

# ASCOBANS NEWS No. 5



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# EVENTS

## 17 MAY 2009: THE 7TH INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE BALTIC HARBOUR PORPOISE



In Poland the Hel Marine Station of the Institute of Oceanography of Gdansk University organized a special information stand and an exhibition about the harbour porpoise. Children could participate in a drawing contest to win postcards and stickers as well as a special award from the new sponsor Lotos Group. In addition, a project, "Active Protection of the Baltic Harbour Porpoises against bycatch in Puck Bay", was presented to the public. With this project, a temporary acoustic barrier is set up each year across the bay from Hel to Gdynia, keeping the porpoises out of an area with high risk of bycatch.

In Stralsund an information stand at the German Oceanographic Museum informed visitors about the small whale of the Baltic Sea and ASCOBANS. A porpoise detector and a skull served as additional demonstration material. Children could test their knowledge about the harbour porpoise in a quiz.

On 13 May, an educational seminar for about 100 schoolchildren, their teachers and parents was the start of this year's celebration of the International Day of the Harbour Porpoise in the Lithuanian Sea Museum. Afterwards, the pupils drew pictures that were exhibited in the dolphinarium of the museum. ASCOBANS, the Lithuanian Ministry of Environment and the company "Premia KPC" supported the event. On 17 May almost 500 visitors saw the ASCOBANS exhibition and films from the Fjord & Bælt Centre. The ASCOBANS exhibition will be displayed in the museum until autumn 2009.

In Finland the day was acclaimed in the Särkänniemi Dolphinarium, where children could take part in a drawing competition and other activities. Also, Mr Kai Mattsson gave an interesting lecture on porpoises and the threats they face in the Baltic Sea.

# MEETINGS

## 6TH MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO ASCOBANS (16-18 SEPTEMBER 2009)

The 6th Meeting of the Parties (MOP6) to the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS) will take place at the Secretariat's seat in Bonn, Germany, from 16-18 September 2009. Representatives of the 10 ASCOBANS Parties, as well as of non-Party Range States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations qualified in cetacean conservation and management, will meet to progress the conservation of small cetaceans in the ASCOBANS Agreement area.

The Meeting of the Parties is the decision-making body of the Agreement. It meets every three years to assess progress and develop further steps in the implementation of ASCOBANS. The agenda of the meeting includes important issues such as a revised version of the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan); a new Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise in the North Sea; a Communication, Education and Public Awareness Plan for ASCOBANS; a possible new format for the Annual National Reports; the possible inclusion of all cetacean species occurring in the Agreement area in the treaty; anthropogenic underwater noise; criteria and guidelines for the establishment of marine protected areas for cetaceans; and scientific findings on small cetacean population structure in the Agreement area and the implications for conservation.

Based on strategic considerations on the future of the Agreement, Parties will also decide on a work plan for the years 2010-2012, which includes activities for the Secretariat, the Advisory Committee and the governmental institutions in the Party States, as well as the budgetary and administrative provisions for the Agreement for the next three years.

Documents for the meeting are available from the website.

## 16TH ASCOBANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING IN BRUGGE

The ASCOBANS Advisory Committee held its 16<sup>th</sup> meeting from 20-24 April 2009 in the beautiful city of Brugge, Belgium. The delegates enjoyed the proverbial Belgian hospitality while debating progress made in the implementation of the Agreement and recommendations to be made to the Meeting of Parties in autumn of this year. Nine of the member states to the Agreement were represented at the meeting, as well as three intergovernmental and seven non-governmental organisations and one invited expert. Among its main outcomes, the meeting agreed on final drafts of the revised ASCOBANS Recovery Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the Baltic Sea (Jastarnia Plan) and the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea, and transmitted them to the Meeting of the Parties for formal adoption. The meeting also established intersessional working groups tasked to further develop current drafts of a revised format for annual national reports and of a Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) Plan for ASCOBANS, with a view to their submission to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration. On the institutional side, the meeting recommended three options for future ASCOBANS Secretariat arrangements for further consideration by the Meeting of the Parties. A report of the meeting is available on the ASCOBANS website.



## 23RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN CETACEAN SOCIETY

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society was held in Istanbul, Turkey, on 2-4 March 2009. The Conference, with the theme “Climate Change and Marine Mammals”, was divided in different thematic sections, in which latest research on cetaceans and pinnipeds was presented; a lot of the results with direct or indirect conservation and management implications. It also afforded an excellent opportunity to establish closer links with the scientific community and enlist support for CMS and ASCOBANS marine mammal work.



The Conference was preceded by a series of workshops. Ms Heidrun Frisch, the CMS Marine Mammals Officer and ASCOBANS Coordinator, attended three workshops on “Reconciling diverse perspectives for cetacean communication”, “Moving towards a standardized population estimate approach for *Monachus monachus*” and “Beaked whales and active sonar: transiting from research to mitigation”.

The “beaked whale” workshop especially was of high interest for both CMS and ASCOBANS. Both MEAs have passed Resolutions on the importance of mitigating noise impacts on marine species. Beaked whales have been found to be particularly sensitive to acoustic disturbance stemming from sonar. After providing a background to the current field research investigating mitigation techniques, as well as legal and official perspectives about the feasibility of promoting a standardised mitigation protocol, the participants agreed to form a drafting group to produce concise mitigation guidelines. These are expected to be available by mid-April and will be forwarded to the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee and other relevant bodies. The ECS membership adopted a strong statement on the need for effective mitigation on 4 March.

## 5TH JASTARNIA GROUP MEETING (23-25 FEBRUARY 2009)

The ASCOBANS Working Group to take forward the implementation of the Recovery Plan for the Baltic Harbour Porpoise (also called Jastarnia Plan) met for the fifth time in February 2009. At the invitation of Finland, the meeting took place in Turku. The Jastarnia Plan was originally finalised in 2002 in reaction to the critical conservation status of the only cetacean species native to the Baltic Sea, which despite strict protection on all political levels still experiences higher human-induced mortality than the small population can sustain.

Besides discussing progress made and further priorities in the implementation of the [Jastarnia Plan](#) by the ASCOBANS Party States, the Group worked towards finalising the revision of the Plan, which was started in 2007. The new version will be presented to Parties for endorsement at the upcoming 6th Meeting of Parties.

# ASCOBANS OUTREACH AND EDUCATION AWARD

## DR. PETER EVANS WINS ASCOBANS OUTREACH AND EDUCATION AWARD



A jury formed at the 16th Meeting of the Advisory Committee (Brugge, Belgium, 20-24 April 2009) decided on the winner of the 3rd ASCOBANS Outreach and Education Award, which will be presented during the 6th Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS (16-18 September 2009, UN Campus, Bonn, Germany). The award was established to go to an individual or institution in recognition of the best cetacean conservation-related PR/educational initiative. It was with unanimous support that Dr Peter Evans, Research Director of the Sea Watch Foundation, was selected for the prize.

Previous winners were the Hel Marine Station in Poland (2005) and Petra Deimer and the Society for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (GSM) (2007) for their work highlighting the plight of the Baltic Harbour Porpoises.

The UK National Whale and Dolphin Watch week, is one of many outreach events organised by the Sea Watch Foundation. This annual activity gives members of the public the opportunity to join experienced observers around the coastline to collect sightings.

## OTHER ITEMS

### HARBOUR PORPOISES SLOW SPEED BOAT RALLY IN THE GERMAN BALTIC SEA

Germany has given priority to the conservation needs of the harbour porpoises living and breeding in its part of the Baltic Sea: a speed boat rally planned by a private company for 4-5 July has been subjected to strict speed restrictions that help protect the small whale and its young, who favour this area for giving birth and lactating in the summer months. The Ministry of agriculture, environment and rural areas the State of Schleswig-Holstein as the responsible authority made an assessment of the risk to the endangered and strictly protected harbour porpoises, both through possible collisions and severe disturbance caused by the underwater noise generated by these boats. When weighing the economic interests against the danger to the animals, the Ministry decided that the rally could not be allowed in its originally proposed form and ordered additional requirements to minimise the impacts. Boaters now have to reduce speed from the planned 35 knots to 24 or 16 knots, depending on the porpoise densities in the different areas. This not only reduces the risks of animals being hit by the extremely fast boats, but also significantly reduces the noise emitted into the harbour porpoises' nursery grounds.

## HUMAN RESOURCES

### NEW INTERIM MANAGEMENT IN PLACE FOR CMS

Bonn/Nairobi, 30 July 2009— Elizabeth Maruma Mrema has been appointed Officer in Charge of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) by Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) as of 27 July 2009. In addition, Mr. Steiner has appointed Bert Lenten, the current Executive Secretary of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) as Acting Deputy Executive Secretary of CMS, effective since 2 July 2009.



## FAREWELL TO ROB HEPWORTH



Bonn, 27 July 2009 - Mr. Robert Hepworth, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), left the CMS Secretariat on 27 July 2009. In addition, Mr. Lahcen El-Kabiri has recently left the position of Deputy Executive Secretary of CMS to take up new functions as the head of the new CMS managed office to oversee the implementation of the Agreements on birds of prey and dugongs in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates.

Mr Hepworth, who joined the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2000 as the Deputy Director at the then Division of Environmental Conventions (DEC) in Nairobi, was appointed as Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species by the former Executive Director of UNEP, Dr. Klaus Töpfer in August 2004. Mr El Kabiri joined the CMS Secretariat as Deputy Executive Secretary one month later. Since then, the two successfully led the CMS Secretariat through two Conferences of the Parties (COP8 in Nairobi, November 2005 and COP9 in Rome, December 2008).

Under their guidance and leadership, the Convention and its Secretariat have lived through a period of intense growth and development.

## NEW INTERN IN THE ASCOBANS SECRETARIAT

Ms Tanja Herr (Germany) currently serves as an intern in the ASCOBANS Secretariat and supports the team in everyday business and especially in the preparation for the 6th Meeting of the Parties in September in Bonn. Presently she is enrolled in a master's programme in Political Science and International Law at the University of Munich.