

Statement of CMS, ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS

to the 68th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission
Portorož, Slovenia, 13-21 October 2022

1. As an environmental treaty under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the **Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS, 1979)** brings together the States through which migratory animals pass, the Range States, and lays the legal foundation for internationally coordinated conservation measures throughout a migratory range. CMS currently has 133 Parties.
2. Migratory species threatened with extinction are listed on Appendix I of the Convention. Appendix I currently lists 16 cetacean species. Appendix II, which currently lists 44 cetacean species, includes migratory species that need or would significantly benefit from international co-operation. For this reason, the Convention encourages the Range States to conclude global or regional agreements.
3. Such mechanisms include two legally-binding cetacean Agreements: **ASCOBANS** (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas) and **ACCOBAMS** (Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area). In addition, two non-binding regional agreements have been concluded, the **Pacific Cetaceans MOU** (Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region) and the **Western African Aquatic Mammal MOU** (Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Conservation of the Manatee and Small Cetaceans of Western Africa and Macaronesia). For more information, please refer to www.cms.int.
4. Below is a joint report of activities on cetacean conservation, undertaken by CMS, ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS, since the 67th Meeting of the IWC (2018).

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)



13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties

5. The 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP13) to CMS was held in Gandhinagar, India, in February 2020. Resolutions and Decisions with a scientific element were first considered at the 4th Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council (ScC-SC4) in Bonn, Germany, in November 2019. The most directly relevant outcomes of COP13 cover the following topics:
 - a) **Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs)** - [Decisions 13.54 to 13.57](#): IMMAs are defined as 'discrete portions of habitat, important to marine mammal species, that have the potential to be delineated and managed for conservation'. These Decisions request Parties to make use of IMMAs when identifying habitat at risk or designing threat mitigation measures, and when designating marine protected areas, for marine spatial planning purposes, for CMS-listed pinnipeds, sirenians, otters, Polar Bears and cetaceans.

- b) **Adverse Impacts of Anthropogenic Noise on Cetaceans and Other Migratory Species - Decisions 13.58-13.60:** The Decisions include a request for the CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Joint Noise Working Group to review the report on *Best Available Technology (BAT) and Best Environmental Practice (BEP) for Three Noise Sources: Shipping, Seismic Airgun Surveys, and Pile Driving*¹ and publish the resulting version as a Technical Series to make the information easily accessible to Parties. It was also agreed that CMS Scientific Council should assess the need for updating the *CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessment for Marine Noise-generating Activities* and/or its *Technical Support Information* prior to COP14 (2023).

The Joint Noise Working Group of CMS, ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS: Established in 2009 with the terms of reference updated several times, its progress reports can be accessed at the [ASCOBANS website](#). The most recent JNWG update was given to AC26 in November 2021. An Industry Advisory Group (IAG) on Underwater Noise was established in October 2021, to facilitate consultation with industry experts on the technical feasibility of proposed measures as well as any alternative measures or solutions.

- c) **Aquatic Wild Meat - Decisions 13.64-13.65:** The Decisions and the relevant Resolution 12.15 set up mechanisms aimed at increasing understanding of the impacts of subsistence use of CMS-listed species as aquatic wild meat on the survival and regeneration of these species, in the context of growing human populations and pressures on wildlife resources and ecosystems, and at improving management to ensure any such use is sustainable. Decision 13.64 outlines the tasks of the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group. The key focus to date has been on background work necessary for the development of a Wild Meat Action Plan for the Gulf of Guinea for consideration by Range State Parties in the region. A workshop involving key government stakeholders and others is under preparation. The Working Group and Secretariat have also worked closely with the IWC Small Cetacean Subcommittee on this issue.
- d) **Marine Wildlife Watching - Decisions 13.66-13.68:** The workstreams on *Recreational In-Water Interactions* and *Sustainable Boat Based Marine Wildlife Watching* have been combined into one, as requested by COP12, now entitled *Marine Wildlife Watching*. The Secretariat developed a review² of existing guidelines and issues of concern related to recreational in-water interactions with aquatic species, which the COP was recommended to take note of. The Decisions from COP13 request the development of guidelines and recommended code of conduct for operators on recreational in-water interactions with CMS-listed species, and in consultation with IWC. The draft guidelines were circulated for consultation, including to IWC, in December 2021. The guidelines will be presented to COP14 for formal consideration. In addition, the Secretariat worked closely with IWC to develop the joint IWC-CMS Whale Watching Handbook³.
- e) **Conservation and Management of Whales and their Habitats in the South Atlantic Region - Decisions 13.84-13.85:** The Decisions request the Secretariat to organize a regional workshop to improve capacity for the implementation of the Action Plan for the Protection and Conservation of South Atlantic Whales. This activity is dependent on sufficient resources becoming available.
- f) **Marine Pollution:** COP13 established a new COP-Appointed Councillor position for Marine Pollution, and selected Mark Simmonds for the role. His work programme was agreed by the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council. The following priority areas were identified:

¹ Published as [UNEP/CMS/COP13/Inf.9](#)

² Annex 2 of [UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.26.2.5](#)

³ <https://wwhandbook.iwc.int/en/>

- Marine debris including Fishing Aggregating Devices (FADs), noting links to the work of the Councillors for Bycatch and Marine Fish;
 - Evidence of the effect of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) on marine migratory species;
 - Nutrient Pollution.
- g) **Bycatch** - [Decisions 13.61-13.63](#): The Decisions give guidance to Parties on implementing a best practice approach to mitigating bycatch, with a specific focus on cetaceans. Decision 13.61 urges Parties, that manage fisheries with identified marine mammal bycatch problems, to take account of the Hamilton and Baker (2019) assessment⁴, and the FAO Technical Guidelines to reduce bycatch of marine mammals in capture fisheries, and the Leaper and Calderan (2018) study of methods used to reduce risks of cetacean bycatch and entanglements (CMS Technical Series Publication No. 38), in addition to the best available scientific advice for the fisheries concerned and implement effective bycatch mitigation measures for marine mammals, as appropriate to their fishing operations including the introduction of alternative gears. CMS (and ASCOBANS) is represented in the IWC Standing Working Group on Bycatch.
- h) **Live Capture of Cetaceans from the Wild for Commercial Purposes** - [Decisions 13.74-13.75](#): The Decisions request Parties to submit information on the implementation of the *Best Practice Guidelines relating to the Live Capture of Cetaceans from the Wild for Commercial Purposes*⁵ via the National Report process. The Decisions also request the Secretariat to provide assistance to Parties, upon request and subject to the availability of resources, to amend their national legislation, in line with the recommendations contained in the Best Practice Guidelines.
- i) **Global Programme of Work for Cetaceans** - [Decisions 13.80-13.83](#): The Decisions request the CMS Aquatic Mammals Working Group to undertake a revision of the POW leading up to COP14, including a review of the implementation of the POW to date, preparation of a gap analysis and identification of the priorities going forward. The Decisions also request consultations regarding the development of an action plan for cetaceans in the Red Sea region. Further, they foresee collaboration with IWC with a view to co-hosting a workshop on the role of cetaceans in ecosystem functioning. This workshop took place in April 2021, and was hosted online by IWC.
- j) **Conservation Implications of Animal Culture and Social Complexity** - [Decisions 13.102-13.105](#): The Decisions request the Expert Working Group on Animal Culture to progress work on the development of a management tool, with the specific task of testing the tool on the CMS Appendices and identifying priority species and social groups.
- The Secretariat convened the first workshop in Parma, Italy, in April 2018. The report of the workshop was presented to ScC-SC3⁶. A summary of the recommendations can be found in the report of the Expert Working Group on Animal Culture to COP13⁷.
 - The second workshop (Part I) took place online on 6 October 2022, and aimed to explain the mandates and propose a way forward, including the setting up of sub-groups for intersessional work and appointment of sub-group leaders. Part II of this meeting is planned to take place in Italy in early 2023, to review work of the sub-groups and agree the recommendations to be made to the CMS Scientific Council and Parties.
- k) **Concerted Actions** are priority conservation measures, projects, or institutional arrangements undertaken to improve the conservation status of selected CMS Appendix I and Appendix II

⁴ Available as [UNEP/CMS/COP13/Inf.11](#)

⁵ Annexed to [Resolution 11.22 \(Rev.COP12\)](#)

⁶ [UNEP/CMS/ScC-SC3/Inf.8](#)

⁷ Annex 1 of [UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.26.4.1/Rev.1](#)

species or selected groups of Appendix I and Appendix II species. The following ones are currently active:

- 13.5 [Concerted Action for the Irrawaddy Dolphin \(*Orcaella brevirostris*\)](#)
- 13.6 [Concerted Action for the Ganges River Dolphin \(*Platanista gangetica gangetica*\)](#)
- 13.7 [Concerted Action for the Harbour Porpoise \(*Phocoena phocoena*\) in the Baltic Sea and the Iberian Peninsula](#)
- 12.2 (Rev.COP13) [Concerted Action for Sperm Whales \(*Physeter macrocephalus*\) of the Eastern Tropical Pacific](#)
- 12.3 (Rev.COP13) [Concerted Action for the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin \(*Sousa teuszii*\)](#)
- 12.4 (Rev.COP13) [Concerted Action for the Humpback Whales \(*Megaptera novaeangliae*\) of the Arabian Sea.](#)

Fifth Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council

6. The main purpose of the meeting (ScC-SC5), held online from 28 June to 9 July 2021, was to develop and agree the work plan for the Sessional Committee for implementation of COP13 Resolutions and Decisions. The meeting report is available [here](#); and press release [here](#).

Publications

7. Fact Sheets on:
 - **Climate change:** Published in February 2020, the fact sheets on [blue whale](#) (*Balaenoptera musculus*) and [narwhal](#) (*Monodon monoceros*) aim to raise awareness on threats to these species due to climate change.
 - **Connectivity:** In preparation for CBD COP15, the following CMS Fact Sheets were produced: on [Connectivity and the post-2020 Biodiversity Framework: An Introduction](#) (June 2019) and [Elements for New Goals and Targets](#) (August 2019).
 - **Marine Noise:** Published in June 2018, this fact sheet aims to raise awareness on marine noise as a threat to migratory species and their prey. It includes a list of impacts of noise on marine wildlife, link to the Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities, and information on how the CMS Family is taking action.
8. [Review of Methods Used to Reduce Risks of Cetacean Bycatch and Entanglements](#): This review was published as CMS Technical Series No. 38 in May 2018. Using case studies, the report summarizes the mitigation methods that have been undertaken with the objective of reducing cetacean bycatch, and assesses their efficacy and future potential. The review, funded by WWF, is intended to support initiatives to address cetacean bycatch, including those by CMS, its associated regional agreements, ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS, and the IWC, by providing a summary of the current state of mitigation techniques.

Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS)



9. As of October 2022, ASCOBANS has ten Parties. In March 2022, the Agreement celebrated its 30th anniversary - see [ASCOBANS website](#) for more information.
10. ASCOBANS targets whales, dolphins and porpoises, with individual measures being contained in a Conservation and Management Plan annexed to the Agreement and individual Resolutions being passed by each of the Meeting of Parties. In addition, ASCOBANS implements four Action Plans:
 - [Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises](#) (Jastarnia Plan)
 - [Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat](#)

- (Western Baltic Conservation Plan)
- [Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises \(*Phocoena phocoena L.*\) in the North Sea](#) (North Sea Plan)
- [Species Action Plan for the North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin \(*Delphinus delphis*\)](#) (Common Dolphin SAP).

Meeting of the Parties

11. Meetings of the Parties to ASCOBANS take place every four years. The 9th Meeting of the Parties (MOP9) took place online in September 2020. The Parties adopted a [new work plan](#) for the Advisory Committee and resolutions on [marine debris](#), [food availability and resource depletion](#), and [Baltic Proper harbour porpoise](#). The Parties also updated existing resolutions on bycatch, conservation of the common dolphin, national reporting, EIA for noise-generating activities, and stranding response. With that, Parties also adopted the [Best practice on cetacean post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling](#), a joint ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS document; and the [CMS Family Guidelines on EIA for marine noise-generating activities](#). The Resolutions are available on the [MOP9 website](#) with the meeting report.

Advisory Committee

12. The ASCOBANS Advisory Committee meets annually (except for MOP-years) and includes both scientific and institutional sessions. The 24th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee ([AC24](#)) met in September 2018 in Vilnius, Lithuania; [AC25](#) in September 2019 in Stralsund, Germany; and [AC26](#) in November 2021, online. The reports, action points, and recommendations can be accessed on the ASCOBANS website.
13. AC26 agreed that the following workshops and meetings be organised (subject to availability of funding; timing to be determined):
 - An expert workshop to recommend small cetacean conservation objectives in relation to anthropogenic removals;
 - A workshop to review conservation units and their delineation for bottlenose dolphins and other small cetacean species within the ASCOBANS region;
 - A brainstorming meeting on a strandings and necropsy database;
 - Meeting on presenting results of marine mammal indicator assessments used for reporting by EU Member States under the MSFD; and
 - A workshop with national navies to consider mitigation protocols for use of military sonar and management of other activities that can contribute to potentially harmful underwater noise, and solutions for acoustic monitoring and bycatch mitigation (deterrent devices) in synergy with national security activities
14. [AC27](#) took place online in September 2022. It agreed on 27 Action Points and Recommendations, regarding *inter alia* bycatch, resource depletion, marine debris, use of stranding records, and offshore renewable energy. AC27 also discussed the recent Nord Stream gas leak, dolphin hunt in the Faroe Islands, and the threat recreational speed crafts pose to small cetaceans. In addition, AC27:
 - Agreed to proceed with scoping project for the web-accessed database for marine mammal strandings and necropsy data - ASCOBANS will liaise with IWC and other organisations in going forward;
 - Agreed to establish Working Groups on offshore renewable energy, Nord Stream gas leak, recreation speed crafts, and to identify potential duplication or gaps in cetacean conservation efforts between ASCOBANS and other organisations;
 - Endorsed the proposals for workshops regarding marine debris and offshore renewable energy;

- Appointed Katarzyna Kamińska (Poland) as Chair and Anne-Marie Svoboda (the Netherlands) as the Vice-Chair of the AC, for the period from 2023 to 2025; and
- Agreed that the tentative dates for AC28 will be 26-28 September 2023.

Implementation of the Work Plan

15. The ASCOBANS Work Plan 2021-2024 covers all areas of the Agreement's work, as laid out in its Conservation and Management Plan. Some of the recent activities of interest to IWC relate to:

a) Fisheries-related threats

16. A project *Using fishers' knowledge to understand the use of alternative gears to static gillnets in the ASCOBANS region* started in June 2022. Its overall objective is to engage with fishers in Germany, the UK, and the Atlantic coast of Spain, to identify alternative gear(s) that static gillnets fishers would be willing to trial and potentially to switch to, in order to reduce cetacean bycatch.
17. The following ASCOBANS Technical Series publications were released: [Monitoring Cetacean Bycatch: An Analysis of Different Methods Aboard Commercial Fishing Vessels](#)⁸ and [Cost-benefit Analysis for Mitigation Measures in Fisheries with High Bycatch](#)⁹.

b) Disturbance

18. A project *Prediction of the cochlear frequency maps of harbour porpoise* started in July 2022. Anthropogenic noise can negatively affect marine mammal populations in several ways, such as masking the vital information transmitted by them, by affecting their behaviour or by causing hearing loss, temporary or permanent. It is important to improve knowledge on the hearing capabilities, and implement a routine protocol to be able to determine the presence of lesions associated to noise overexposure in harbour porpoises. Final report is expected by end of 2022.

c) Marine Protected Areas

19. The *Second ASCOBANS Workshop on Management of Marine Protected Areas for Small Cetaceans* took place from 31 May to 2 June 2022 in Helsinki, Finland. The workshop built on the results from the [first workshop](#) (2021), and continued to develop and discuss examples of ambitious and innovative practical conservation measures for small cetacean MPAs, including Natura 2000 sites, building on the results from the first workshop. This will contribute to a complete and more concrete toolbox of conservation measures for small cetacean MPAs. The workshop report will be available on the [ASCOBANS website](#) in due course.

ASCOBANS is also aiming to develop draft guidelines for cetacean-friendly MSP during the next year.

d) Biological information

20. The project *Status of the Iberian harbour porpoise* started in June 2022. The aim of the project is to investigate morphological and demographic parameters in the Iberian harbour porpoise, and compare the Iberian population to porpoises in the North Sea and the Bay of Biscay. This project also contributes to the CMS CA 13.7 (Concerted Action for the harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea and the Iberian Peninsula).

⁸ Grant P. Course (2021). *Monitoring Cetacean Bycatch: An Analysis of Different Methods Aboard Commercial Fishing Vessels*. ASCOBANS Secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 74 pages. ASCOBANS Technical Series No.1.

⁹ Fiona L. Read (2021). *Cost-benefit Analysis for Mitigation Measures in Fisheries with High Bycatch*. ASCOBANS Secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 52 pages. ASCOBANS Technical Series No. 2.

Working Groups

21. The following [Working Groups and Steering Groups](#) reported to the AC during 2021-2022:

a) **Jastarnia Group (JG)**

The most recent meeting (JG18) took place in March 2022 in Gothenburg, Sweden. The meeting discussed, among others, progress on implementation of the action plans, status of the delegated act to minimize bycatch of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise and current discussions in BALTFISH on further measures, results of the MiniSCANS-II project, and the status of the draft proposal to list the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise to CMS Appendix I. The Action Points are available [online](#). The next meeting will be held online on 20-22 March 2023.

b) **North Sea Group (NSG)**

The most recent meeting of the Steering Group for the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea (NSG10) was held online in January 2022. The meeting discussed key priorities such as the implementation of existing bycatch regulations and investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on harbour porpoises. The meeting expressed concern regarding population level impacts of noise levels and exposure duration, and learned about the findings of the mass stranding event that occurred on the Dutch Wadden Sea Islands in August 2021 (read more [here](#)). Priority Recommendations are available [online](#). The next meeting will be held online on 31 January-1 February 2023.

c) **Common Dolphin Group**

The most recent meeting of the Steering Group for the Species Action Plan for North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin ([CDG2](#)) took place in December 2020. Comprising of experts from France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the UK, and IGO and NGO representatives, the group reported on progress in SAP implementation, activities contributing towards its implementation, relevant ICES and OSPAR meetings, and what kind of action countries were planning to take with regards to the ICES Special Request Advice regarding emergency measures to prevent bycatch of common dolphins. The recommendations of CDG2 were adopted at AC27. The next meeting is planned to be held on 15-16 November 2022, online.

d) **Joint Bycatch Working Group of ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS**

Joint Bycatch Working Group (JBWG) aims to address mandates of relevant resolutions of both Agreements; provide updates on bycatch mitigation measures and their effectiveness; review information on illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing; and provide technical support when needed to facilitate dialogue with relevant bodies. The first meeting of the JBWG was held online in February 2021 - its Recommendations are available [here](#). A catch-up meeting was held online in August 2022, and the [most recent report](#) from the JBWG was submitted to AC27.

e) **Intersessional Working Group on Resource Depletion**

With a mandate from AC24, this Working Group was established in 2019 to (i) review new information on resource depletion and its impacts on small cetacean populations and (ii) make recommendations to Parties and other relevant authorities for further action. The [most recent report](#) of the Working Group was presented to AC27.

f) **Intersessional Working Group on Beaked Whales**

The topic of beaked whales was raised at MOP9 because of the Unusual Mortality Events (UMEs) recorded in 1990-2020 in the Northeast Atlantic. Many of the species concerned are categorised as Data Deficient by IUCN, reflecting that the level of monitoring at sea is inadequate and given the recent number of strandings and what we know of beaked whale biology, there is considerable concern about the status of populations. An [updated report](#) was

presented to AC26 in November 2021, and the AC endorsed the recommendations presented in the report.

- g) Joint Noise Working Group of CMS, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS (*see above*).

Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS)



Management of the Agreement

22. As of October 2022, there are 24 State Parties to the Agreement.
23. A **proposal for the extension of the ACCOBAMS** to cover the Atlantic EEZ of Spain and Portugal was adopted by the MOP4. By October 2022, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Italy, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, and Ukraine deposited their instrument of acceptance with the Depositary.
24. **The 7th Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS** was held in Istanbul in November 2019. The Meeting appointed representatives of Türkiye (Chair), Lebanon, Malta, Morocco and Spain, as Bureau Members for the triennium 2020-2022. **The 8th Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS** will be held in Malta, from 29 November to 2 December 2022.
25. **The 13th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee** was held in February 2020 in Cap d'Ail (France) and the **14th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee** was held in November 2021, in Monaco. Simone Panigada was nominated as the Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee for the period 2020-2022 and Lea David as the Vice Chair.
26. **The 3rd Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee** was held online on 29-30 March 2022.

Conservation Action

a) Improve knowledge about the state of cetaceans

27. **Cetacean population estimates and distribution:** During the summer of 2018 and 2019, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat coordinated the first ever large-scale survey of cetaceans in the Mediterranean and Black Seas (ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative) combining visual monitoring methods - from aircrafts and boats - with passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) methods targeting specifically deep-diving species. All the riparian countries of the ACCOBAMS area jointly participated in this exceptional effort alongside with more than 40 national and international organisations. Those ambitious campaigns mobilized a hundred scientific observers from all ACCOBAMS countries, as well as a dozen aircrafts specially equipped and six research vessels. In spite of local geopolitical complexity, aerial surveys covered 1.92 million km², or 77% of the Mediterranean, while boat-based surveys covered 1.3 million km², or 52% of the Mediterranean, in particular in no-fly areas. More than 60% of the Black Sea was covered by aerial surveys, representing about 270,000 km² of studied area.
28. The ASI provided a unique opportunity to collect data on cetaceans but also on other marine megafauna species like turtles and elasmobranchs, as well as on human activities and respective impacts, like floating litter and underwater noise. Results and data collected under the ASI are openly available for the best and widest possible use at the service of conservation of the marine environment. ASI results on distribution and abundance of cetacean species throughout the

Agreement Area are a valuable baseline to assess the current conservation status of these endangered species - IUCN Red List species status were updated in 2021 - and to monitor populations' future growth or decline.

29. After this first successful experience, efforts are now dedicated to transform ASI into an ACCOBAMS embedded Long Term Monitoring Programme sustaining collaborative macro regional surveys every 6 years.
30. **Strandings:** The Secretariat organized several trainings on necropsies, following the best practices towards the investigation of causes of death including incidental catches during fishing operations (bycatch) and marine litter ingestion, entanglement, but also impacts caused by noise, ship strikes and infectious diseases – “Best Practices on cetacean post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling resulted from the harmonization process in ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS”.
31. In June 2021, a 2-day online marine mammal post-mortem investigation webinar was organised using a videoconferencing system. Late September and then late October, online demonstrations on necropsies were held from Liege and Padua, respectively. Until November 2021 online asynchronous lessons were released from both Liege and Padua Universities.
32. In 2022, two 3-days face-to-face trainings on marine mammal *postmortem* were organized. One in Padova (Italy) in February; the second in Liege (Belgium) in March; and the third online, in July 2022 (Liege University).
33. The establishment of an ACCOBAMS expert panel on strandings to assist with emergencies and unusual mortality events (Task Force) is ongoing including a specific topic on the Black Sea.

b) Reduce human pressures on cetaceans

34. **Interaction with fisheries:** The first meeting of the Joint Bycatch Working Group (JBWG) of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS was held online in February 2021. Several projects aimed at assessing and mitigating impacts of bycatch and depredation were funded by MAVA Foundation and will come to an end in October 2022. These projects supported the implementation of relevant activities in the Alboran Sea, Tunisian-Sicily Strait and the Levantine area. Main activities included the development of data collection methodologies, data collection through on-board observations and port questionnaires, mitigation trials, *inter alia*. Collaboration with the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (FAO-GFCM) is pursued in the framework of these projects. A review of available bycatch data in national stranding databases was also carried out based on questionnaires.
35. **Anthropogenic noise:** The ACCOBAMS Secretariat is involved in a new EU funded project QUIETSEAS project "Assisting (sub)regional cooperation for the practical implementation of the MSFD second cycle by providing methods and tools for D11 (underwater noise)".
36. A workshop with the Joint Noise Working Group was organized in January 2020 and in February 2022, respectively, in the framework of QuietMed2 project regarding a proposal for a candidate indicator on impulsive noise in the Mediterranean region, and of QuietSeas project, so to support the implementation and operationalization of the TG Noise framework methodology, and the establishment of threshold values for noise in the Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea region
37. **Cetacean watching:** under the guidance of the Whale Watching Working Group, a study aimed at identifying hotspots of WW activities in the ACCOBAMS area was conducted based on questionnaires circulated to data collection partners in each country. Guidelines on the management of cetaceans watching activities in the ACCOBAMS Area were also developed and

will be presented for endorsement at MOP8 in November 2022.

38. **Marine litter:** A study on the hotspots of interactions between cetaceans and marine litter in the ACCOBAMS Area is under preparation.
39. **Chemical & biological pollution:** A bibliographic review on the impact of chemical pollution on cetaceans and Guidelines on best practices to assess the impact of chemical pollution on cetaceans are under preparation.

c) Improve Communication, Awareness and Capacity-Building

40. A draft Communication Strategy was developed and will be presented at MOP8 for adoption by Parties.
41. **The [5th Conference on Cetacean Conservation in South Mediterranean Countries](#)** of the ACCOBAMS was held online in April 2021. The objective was to assess the knowledge gained on cetaceans in the South of the Mediterranean; to identify potential gaps and to improve the development of conservation actions in order to promote the implementation of the ACCOBAMS Agreement.

d) Enhance effective conservation of cetacean critical habitats

42. **Protected areas for cetaceans:** ACCOBAMS is working on the **identification of new Cetacean Critical Habitats (CCH)** in the ACCOBAMS area, in order to propose appropriate threats management or spatial management measures. The identification is based through overlapping areas of interest for Marine Mammals (IMMAs) while mapping existing anthropogenic pressures.