeting cycle is heavy compared with some other CMS instruments.
3. Based on discussions at AC25, table 1 below outlines how the future AC meetings could be distributed over the quadrennium for each of the options. Table 2 further below outlines pros and cons of the options regarding the frequency of both scientific and institutional sessions.

Table 1. Potential frequency of meetings over a quadrennium.

	Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Option 1	MOP	AC-S + AC-I	AC-S + AC-I	AC-S + AC-I	MOP
Option 2	MOP	AC-S + AC-I	AC-S	AC-S + AC-I	MOP
Option 3	MOP	AC-S + AC-I		AC-S + AC-I	MOP
Option 4	MOP	AC-S + AC-I	AC-S (v) + AC-I (v)	AC-S + AC-I	MOP

MOP = Meeting of the Parties; AC-S = Advisory Committee Scientific Session; AC-I= Advisory Committee Institutional Session; (v) = virtual meeting.

Table 2. Options for future AC meetings in non-MOP years.

Option 1	
Description:	Status Quo. AC meeting would continue to have both scientific and institutional sessions held face-to-face and annually in between MOPs.
Pros:	Momentum in scientific and institutional sessions maintained.
Cons:	Requires significant Secretariat capacity for preparation, particularly regarding meeting documents, as well as preparation from AC Members. No decrease in carbon footprint. Requires travel = no savings in travel for Parties, AC Host Government or the Secretariat.
Option 2	
Description:	Like option 1, but without an institutional session in Year 2. At AC25, it was suggested that at least in Year 1, the institutional session could be held online. However, since it seems the same people attend both scientific and institutional sessions, it may not be efficient to hold the scientific session face-to-face and institutional session separately online.

Pros:	Momentum on scientific issues maintained. Not quite as heavy on preparation as Option 1. Parties could focus attendance on expert rather than policy participation in Year 2. More time available to scientific discussions in Year 2.
Cons:	Would still require considerable Secretariat capacity for preparation. Lack of oversight on institutional issues in this year.
Option 3	
Description:	No AC meeting in Year 2. If institutional issues arose intersessionally, the Secretariat could seek advice in writing via email. End-of-term and mid-term expenditure reports could be sent to Parties by email on Year 2.
Pros:	Reduction in carbon footprint. Savings in travel costs for Parties, AC Host Government and the Secretariat. Potentially more funds available for scientific and conservation work on the ground.
Cons:	Potentially loss of momentum on both scientific and institutional issues. Reduced Party engagement. North Sea Group would need to convene on its own in Year 2, incurring additional travel costs if they meet in person.
Option 4	
Description:	AC meeting would have both scientific and institutional sessions held annually in between MOPs, except on Year 2 the meeting would be held online, (like option 1 but with Year 2 meeting held online.)
Pros:	Cheaper than option 1: savings in travel costs for Parties, AC Host Government and the Secretariat. No carbon footprint from travel on Year 2. Momentum in scientific and institutional issues maintained.
Cons:	Loss of networking opportunities. Would still require similar Secretariat capacity for preparation, as well as preparation from AC Members.

Discussion

4. The Meetings of Parties (MOP) to ASCOBANS are held less frequently than in most other Agreements, but Advisory Committee (AC) meetings with scientific and institutional oversight occur every intersessional year. This is more frequently than AEWA and CMS Memoranda of Understanding, and as frequently as CMS and EUROBATS.
5. If the Parties wished, the MOP could decide to reduce the frequency of face-to-face AC meetings (Option 3 and 4). Per meeting, this would mean approximately €6,400 savings on the Secretariat's travel, depending on location. Also, the Host Government of the AC meeting would not have to pay a potential over-expenditure of the AC budget line (which would be approximately € 2,650¹). These savings, however, are relatively small.
6. If Parties would like the AC to continue meeting annually, another option would be to consider removing some documents from its agenda. The standard documents that the Secretariat prepares are (and additional documents are produced according to requests from the AC and in line with the Work Plan):
 - **Core:** Provisional Agenda, Provisional Annotated Agenda and Schedule.
 - **Work Plan elements:** Report of the Secretariat on Outreach and Education Activities, Activities Requiring Funding, ASCOBANS Work Plan Overview of Implementation, Draft List of Dates of Interest to ASCOBANS.

¹ This excludes the fee of the report writer supplied by the Secretariat (ca. € 1,050).

- **Institutional:** Report on Administrative Issues, End of Term Report on Budgetary Issues, Mid-Term Report on Budgetary Issues, and Status of Accession and Acceptance of the Amendment to the Agreement.
7. Finally, Parties may wish to advise to continue the existing arrangements and to keep them under review, proposing *ad hoc* changes to address perceived shortcomings and to make improvements to efficiency.
 8. AC25 also raised a question of whether the ASCOBANS working groups under the AC should consider online conferencing. The recent meeting of the Steering Group for the ASCOBANS Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoise (Jastarnia Group) decided that every other meeting of the group should be held online. The Jastarnia Group meeting in June 2020 took place online and was well attended and well received by the participants. This might serve as a model for meetings of the other working groups as well.