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**PROGRESS REPORT OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS  
OF THE BLACK SEA, MEDITERRANEAN SEA AND CONTIGUOUS ATLANTIC AREA  
(ACCOBAMS)**

Summary:

The Secretariat is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species, the report provided by the Secretariat of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area.

The Report is provided unedited in the format and language that it was submitted.

## PROGRESS REPORT OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS OF THE BLACK SEA, MEDITERRANEAN SEA AND CONTIGUOUS ATLANTIC AREA (ACCOBAMS)

*(from January 2016 to September 2017)*

### I. MANAGEMENT OF THE AGREEMENT

#### *1.1 - Administrative matters*

1. As of September 2017, there are **23 Parties** to the Agreement: Albania, Algeria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

2. A **proposal for the extension of the ACCOBAMS** to cover the Atlantic EEZ of Spain and Portugal was adopted by the MOP4 in 2010. On September 2017, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Monaco, Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain and Ukraine deposited their instrument of acceptance with the Depository.

3. **The First Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Follow up Committee** was convened in Monaco on Wednesday 2nd March 2016. By consensus, the Committee decided that its **President shall be Mr. Victor ESCOBAR PAREDES** and its **vice President Mr. Draško HOLCER**, until the end of their mandate in the Committee.

4. **The Third Meeting of the Extended Bureau** of the Parties to ACCOBAMS was convened in the Principality of Monaco, on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April 2016. Members reviewed the proposed draft Resolutions and agreed on the final versions to be submitted to the MOP6.

5. **The 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS**, marking the **twentieth anniversary** of the signing of the Agreement, was held in Monaco from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> November 2016. The Meeting appointed representatives of France (Chair), Algeria, Albania, Cyprus and Ukraine as Bureau Members for the triennium 2017-2019.

Signature of the **Amendment to the Headquarters Agreement with the Host Country**, which clarify the conditions which govern the establishment and the functioning of the Permanent Secretariat was held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2016. A variety of issues relevant to the collaboration with CMS were discussed, especially in the **ACCOBAMS Work Program** (Resolution 6.5) where the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat was invited to participate in the process of fully developing the Companion Volume for the Strategic plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023 to ensure that relevant tools developed by ACCOBAMS are reflected and possible areas of cooperation identified.

The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat was also requested to:

- further develop, for the triennium 2020-2022, the current format for the Work Programme by including, for each action: level of priority, timeline, estimated costs, secured funds, prospected funds for cost coverage;
- entrust a specialized consultant to carry out a functional assessment of the personnel needs of the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat and the associated costs.

The report of the Meeting is available on the ACCOBAMS website.

6. **The 11<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee** was held from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> February 2017, in Monaco. Mr. Simone Panigada was nominated as the Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee for the period 2017-2019 and Mrs. Ayaka Amaha OZTÜRK as the Vice Chair.

Four Task Managers dealing with priorities defined by the Scientific Committee (Interactions with fisheries, Species Conservation Management Plans, Functional Stranding Networks and Responses to Emergency Situations, Protected Areas for Cetaceans) were appointed by the Meeting. The report of the Meeting is available on the ACCOBAMS website.

## *1.2 - Regular communication*

7. **NETCCOBAMS** is the Network on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and the Adjacent Atlantic Area, developed by the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat in collaboration with WWF France and the GIS 3M. In 2017, this network was updated in order to provide a more modern, efficient and dynamic tool, facilitating the exchange and circulation of information, knowledge and experience among all stakeholders in cetacean conservation.
8. **A new web site** adopting the CMS Family identity was launched in January 2017, both in English and French (<http://www.accobams.org/>).
9. **The 4<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference on Cetacean Conservation in South Mediterranean Countries** of the ACCOBAMS will be held in Oran (Algeria) from 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> November 2017. The objective is to assess the knowledge gained on cetaceans in the South of the Mediterranean, to identify potential gaps and to stimulate the development of conservation actions in order to promote the implementation of the ACCOBAMS Agreement.
10. **Monacology** is an annual event welcoming, for a week, the children of the Principality of Monaco, and border cities to raise awareness about the environment. Through these educational workshops facilitated by associations and organizations, children become aware of various environmental issues, and discover, at their level, how to become an actor of sustainable development. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat participates to raise awareness on threats to cetaceans.
11. **Cetacean day** - The 2nd edition of the “ACCOBAMS Cetaceans Day” with an emphasis on the ACCOBAMS 20th Anniversary was organized by the Secretariat on June 25th 2016 in Monaco back to back with the “Fête de la Mer” that took place at the Monaco Yacht Club (MCY). The 3rd Edition was organized on 8th June 2017 by the Secretariat, back to back with the World Ocean Day and the MONACOLOGY event (June 6-9, 2017). The Secretariat prepared and provided Parties and Partners with material for use for the ACCOBAMS Cetaceans Day. The material was made available both in French and in English and was as well downloadable from the ACCOBAMS website.
12. **Student award** - In September 2016, it was agreed with the European Cetacean Society (ECS) Council that from 2017 (i) the ACCOBAMS Secretariat will sponsor the student awards of the ECS Conference and (ii) the student awards will be renamed as follow: “ACCOBAMS/ECS student awards”, in order to promote student awareness on ACCOBAMS conservation.

## *1.3 – Cooperation with international organizations*

13. The ACCOBAMS Secretariat has been significantly developing/reinforcing its cooperation with **other relevant international organizations** (CMS Family, CBD, Barcelona Convention, Bern Convention, Bucharest Convention, GFCM, IWC, IUCN...), in particular by having the outputs of its work programme integrated into their initiatives.

## **II. CONSERVATION ACTIONS**

### *II.1 - Improve knowledge about state of cetaceans*

14. **Cetacean population estimates and distribution:**
  - **The “ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative” project (ASI)** was officially launched at the last Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS (Monaco, 22-25 November 2016). In coordination and with the support of riparian countries and local scientists, the ASI will lead to the establishment of an integrated, collaborative and coordinated surveillance system for the status of cetacean populations. The final goal of the project is to strengthen the governance conditions affecting

cetacean species in order to reach and / or maintain these species and their habitats in a state of favorable conservation.

One of the objective of the ASI project is to establish a baseline to assess cetacean abundance and distribution at the macroregional level. A synoptic survey will be carried out in summer 2018 combining visual survey methods (aerial- and ship-based surveys) and passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) with the participation of scientists of the area. When possible, data will be also collected for other species encountered (such as turtles, sharks, seabirds,...).

Numerous capacity building actions for national stakeholders involved in the cetacean monitoring will be implemented. Results of the survey will be cross-referenced with existing data on relevant indicators and will lead to assess conservation status of cetacean populations, to confirm existing areas of interest and potentially identify new ones, and to promote and support national or transnational systems and procedures for the conservation of cetaceans, including MPAs.

Taking into consideration the geographic areas priorities of the external funders that have agreed to support the project so far (the MAVA Foundation and the Prince Albert II Foundation), activities have started for the Mediterranean Sea. The ACCOBAMS Secretariat is pursuing its efforts to identify additional sources of funding for the Black Sea.

A regional workshop for the project will be organized in October 2017. This event will provide a unique opportunity for all ASI partners to work together to prepare and implement the project. Organized in the form of plenary sessions and working groups, the objective of this workshop will be to finalize the scientific, technical, administrative and logistical preparation of the synoptic survey that will take place in the summer of 2018 throughout the Mediterranean.

- An **ACCOBAMS call for proposals** was launched in January 2016, the priority theme of this call was “cetacean population distribution and abundance”. Three project were selected for funding under the Supplementary Conservation Funds through this call:
  - “Increase the regional capacity for developing cetacean distribution and abundance studies” from the NGO Mare Nostrum (Romania),
  - “Tunisian Dolphin Project : population size and habitat use for bottlenose and common dolphins” from the Association Nationale du Développement Durable et de la Conservation de la Vie Sauvage (Tunisia),
  - “Identification and initial assessment of cetacean groupings in coastal waters of the north-western Black Sea, Ukrainian sector” from the Ukrainian Scientific Center of Ecology of the Sea (Ukraine).

15. **Population structure:** In order to reinforce the cetacean conservation status, a [draft CITES Recommendation](#) prepared by ACCOBAMS on the establishment of individual identification system(s) of cetaceans kept in captivity was presented by Ukraine at CITES COP in October 2016. Even if an amended text was adopted as a Decision focusing on the subspecies of the Black Sea (*Tursiops truncatus ponticus*), Parties are anyway encouraged to use genetic analyses, to establish repositories for data and to report to the CITES Animals Committee on exports of *Tursiops truncatus ponticus* and their origins.

16. **Monitoring cetaceans status :** The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee decided to assess the IUCN threat status of killer whale in the Mediterranean Sea, in priority, and to postpone the (re)assessment of the other species after the results of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative, when data on population abundance and distribution will be available.

## ***II.2 - Reduce human pressures on cetaceans***

17. **Interaction with fisheries:**

- ***Establishment of a Joint Working Group with ASCOBANS on bycatch***

As provided by Resolution 6.16 adopted at the last Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS, the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat was requested, “in collaboration with the Scientific Committee, to develop a joint working group with ASCOBANS on bycatch, and to explore opportunities for linking this with other relevant initiatives, including the Bycatch Initiative established under the International Whaling Commission”.

A first draft version of the Terms of Reference for a “Joint Bycatch Working Group of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS” was revised by the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee during its 11th Meeting (Monaco, 7-9 February 2017). These draft Terms of Reference were then presented and further elaborated during an expert workshop on bycatch organized by

ASCOBANS on 22-23 February 2017 in Bonn.

They were reviewed by the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee. Once these Terms of Reference will be finalized by the Chair and the Task Manager on “Interactions with Fisheries” of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, the ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS Secretariats will collaborate to identify the members of this Joint Working Group.

- ***Project on mitigating the negative interactions between threatened marine species and fishing activities***

Launched in 2015, this project is coordinated by the Secretariats of ACCOBAMS and of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), in collaboration with the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas of the UN Environment/Mediterranean Action Plan (RAC/SPA). It is funded by the MAVA Foundation.

The main objectives of the project are: 1) to enhance the conservation of cetaceans, sea turtles and seabirds, in particular by mitigating interactions with fisheries, considering both incidental catches and depredation issues; 2) to increase the awareness of national authorities, fishers and civil society and to demonstrate that economic incomes of fishers could be diversified through association of traditional fishing with ecotourism-oriented activities such as observation of wild marine fauna.

The first component of the project is implemented by relevant national institutions and NGOs through the development of pilot actions in selected fisheries of the Central and Western Mediterranean Sea (i.e. France, Spain, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria) aiming at identifying the nature of such interactions and at testing mitigations measures.

The second component of the project aims at supporting the development of sustainable ecotourism activities in Morocco and Tunisia based on the link between traditional fishing and the observation of marine fauna according to international standards that prevent disruption and harassment of the animals.

- ***Understanding Mediterranean multi-taxa ‘bycatch’ of vulnerable species and testing mitigation - a collaborative approach***

A second project has been recently approved by the MAVA Foundation. It will be implemented over the next 3 years (2017-2019). Following a multi-taxa approach, the project will consider marine mammals, elasmobranchs, sea turtles and seabirds. It is aimed at developing and implementing standardized data collection of bycatch and testing mitigation measures for their effectiveness in reducing single and multi-taxa bycatch.

In addition to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, this project involves BirdLife International, the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles (MEDASSET), the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas of the UN Environment/Mediterranean Action Plan (RAC/SPA), the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (IUCN Med).

This project will focus on three prioritized regions identified by the MAVA Foundation (Alboran Sea, Strait of Sicily and South of Aegean Sea/North of Levantine Sea) and on three separate fishing gears: demersal trawls, gillnets and longlines. The project will involve collaborations between national fisheries institutes, local NGOs and fishers and fishing associations.

## 18. **Anthropogenic noise:**

- An update of the **study regarding noise hot spots in the ACCOBAMS Area** was presented during ACCOBAMS MOP6.

- A **web tool containing a common database for the ACCOBAMS Agreement area on impulsive noise** sources was also presented during MOP6. This tool was elaborated in accordance with the involvement of ACCOBAMS in the MSFD of the EU and the EcAp of UNEP-MAP processes. A cooperation with the ICES, which developed and manages the noise register for northern European waters, was established in order to create a compatible tool from a technical point of view. The tool is available at “[accobams.noiseregister.org](http://accobams.noiseregister.org)”.

- A **joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS/CMS/ECS workshop** entitled “Best Practice Workshop: Fostering inter-regional cooperation in underwater noise monitoring and impact assessment in waters around Europe, within the context of the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive” was held on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2017 in Middelfart, Denmark. ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS were leading on the first part of this workshop with the objective of (i) gathering information about impulsive noise registers in EU countries and Mediterranean border countries, and (ii) debating

about standardization of registers in order to promote inter-regional cooperation for noise registers.

- Moreover, the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat is one of the partners of the **QUIETMED project** - “Joint programme on noise (D11) for the implementation of the Second Cycle of the MSFD in the Mediterranean Sea”-, project coordinated by CTN Naval from Spain. It is aimed at enhancing cooperation among Member States in the Mediterranean Sea Basin to implement the Second Cycle of the Marine Directive and in particular to assist them in the preparation of their MSFD reports by 2018, in particular as regards Descriptor 11 on underwater noise. It will also contribute to address underwater noise monitoring gaps in the Mediterranean improving coherence and adequacy of MSFD implementation.

19. **Ship strikes:** During the MedMPA Forum (29 November – 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016, Tanger), the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat contributed to the IMO Focus Session which aimed at exploring how the International Maritime Organization can contribute to protect sensitive marine environments and mitigate international shipping risks on MPAs in the Mediterranean. IMO representative noted that marine conservation issues that could be improved with measures under IMO (including PSSAs, TSS, etc.) need to be identified at a regional scale, prioritized and addressed within an action plan and involving all regional stakeholders as ACCOBAMS (Areas of conservation importance for cetaceans located in areas with high maritime traffic).

Terms of Reference of the **ACCOBAMS Working Group on collisions** and relevant time schedule were updated during the SC11, taking into account provisions of the Resolution 6.19. The idea was to limit the WG to ship strikes only, since fin whales will be covered by the CMS correspondence group.

20. **Cetacean watching:** Cetacean watching activities for commercial purposes are increasingly being developed in the ACCOBAMS area, most of the time in the absence of management rules to mitigate harassment and other adverse impacts on cetaceans. Considering that these activities, where properly conducted, should be encouraged as they do contribute to the building of education and awareness on cetaceans, the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat registered the logo “High Quality Whale Watching®” at the World Intellectual Property Organisation together with the regulations governing the use of this collective certification mark, that includes a good code of conduct for whale watching in the Mediterranean Sea. Parties to ACCOBAMS decided through Resolution 6.20 to adopt the new logo “High Quality Whale Watching®” (HQWW®). Parties to ACCOBAMS decided also to promote the implementation of the HQWW® Certificate in their waters and to support the continuation and expansion of national or regional training courses for operators, covering, *inter alia*, the biology of animals, risks, boat behavior around the animals, involvement in scientific research.

The ACCOBAMS Working Group on whale watching is currently working on:

- Guidelines for monitoring programs aimed at maximizing the chance of detecting potential adverse impacts of whale watching activities on individual cetaceans and on populations, and
- a common procedure (data collection system) for whale watching vessels to be implemented in the ACCOBAMS Area

21. **Marine Debris:** Since September 2016, ACCOBAMS is part of **Regional Cooperation Platform on Marine Litter in the Mediterranean**.

In order to further develop cooperation with the ongoing regional initiatives on marine debris, including ghost nets, and to assess the impact of plastic materials on cetaceans, the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat plans to organize, during the ECS Conference in 2018, in Italy, a **joint workshop** in collaboration with IWC, ASCOBANS, the Pelagos Agreement, ECS and any other interested organizations, aiming at:

- proposing standards on data collection, including data to be collected during cetacean stranding. This will participate to the development of a common operational stranding protocol, in collaboration with IWC, ECS and ASCOBANS
- collecting information on ongoing initiatives,
- proposing relevant concrete mitigation measures

22. **Species conservation plans:**

- The International Whaling Commission (IWC) has developed a process for **conservation management plans (CMPs)** through its Scientific and Conservation Committees and the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee has summarized the IWC approach in the context of the ACCOBAMS. A CMP template for new conservation management plans in the ACCOBAMS Area has been adopted through the Resolution 6.21.
- The ACCOBAMS Secretariat, in collaboration with the Black Sea Commission Permanent Secretariat, undertook the revision of the existing **Conservation Plan for Black Sea Cetaceans**. It was revised and aligned in line with BSC documents and was recommended for consideration at 32nd BSC Regular Meeting (October 2016).
- RAC/SPA assisted the ACCOBAMS Secretariat in the **revision of the Action Plan for the conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea** together with the identification of priorities for the period 2016-2020. It was adopted at the UNEP/MAP COP in February 2016.

23. **National Action plans:** The ACCOBAMS Secretariat is collaborating with the RAC/SPA for supporting the Egyptian Environment Affairs Agency (EEAA) to implement the National Action Plan for the conservation of marine mammals in Egypt in 2016.

24. **Captivity related issues:** in 2015/2016 the ACCOBAMS Secretariat was approached by NGOs and Parties regarding the captivity issue both in dolphinarium and in their natural environment (“dolphinarium-like”). In this context, in 2016 the ACCOBAMS Legal Expert updated the report “Taking of cetaceans and dolphinarium: a legal analysis within the framework of ACCOBAMS” in order to include the “quasi dolphinarium” together with the re-introduction issues. This study should be published in a legal journal in 2017.

### ***II.3 - Improve Communication, Awareness and Capacity Building***

25. **Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situation:** the Permanent Secretariat undertook a review of the functioning of MEDACES taking into account the recommendations of the Scientific Committee. This review was undertaken by an expert jointly agreed by the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat and the RAC/SPA. It proposed, in particular the designation of a national representative and the development of a dedicated smartphone application.

26. **Marine Mammals Observers (MMOs) in the ACCOBAMS Area:** An **ACCOBAMS Workshop “Developing Tools to Ensure High Quality MMOs in the ACCOBAMS Area”**, was held during the 30<sup>th</sup> ECS Conference (13<sup>th</sup> March 2016, Funchal, Madeira, Portugal), and co-funded by the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA - MAP-UNEP)

Recognizing that a certification for entities to train MMOs and PAM operators in the ACCOBAMS area will guarantee a high quality training of MMOs/PAM throughout the Agreement area, Parties adopted, during MOP6, the Resolution 6.18 regarding the **implementation of an ACCOBAMS Certification for Highly Qualified Marine Mammals Observers**. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat plans to train the first Highly Qualified MMOs in the Southern Mediterranean during the forthcoming Biennial Conference, scheduled for October 2017 in Oran (please refer to item MA1) Workshop. A more specific training (3-4 days) is also planned for Black Sea experts in 2018.

27. **Cetacean conservation and postgraduate programmes:** The ACCOBAMS teaching module regarding cetacean conservation was initiated in 2012, first in the French speaking universities (in Algeria, France, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia). Its translation into English made possible its implementation in the University of Malta in 2015. The implementation of the module in the Black Sea with the assistance of the Black Sea Commission was planned in September 2016, in the University of Istanbul, Turkey. This activity has unfortunately been cancelled due to the deterioration of the political situation in July 2016. A new University (tentatively in Romania) is to be identified soon in order to implement the module by early 2018.

## *II. 4 - Enhance effective conservation of cetaceans critical habitats*

### 28. **Protected areas for cetaceans:**

- The **joint workshop on the Identification of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) in the Mediterranean Sea**, organized by the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force (MMPATF), in collaboration with ACCOBAMS and the Tethys Research Institute, was held in Chania, Greece, 24-28 October 2016.
- A workshop entitled “**Inputs to the ACCOBAMS ongoing effort to map human threats on cetaceans in the Mediterranean and Black Seas**” was held on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2017 in Middelfart (Denmark), during the 31<sup>st</sup> ECS Conference. This workshop is part of the ongoing initiative aiming at spatially mapping direct threats to cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area. This work will allow the identification of new relevant CCH in the ACCOBAMS area, which, once aligned with areas of importance for cetaceans, will facilitate the implementation of sustainable conservation actions at the regional level.
- The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat contributed **to the 4<sup>th</sup> International Marine Protected Areas** held in La Serena, Chile, 4-8 September 2017. The threat-based management approach for the designation of Cetacean Critical Habitats was presented together with the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative as a significant source of new scientific data on cetacean population’s abundance and distribution.