



**Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species  
Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans  
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**

*Joint Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme*



UNEP/CMS/StC41/18.c

**Report of the joint CMS/ASCOBANS Secretariat  
to the 41<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee**

1. This document contains a report on recent progress made by the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS) since reporting to CMS StC40 ([UNEP/CMS/StC40/21d](#)).

**Institutional Bodies**

2. The 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Advisory Committee (AC20) was held in Warsaw, Poland, from 27-29 August 2013, thanks to the kind invitation and hosting of the Polish Ministry of the Environment. The [report](#) can be accessed on the ASCOBANS website. The AC combines the functions of a Scientific Committee and a Standing Committee.
3. AC20 was the first Advisory Committee Meeting in the four-year intersessional period following the 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties (22-24 October 2012), the [report](#) of which can also be accessed online. AC20 therefore both assessed progress on long-standing items on the work plan, and those that had been added as new items at MOP7.
4. The Agenda covered the three action plans for harbour porpoises developed under the Agreement, for each of which specific recommendations had been made by working groups, which were subsequently endorsed by the Advisory Committee:
  - Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan): see Annex 6 of the [AC20 Report](#)
  - Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea: see Annex 9 of the [AC20 Report](#)
  - Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat: see Annex 6 of the [AC20 Report](#)
5. Important other items include:
  - Review of New Information on Threats to Small Cetaceans, covering bycatch, underwater noise, effects of vessels and disturbance, chemical pollution, marine debris, underwater unexploded ordnance, responses to hazards and emerging issues
  - Review of New Information on other Matters Relevant for Small Cetacean Conservation, covering population size, distribution, structure and causes of any changes, management of marine protected areas, measures relevant for the western extension of the Agreement Area, as well as large cetaceans
  - Publicity and Outreach
  - Project Funding through ASCOBANS
  - National Reporting

- Relations with other Bodies
  - Financial and Administrative Issues
6. In particular, the following outcomes are of direct relevance to CMS:
- It was agreed that the joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Noise Working Group should be extended to include CMS with appropriately amended Terms of Reference (see Annex 13 of the [AC20 Report](#)). The Secretariats of ACCOBAMS and CMS were requested to present these to the appropriate bodies for endorsement. The ACCOBAMS Meeting of the Parties (MOP5, 5-8 November 2013) requested to add three additional items to the ToR, which will shortly be brought to the attention of the CMS Scientific Council to invite its full participation in the working group.
  - Provided CMS accepts the offer above, the request to the Joint Noise Working Group and the Secretariats of ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS also becomes relevant, who in consultation with ECS are to prepare a proposal for a workshop on underwater noise to be held in the margins of the 2014 Conference of the European Cetacean Society (ECS).
  - ASCOBANS Parties requested the Secretariat to take part in the WhaleFest 2014, a large outreach and education event which had already been held in 2012 and was a great success. Due to its relevance for CMS, ASCOBANS is again inviting CMS to share in this initiative by co-sponsoring an area in the exhibition halls. After discussions with the organizers, the proposal is to focus on the theme of marine debris.
  - ASCOBANS National Coordinators were requested to liaise with their CMS National Focal Points to feed any input into the working group developing the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species.
  - The Advisory Committee endorsed ASCOBANS' participation in the Migratory Species Champion Programme.

### **Working Groups and Workshops**

7. The Baltic Sea Working Group (Jastarnia Group) met for the ninth time in April 2013 (report available [online](#)). This group of experts from the environment and fisheries sectors of the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea was set up to discuss progress made and priorities for the further implementation of the Recovery Plan for the Baltic Harbour Porpoise. The Group also does the same for the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat since its adoption in 2012,. The Jastarnia Group reports and makes recommendations to the Advisory Committee.
8. The North Sea Group, established to support the implementation of the Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea, held its third meeting in August 2013 (report under preparation).
9. Numerous working groups established by the Advisory Committee operate by correspondence, where possible through the [AC Workspace](#). They cover the following topics:
- Bycatch
  - Underwater Noise (joint group with ACCOBAMS; to be extended to CMS if confirms)
  - Pollution
  - Marine Debris

- Marine Strategy Framework Directive (joint group with ACCOBAMS)
  - Extension Area
  - Large Cetaceans (informal group)
  - Further Development of Management Procedures for Defining the Threshold of 'Unacceptable Interactions' (short-term)
10. ASCOBANS was co-host or organizer of three workshops in the margins of the European Cetacean Society Conference held in Setubal, Portugal, in April 2013:
- ECS/ASCOBANS/WDC Workshop towards a Conservation Strategy for White-beaked Dolphins in the Northeast Atlantic ([report](#))
  - Joint ECS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Workshop on Cetacean Population Structure ([report](#))
  - Joint ECS/ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Workshop on the challenge of spatially managing cetaceans - a highly mobile animal group ([report](#))

### Project Support

11. Savings made on the ASCOBANS Trust Fund have in recent years been redirected to the support of conservation projects. Based on prioritization done by the Advisory Committee, the Secretariat received the following reports of (co-)funded projects since the last report, all of which have a direct significance for supporting the goals of the Agreement:
- Understanding harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) and fisheries interactions in the north-west Iberian Peninsula (University of Aberdeen, UK, final report [AC20/Doc.6.1.b](#))
  - Distribution and relative abundance of harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) over Dogger Bank and surrounding waters, Southern North Sea (Marine Conservation Research International, final report [AC20/Doc.6.1.c](#))
12. Ongoing (co-)funded projects are the following:
- Enhanced detection of harbour porpoises prior to ramming, seismic blasts and ammunition clearance: design and construction of a PAL-porpoise detector (PPD) (F<sup>3</sup>)
  - Pollutant exposure in coastal top predators: assessing current levels of exposure and toxic effects (Zoological Society of London, UK)
  - Examine habitat exclusion and long-term effect of pingers (Aarhus University, Denmark)
  - Preparation for SCANS-III (University of St. Andrews, UK)

### Outreach and Education

13. A detailed report can be accessed as [AC20/Doc.5.2](#).
14. The 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Advisory Committee also endorsed unanimously the proposal by Poland to give the ASCOBANS Lifetime Award to Dr. habil. Karl-Hermann Kock of the Institute of Sea Fisheries of the Johann-Heinrich von Thünen Institute (Hamburg, Germany), who has devoted his entire career to issues related to marine conservation and sustainable use of marine living resources, and had been actively involved in the work of ASCOBANS since 1996 until his retirement this year.