

**SC/68C/O/05**

**Sub-committees/working group name: O**

**Co-operation with Other Organisations - Compilation of observer reports**

**Secretariat**



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## COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The reports of observers representing the Commission at the following meetings are attached as the Appendices indicated:

<b>Appendix</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>IWC Observer(s)</b>
<b>A</b>	Report from the 2020 activities in ICES	<i>Tore Haug (Norway)</i>
<b>B</b>	2020 Meeting of PICES held virtually - 13 -30 October 2020	<i>Tsutomu Tamura (Japan)</i>
<b>C</b>	NAMMCO Scientific Committee	<i>Tore Haug (Norway)</i>
<b>D</b>	Cooperation with IMO	<i>Russell Leaper (UK)</i>
<b>E</b>	Report from ASCOBANS to IWC SC68C	<i>Mark Simmonds (UK)</i>

## Appendix A

### REPORT FROM THE 2020 ACTIVITIES IN ICES

**Tore Haug**

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#### **ICES WGMME**

The ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME) met in Barcelona, Spain, during 10–14 February 2020.

Two terms of references were standing ToRs; under the first of these, ToR A, new and updated information on seal and cetacean population abundance, population/stock structure, management frameworks as well as anthropogenic threats to individual health and population status were reviewed. The latest abundance data on harbour, grey and ringed seals are also reviewed under this ToR along with findings on threats to marine mammals such as bycatch, pollution, marine debris and noise.

ToR B arose to facilitate the work of Working Group on Biodiversity Science's (WGBIOIV) ToR A; "Investigate mechanisms linking trophic guilds under contrasting levels of pressure and/or primary production in case study areas". The initial focus of work should be on harbour porpoise, grey seal and harbour seal in the North Sea as a case study and, therefore, a number of recent studies addressing diet, foraging distribution and trophic interactions were reviewed. Additionally, an overview of published and unpublished data on diet and distribution of marine mammals in the North Sea was synthesized.

ToR C was implemented to review aspects of marine mammal-fishery interactions not covered by ICES WGBYC. In 2020, WGMME focused its efforts on i) reviewing conservation objectives with respect to maximum mortality since the lack of conservation targets was identified as hindering the ability to address marine mammal-fisheries interactions, ii) assessing the use of stranding records as a source of information to identify abnormal mortality and possible relations to fisheries. A country-by-country review of current stranding network activities was included.

ToR D, updating the database for seals, is the second standing term of reference. The database format generated in 2019 was updated with the most recent data on seal abundance.

#### **ICES WGBYC**

The Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) met in Den Helden, The Netherlands, 10–13 March 2020. WGBYC planned to address seven Terms of Reference, one of which was a special request from the European Commission on emergency bycatch mitigation measures for common dolphin in the Bay of Biscay and harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea (ToR G). ToR G demanded a great deal of resources from WGBYC and, coupled with the COVID-19 disruption where WGBYC work had to be carried out remotely, this meant it was not possible to complete all tasks. Note that ToR E was not addressed while ToR G is reported in WKEMBYC. All data submissions were requested via a formal WGBYC/ICES data

call on fishing effort, monitoring effort and PETS (protected, endangered, and threatened species of marine mammals, seabirds, reptiles, and fish) bycatch incidents in 2018. 19 of the 24 countries that contacted (18 ICES countries and 6 Mediterranean non-ICES countries) responded. WGBYC did not accept data brought to the meeting, but where problems were found during assessments with country submissions, updated versions were accepted.

The quality and scope of Member States (MS) reports on the implementation of Regulation 812/2004 (cetacean bycatch) during 2018 remain varied (ToR A). Most countries have relied on monitoring through their Data Collection Framework (DCF) sampling programmes rather than implementing dedicated observer programmes. This means that métiers that pose the greatest risk of cetacean bycatch are generally under-sampled and bycatch is underestimated. Regulation 812/2004 was repealed and replaced in June 2019 by the Technical Conservation Measures Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2019/1241) and PETS bycatch monitoring is further implemented through the EU-MAP (Regulation (EU) 2017/1004). For 2018, data received through the WGBYC data call included 82 cetaceans (5 species) and 175 seals (4 species). Equivalent data from non-EU countries was also received from the USA and Iceland. Bycatch of marine mammals was observed in all ecoregions and several gears including gillnets, traps, longlines, and trawls. Eight countries also contributed numbers of bycaught stranded cetaceans. Bycatch was the predominant cause of death of common dolphins stranded in the Bay of Biscay and Channel.

Member states compliance with the ‘pinger’ requirements of Regulation 812/2004 is difficult to gauge from the submitted reports due to reporting inconsistencies and incomplete information (ToR B). Only the United Kingdom appears to comply fully, reporting that all relevant vessels are equipped with “DDD” pingers used under a derogation and there is active enforcement in place. But in general, there has been little progress in the mitigation of cetacean bycatch and the effectiveness of pingers appears to vary among fishing métiers and geographical areas. WGBYC continues to have insufficient data to examine bycatch rates according to pinger use within their database.

Under ToR C, different bycatch unit of effort metrics were examined. Bycatch rates calculated by km/hr (rather than per haul, for example) provide the most insightful outputs and may alter our interpretation of broad-scale patterns of bycatch and consequently where mitigation attempts might be best targeted. Further analysis is required to test the suitability of different effort metrics to complex statistical analysis, and their effects on assessments of total bycatch mortality. When fitting uncertainty around bycatch rate estimates, the Poisson or the negative binomial distributions tended to fit the tested datasets better than the binomial distribution that tended to be used in the past.

An assessment of bycatch for common dolphins was evaluated in the Celtic Seas Ecoregion and the Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast Ecoregion (ToR C/ToR G). In the Celtic Seas, the mean annual bycatch in 2016–2018 across all métiers ranged from 278–1345 dolphins, with bottom otter trawls (OTB) and gillnets (GNS) targeting demersal fish accounting for the largest bycatch. In the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Peninsula, the mean annual bycatch for 2016–2018 across all métiers ranged from 1998–6599 dolphins, with trammel nets (GTR) for demersal fish accounting for the largest bycatch. The mortality inferred from French common dolphin strandings in 2017 and 2018 in the Bay of Biscay and the Western Channel was estimated to

be between 5800–17 900 and 3400–10 500 individuals, respectively. The bycatch estimates from strandings and the at-sea monitoring data collectively suggest that common dolphin bycatch likely exceeds the upper limits of “sustainable” anthropogenic removals, defined using a Potential Biological Removal threshold (proposed by ICES WGMME in 2020) of 4927 common dolphins per year. For the Baltic harbour porpoise (ToR C/ToR G), examination of bycatch rates of harbour porpoise generated from the WGBYC database (2005–2018) in all regions was carried out to identify high-risk métiers, given the lack of data for the Baltic proper. In the North Sea and Celtic Sea the highest bycatch rates occurred in gillnet or trammel nets. In the Bay of Biscay, the highest bycatch rate occurred in pelagic trawls but it is likely that gillnets would pose the greatest threat in terms of total harbour porpoise mortality due to the fleets’ size.

WGBYC needs to continue coordination with other expert groups to better understand the raising factors used to ensure correct interpretation of elasmobranch bycatch data. To better understand the distribution of monitoring and fishing effort, WGBYC mapped the 2018 data received through the data call. Additionally, monitoring effort was summarised by métiers against a “PETS bycatch risk index” (obtained from the fishPi project) (ToR C). A clear inverse relationship was demonstrated between the bycatch risk index and amount of monitoring effort. Considering that Member States are obliged to monitor protected species bycatch, the Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) will need to consider increasing monitoring effort to static gears which have high bycatch risk. WGBYC conducted a comparative analysis of the 2018 and 2017 fishing effort data contained within the WGBYC database with equivalent data from the ICES Regional Database (RDB). This work highlighted discrepancies with the quantity of fishing effort data submitted to each. In general, there was a lot of variability when comparing fishing effort in the two databases between countries, but more consistency between years for each country and database. Some of these inconsistencies might be explained by gear type definitions for the different submissions and/or national effort recording systems prior to submission. When the new Regional Database Estimations System (RDBES) becomes operational (2022), WGBYC will carry out complete comparisons of fishing effort, monitoring effort, and bycatch before any decisions on full transition to RDBES as a sole data source. Until then, WGBYC will continue to issue a formal data call to obtain fishing effort, monitoring effort, and bycatch data to form the basis of its bycatch assessments. WGBYC expressed concern that moving to the RDBES as their data source would mean that bycatch data from General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) areas would be lost since many Mediterranean countries are not ICES members; ICES needs to work with the GFCM to assist with this. WGBYC has collaborated with the ICES Working Group on Commercial Catches (WGCATCH) on multiple tasks this year, including creation of species sampling lists to support at-sea PETS bycatch data-collection, collation of information on the sampling methods and the stages in the fishing process that are monitored for PETS, and participated in the WGCATCH PETS subgroup. Additionally, WGBYC reviewed case study proposals as part of RCG PETS subgroup work to develop regionally coordinated sampling plans. The group continues to work with other expert groups that also have an interest in bycatch (e.g. the ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology–WGMME) and encourages participants to share information on relevant initiatives, such as the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) Roadmap on Fisheries Data. Importantly, WGBYC contributed to early drafts of the Roadmap for ICES bycatch advice on protected, endangered and threatened species which has now been published.

## ICES WKEMBYC

Following a submission of two reports from 26 European environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to the European Commission (DG MARE) concerning the introduction of emergency measures to mitigate bycatch of common dolphins in the Bay of Biscay and harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea, ICES established the Workshop on Emergency Measures to mitigate BYCatch of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea and common dolphin in the Bay of Biscay (WKEMBYC). WKEMBYC was tasked to build on the work conducted by WGMME and WGBYC to assess the emergency measures proposed by the NGOs, explore alternative measures, and suggest emergency measures that are necessary to ensure a satisfactory conservation status of these stocks. The work of WKEMBYC, who met by correspondence on 1-3 April 2020, was based on the examination of the information provided by NGOs, as well as the work conducted by WGMME 2020 and WGBYC 2020 under ToR E and ToR G respectively.

The population of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Proper is considered to be critically endangered and its abundance is 497 individuals (95% CI 80–1091). At least 5–10 individuals might die from bycatch every year. A Potential Biological Removal (PBR) limit for the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise was estimated at 0.7 animals per year. Data from the North Sea and the Celtic Sea showed that the highest bycatch rate for harbour porpoise was in gillnet and trammel net fisheries (GNS and GTR). Data from 2016 to 2018 from Bay of Biscay bycatch rates are highest in midwater pair trawls (PTM). Harbour porpoises are also caught in bottom and midwater otter trawls (OTB, OTT and OTM). The three proposed emergency measures by NGOs aiming at a reduction of bycatch numbers are not sufficient for the protection and recovery of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise population, therefore WKEMBYC recommended adjustments. The proposed monitoring actions by NGOs would increase the knowledge of the harbour porpoise population.

The common dolphin is one of the most abundant cetacean species in European waters. The appropriate scale at which to evaluate the population status of common dolphins occurring in the Bay of Biscay is the European Atlantic Assessment Unit, where its abundance is estimated to be 634 286 (CV=0.307). In 2017 and 2018, the mortality due to bycatch inferred from French strandings in the Bay of Biscay and Western English Channel at large was respectively estimated at 9300 [5800; 17 900] and 5 400 [3400; 10 500] common dolphins. In the Bay of Biscay and the Iberian Coast, the mean annual bycatch estimated from at sea observations for 2016–2018 across all métiers amounted to 3973 (95% CI 1998–6599) dolphins. PBR was calculated as 4926 individuals per year. Comparing bycatch estimates obtained from strandings with PBR suggests recent estimates (2017–2019) were higher than the PBR limit. Removing bycatch in the January–March winter period reduces the estimated bycatch to a small proportion of the total, and much lower than the calculated PBR.

WKEMBYC considered that the NGO proposed closure of all fisheries of concern in the Bay of Biscay from December to March was expected to significantly reduce bycatch of common dolphins. However, suggestions of alternative closures needed to be further explored and the use of 'pingers' needed to be considered.

It was considered important that measures allowing the population to increase are implemented as soon as possible, implemented in a long term, and that the mortality limit of 0.7 animals per year is used as an operational threshold. Specifically, WKEMBYC recommended closure of a defined summer core area for the population from all fishing gears, with the exception of passive gears proven not to bycatch harbour porpoises. Closures were also recommended in a number of Nature 2000 sites and additional areas, within the seasonal distribution range of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise. Additionally, the workshop recommended prohibiting the use of static nets without the simultaneous use of pingers in the entire seasonal Baltic Proper harbour porpoise management area. A series of monitoring recommendations aiming at increasing the knowledge on bycatch risk and status of the Baltic proper harbour porpoise population were given.

Regarding the Bay of Biscay common dolphin, WKEMBYC agreed that PBR may be a useful tool. Bycatch values derived from monitoring programmes and stranding were considered to be two views of the same phenomenon and their uncertainty ranges were considered to contain the true bycatch level. In the absence of other agreed thresholds and considering the large uncertainty bounds of the annual bycatch estimates, two management objectives were tested; Reduce bycatch below 50% of PBR and Reduce bycatch below 10% of PBR. To achieve a level of bycatch below 50% of PBR, WKEMBYC recommended a two-month closure for the métiers of concern, from mid-January to mid-March, and the use of acoustic deterrents, proven to be effective for reducing common dolphin bycatch in trawls, on PTM and PTB the rest of the year. To achieve reductions that minimise bycatch (<10% of PBR) WKEMBYC recommended a three-month winter closure from January to March, and a one-month summer closure from mid-July to mid-August for the métiers of concern along with the use of acoustic deterrents, proven to be effective for reducing common dolphin bycatch in trawls, on PTM and PTB the rest of the year. WKEMBYC also recommended a series of monitoring actions to improve bycatch estimates and the assessment of the northeast Atlantic common dolphin.

### **ICES ASC**

Because of the global COVID-19 crisis, the planned ICES Annual Science Conference (ASC) 2020 was postponed, and will take place 6-9 September 2021 at Øksnehallen in Copenhagen, Denmark. More information is available at the ICES web side <http://www.ices.dk>.

## Observer Report of the 2020 PICES Annual Meeting

***Tsutomu Tamuta***

*Japan*

The North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES) is an inter-governmental organization in which Canada, China, Japan, Korea, Russia and the United States participate. PICES has four committees: the Biological Oceanography Committee (BIO), the Fisheries Science Committee (FIS), the Marine Environmental Quality Committee (MEQ), and the Physical Oceanography and Climate Committee (POC). In addition, it has one technical committee for data exchange (TCODE). PICES has been conducting a research project titled FUTURE (Forecasting and Understanding Trends, Uncertainty and Responses of the North Pacific Ecosystems) since 2008.

PICES meets once a year for its regular meeting and its associated symposium with over 500 participants. Since 1997, PICES has addressed marine birds and marine mammals as relevant ecosystem components in the North Pacific, and has established a special working group to assess the impact of feeding by marine birds and marine mammals upon ecosystems (WG11). There was also a marine birds and marine mammals advisory panel (AP-MBM) under the BIO to examine the relationship between climate change and ecosystem fluctuation in the North Pacific Ocean, and compare the situation with those in other oceanic basins. Since 2016, the AP-MBM is under Section-MBM (S-MBM) under the BIO.

The PICES-2020 meeting was held online between 13 and 30 October 2020. The S-MBM Business meeting focused on the ongoing activities. Four S-MBM members representing Canada, Japan, Korea and the USA were present, while those from China and Russia did not attend PICES-2020.

S-MBM in 2020 reviewed the 2015-2020 S-MBM project “Climate and Trophic Ecology of Marine Birds and Mammals” and prepared drafted chapters for Scientific Report as final products of the project, including the results from the workshop on “Anthropogenic stressors, mechanisms and potential impacts on Marine Birds and Mammals”. The draft Scientific Report will be provided at PICES-2021.

Below is a brief outline of the most relevant events:

### **1. S-MBM leadership**

The business meeting of S-MBM was convened by Dr. K. Hattori (National Research and Development Agency, Japan) and Dr. P. O’Hara (Canadian Wildlife Service, Canada).

### **2. Reports from IWC SC at the S-MBM Business meeting**

At the S-MBM Business meeting held on 15 and 16 September 2020, Tamura (Japan), as the representative of the IWC-SC, presented the observer report of the 2020 IWC/SC meeting on topics related to the North Pacific (e.g. the Research Plan for the IWC/POWER cruise). S-MBM agreed to continue participating in the IWC/SC as the observer representing PICES.



### **3. Activity in 2020 of the S-MBM**

There was no activity of the S-MBM in 2020 because of COVID-19.

### **4. Activity plan in 2021 for the S-MBM**

One workshop (one-day) was proposed and agreed for PICES-2021 at the S-MBM Business meeting: "Anthropogenic stressors, mechanisms and potential impacts on Marine Birds and Mammals".

It was proposed and agreed that the future five-year project (2021-2025) focuses on the "Interaction between MBMs and other ecosystem components and stressors". This will include important sub-themes such as:

- Forecasting changes in forage species and response of top predators.
- Marine birds and marine mammals as ecological indicators and predictors of changing marine ecosystems.

It was decided to continue discussing possible activities of the S-MBM for this new focal project until PICES-2021 by e-mail, and make a proposal of the future five-year project to BIO at PICES-2021.

### **5. Other matters**

The 2021 annual meeting of the PICES will be held at Qingdao, China. The schedule will be decided later.

**NAMMCO – Scientific Committee**

***Tore Haug***

*Norway*

Because of the Covid-19 situation, there was no NAMMCO SC meeting in 2020. A new NAMMCO SC meeting was held in January 2021, but the plan is to report from that meeting next year (2022). Of cetaceans, the prime focus was on narwhals and very little on the traditional IWC-whales.

NAMMCO SC has decided that they will continue to meet in January in their future annual meetings.

**Appendix D****Cooperation with IMO 2020-2021***Russell Leaper (UK)*Underwater noise

Several papers on underwater noise were tabled for the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 75) in 2020. MEPC 75 was initially postponed and then had a reduced agenda when it did take place. Australia, Canada and the US had submitted a proposal for a new output concerning a review of the 2014 Guidelines for the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life (MEPC.1/Circ.833) and identification of next steps (MEPC/75/14) with comment papers from European Union countries (MEPC/75/14/1) and other organisations (MEPC/75/14/2 and MEPC/75/14/3). However, there was not time to discuss these papers. It is expected that the proposal in MEPC/75/14 will be discussed at MEPC 76 in June 2021. The Secretariat has submitted a short paper to MEPC 76 outlining recent IWC work on underwater noise and highlighting desire to work with IMO on this issue.

Ship strikes

Proposals for ship routing measures are considered by the sub-committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue (NCSR) which has not met since SC68B. NCSR 8 will meet from 19-23 April 2021 but all routing proposals have been deferred to NCSR 9.

## Report from ASCOBANS to IWC SC68C

Since the previous meeting of the IWC Scientific Committee, the following ASCOBANS meetings have taken place, all online:

- **16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Jastarnia Group** (Steering Group for the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoises in the Baltic Sea, and the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat) in June 2020. It reviewed progress made on implementation of both plans and agreed on status assessment criteria for the activities. One of the meeting outcomes was the decision for the Jastarnia Group to write up [Technical and Scientific Comments](#) to the European Commission on ICES Special Request Advice on Emergency Measures to Prevent Bycatch. The [meeting report](#) is available online.
- **9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties (MOP9)** to ASCOBANS 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](#). Several resolutions refer to IWC. The resolutions are available on the [MOP9 website](#) with the meeting report.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Common Dolphin Group** (Steering Group for the Species Action Plan for North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin), in December 2020. 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 meeting decided that the Steering Group would develop a short set of recommendations to be sent to the European Commission, re-affirming the conclusion and concerns within the ICES advice, and providing further guidance where required.
- **9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the North Sea Group** (Steering Group Steering Group for the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea) in January 2021. The meeting suggested that regarding monitoring trends in distribution and abundance, Parties should consider doing larger analysis together with many countries. The SCANS IV survey is planned for the summer of 2022, and countries were requested to put aside funds to be able to participate in this important project. [Priority recommendations](#) from the meeting are available online. It was also agreed that a review of the Conservation Plan should be started in 2021.
- **1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Joint Bycatch Working Group** in February 2021. During the first two days experts shared their experiences in monitoring and mitigating cetacean bycatch in different areas and for different fishing gears - these sessions were open to observers. The third day was dedicated to the Working Group Members to discuss and decide on the priorities to be addressed during the next years. The presentations are available on the [meeting page](#); recommendations and meeting report will be posted asap.

Upcoming meetings:

- **Workshop on Management of MPAs for Small Cetaceans** is now scheduled for 18 May 2021 (part I: Criteria and clear options for well-formulated conservation objectives) and 7-9 June 2021 (part II: A toolbox of ambitious and innovative practical conservation measures). The purpose of the workshop is to act as an open brainstorming session, allowing for innovative ideas to be developed by a group including experts on cetaceans, experts on threats to cetaceans, and MPA managers. The plan is to review and share experiences on best practice approaches to MPA management, taking them beyond being merely 'paper parks', in order to make recommendations to ASCOBANS Parties.
- **26<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee**, 8-12 November 2021, online. For the meeting, Parties are requested to report on pressures and threats to small cetaceans as per [Resolution 8.1 \(Rev.MOP9\)](#): noise (impulsive i.e. piling and continuous / ambient i.e. shipping), ocean energy, unexploded ordnance, and marine spatial planning. Registration for the meeting is can be done via the [meeting page](#) by 8 October. Requests for observer status should reach the Secretariat by 9 September - a completed registration form serves as a request for observer status.
- **10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the North Sea Group**, 6-7 December 2021, online. The meeting will review progress under the action plan, learn about complementary initiatives, and aim to move implementation forward. Registration for the meeting is available on [the meeting page](#).

In addition to the ongoing work and the above-mentioned species working groups, new intersessional working groups were formed at the request of MOP9:

- **Beaked Whales:** the group has submitted a paper to this meeting, *Overcoming Challenges to Protect Beaked Whales in the Northeast Atlantic* (SC/68C/E/02), raising concern over Unusual Mortality Events (UMEs) recorded in 1990-2020 in the NE Atlantic. Given the vulnerability of beaked whales to underwater noise, supported by significant advances in our understanding of the impacts of military sonar on these animals, it seems likely that powerful sonars deployed in or close to important beaked whale habitat may at least be in part responsible.
- **Data Deficient Taxa:** the group aims to identify the barriers to understanding and improving conservation status of data deficient species of small cetaceans. This will include identifying which species and populations are of particular concern and how their status might be best remedied. Please contact the [ASCOBANS Secretariat](#) if you are interested in joining.