



## REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT

The present report aims at providing comprehensive information on the activities carried out by the Secretariat of ACCOBAMS since the last Standing Committee Meeting as well as an overview of the main issues of the Third Meeting of the Parties (22-25 October 2007, Dubrovnik, Croatia).

### **I. Status of ratifications**

The number of Parties to ACCOBAMS reached 20 Parties.

Algeria has published on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2007 the national Decree on ACCOBAMS accession and will be Party of ACCOBAMS on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2007.

### **II. Meetings and workshops.**

In the frame of the Agreement implementation the Secretariat organized several Meetings and Workshops were organized : *Scientific Committee Meeting* in Monaco (November 2006), *Joint PELAGOS/ACCOBAMS workshop on Whale Watching and labelling*( Monaco, 23 April 2007): organized with the aim to elaborate the Term of Reference of a Label on whale watching, *Workshop on Marine Protected Areas* (Monaco, 5-8 November 2006): in the frame of the 2010 targets, the workshop identified criteria for selecting sites of interest for cetacean conservation. A provisional list of potential Protected Areas for cetaceans was drafted, *Workshop on live strandings* (Monaco, 3-4 November 2006) on the development of techniques and guidelines to deal with the problem of live stranding; *Workshop on National Stranding Network in Monaco*: to train the staff of the Environment Department of Monaco; *Joint Workshop on interaction with fisheries* (Salambô, Tunisia) aimed at launching a joint initiative of the Secretariats of ACCOBAMS and GFCM to collect data about bycatch of cetaceans in fishing gear; *Joint Workshop on Marine Protected Areas* (22-25 May 2007, Salambô, Tunisia): in the frame of the collaboration with GFCM; *Workshop stranding in Morocco* (Mdiq, 2007) to elaborate operational procedure for the national network of cetaceans stranding monitoring ; *Italian National workshop on BYCBAMS implementation* (Rome, 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> September 2007) on the implementation of the activities of the BYCBAMS project by Italy.

### **III. The Supplementary Conservation Funds**

The project from Romania on the “Assessment of the extent of current cetacean by-catch and stranding in the Romanian Black Sea area” was supported by the Supplementary Conservation Funds. Three other projects related to the use of pingers , training of NGOs and WW operators were approved for funding to the Fourth Meeting of the Bureau (11 May 2007, Losjin, Croatia).

### **IV. Main activities**

#### **A/ Capacity building**

During the triennium, the Secretariat carried out several capacity building activities:

National training on the monitoring of cetaceans Stranding (Morocco, Monaco, Black Sea Parties ); collaboration with IFAW to carry out surveys in the Mediterranean area; Finalization of the Educational kit thanks to the financial support from UNEP, CMS, RAC/SPA and the Black Sea Commission; Elaboration of a Kit Conference aimed to the recognition of the main species in the area; Assistance to Countries in elaborating their National Action Plan for the Conservation of cetaceans (Tunisia and Albania); Assistance to Montenegro in developing the national legislation for the conservation of cetaceans as part of the national legal framework for biodiversity.

#### **B/ Promotion of Research and monitoring**

*Interaction with fisheries* : As part of the implementation of the *BYCBAMS project*, the Secretariat of ACCOBAMS, received a financial contribution from the Italian Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MIPAAF) to carry out some of the activities of the project in Italy: elaboration of common methodology for data collection on bycatch and the development of a national strategy on cetacean bycatch assessment .

*Modelling*: a compilation exercise of the available data on *Ziphius distribution* is being carried out thanks to the financial contribution from the Italian Ministry of Environment. It is aimed at developing a habitat use modelling exercise.

**C/ Communication and awareness.**

During the triennium the Secretariat of ACCOBAMS paid special attention to developing activities aimed at raising the awareness of the general public about the conservation of cetaceans. The X<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Agreement offered an opportunity to hold a series of events and to publish awareness raising material. The culmination of these activities was the MIMO event and the launching of the 2007 Year of the Dolphin under the Patronage of His Sovereign Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco. Some material for awareness was prepared: a new leaflet, 10.000 board games (6 languages) aimed to children from 8 to 12, teaching them about cetaceans; an “ACCOBAMS kit conference” (English and French versions) to organize conferences for the large public; an ACCOBAMS institutional video (English and French versions) to raise awareness on cetaceans conservation; elaboration of an informative stand.

**D/ Ongoing projects**

- BYcBAMS: on the assessment and mitigation of bycatch
- Collection and analysis of data on the distribution of Cuvier’s beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*)
- “Further steps in the comprehensive cetacean population estimates and distribution in the ACCOBAMS area”
- Development of Black Sea Cetacean National Stranding Network (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Ukraine)
- Pilot studies on the use of acoustic devices to mitigate bycatch (Tunisia, Morocco)

**V. Main issues of the Third Meeting of the Parties**

21 Contracting Parties, NGOs, scientific bodies and observer organisations, were represented. New strategies to be adopted to reduce the threats to cetaceans living in the ACCOBAMS area were discussed:

- Marine protected areas: to contribute not only to cetacean protection but also to the protection of other species sharing the same ecosystem. A network of 18 marine areas, extending beyond territorial waters, has been proposed by scientists. The Alborán Sea, the Straits of Gibraltar and the waters off Sicily have been specifically recommended for this purpose.
- A conservation plan for the strategically important Black Sea region
- A Resolution on the dramatic situation of the Mediterranean common dolphin, which is projected to disappear by 2010 in certain parts of the Agreement Area.
- The question of drift nets was addressed, and the Parties agreed to include in the text of the Agreement the prohibition of their use and of their presence on board fishing boats, to bring the Agreement into line with other international instruments.
- Various guidelines were adopted, to be used by governments in attaining their objectives for 2010, including in particular the rescue of animals in distress, centralized collection of tissue samples from stranded animals and the release of cetaceans into the wild to ensure their conservation.
- The delicate question of noise was discussed extensively. The Parties agreed to form a working group consisting of government representatives and scientists to decide on the management of this important threat to cetaceans
- An expert from the United States made a presentation on ‘dolphin-assisted therapy’. The conclusion of her studies clearly showed that this technique does not meet the expectations of the public, is in fact a wrong perception, and presents a real risk for the conservation of these marine mammals.
- With regard to commercial whale-watching activities, the Meeting decided to establish a ‘label’ for operators to ensure that this activity has a scientific objective, including strict rules for approaching these species and training of operators who are in contact with the public.

The next Meeting of the Parties will be hosted by the Principality of Monaco in 2010.

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