



**Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species
Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the
Baltic and North Seas**



Joint Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



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**Report of the CMS/ASCOBANS Secretariat
November 2007**

1. As of 1 January 2007, the CMS and ASCOBANS Secretariats were merged. A detailed report on the organisational arrangements and their administrative and budgetary implications is available as Doc.8 of this meeting.

2. Despite the turbulent transition period, ASCOBANS made substantial progress in the implementation of the Work Plan for the Triennium 2007-9.

a) Meeting of the Parties

The second session of the 5th Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS took place in The Hague, Netherlands, on 12 December 2006, in order to come to decisions on agenda items not considered during the first session in September of the same year. These include the institutional arrangement, resulting in the merger of the CMS and ASCOBANS Secretariats for a two year trial period, the budget, the work plan and the public awareness and education programme.

b) Advisory Committee

The 14th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee met in San Sebastián, Spain, from 19-21 April 2007. It was the first meeting since the CMS and ASCOBANS Secretariats were merged and provided the opportunity for the new members of the core "CMS/ASCOBANS Team", i.e. the acting Executive Secretary Robert Hepworth, the Scientific and Technical Officer Marco Barbieri, and the newly appointed CMS/ASCOBANS Coordinator Heidrun Frisch, to introduce themselves to the Party representatives.

The ASCOBANS Advisory Committee considered activities of the Parties and the Secretariat in the last year and set the course for the coming year. Issues discussed included information on impacts of fishing effort, pollution, noise and disturbance, the implementation of mitigation measures and outreach activities. Recently available information on population sizes, structure and distribution was considered.

The meeting also decided to give the second ASCOBANS Award to the German NGO "Gesellschaft zum Schutz der Meeressäuger" for its outstanding role in raising awareness, educating as well as engaging the public and facilitating data gathering on cetaceans and other marine mammals.

c) Jastarnia Plan

The Jastarnia Group met in Copenhagen, Denmark for the third time from 19-21 February 2007. The Group was established to carry forward the Agreement's Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan) and made up of members from the Baltic Parties to ASCOBANS and Baltic Range States. Discussions and progress reports mainly centred on bycatch mitigation measures, such as identification of particularly critical areas, reduction in fishing effort, alternative fishing gear and pinger programmes. Other important issues were the coordination of research and monitoring, including common databases, and awareness raising efforts. Recommendations were made to the Advisory Committee, taking into account the specific situation in the Baltic Sea with its small and vulnerable harbour porpoise population.

The Group also examined the Jastarnia Plan with a view to needed updates and amendments. A list of suggestions was endorsed by the Advisory Committee meeting and a review of the Plan has since been undertaken by the ASCOBANS Secretariat. The working document resulting from that is currently under discussion by the members of the Group and is expected to be agreed and finalised at the 4th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group, which will take place from 25-27 February 2008 in Kolmården, Sweden.

d) North Sea Plan

The Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise in the North Sea was discussed further at AC 14. It was decided that the comprehensive background document available needed to be translated into a concise and concrete Action Plan. Currently, plans are ongoing to convene a small expert working group before the end of the year that can produce this document in time for endorsement by the next Advisory Committee meeting. The AC will be asked to consider setting up a Steering Group, which will help in coordinating and urging implementation of the measures outlined in the document.

e) Workshops

- (i) Workshop on Wind Farms and Marine Mammals (San Sebastian, 21 April 2007) – The workshop was convened jointly by ASCOBANS and the European Cetacean Society (ECS) in order to gather opinions on best practice in construction, surveying and monitoring of the effects of offshore wind farms in order to provide advice to policy-makers and energy-producers. The need for baseline studies and monitoring as well as possible mitigation measures were discussed. A set of recommendations will be published together with the proceedings.
- (ii) Workshop on Selection Criteria for Marine Protected Areas for Cetaceans (San Sebastian, 22 April 2007) – The workshop was jointly convened by ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS and ECS. Specific guidelines for the identification of sites of importance for cetaceans are so far lacking to a large extent. The purpose of the workshop, therefore, was to analyse and discuss the development, scope and appropriateness of possible criteria such as high-density areas, feeding or breeding sites, and migration corridors, including methods to identify those sites. Examples of Marine Protected Areas and their effectiveness in conserving cetaceans were highlighted and the results of existing research indicating important areas were presented. Proceedings are under preparation.
- (iii) Static Acoustic Monitoring of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise (Stockholm, 19-20 June and Helsinki, 27-28 September) – In order to improve the knowledge of the geographic distribution, density and size of the harbour porpoise distribution in the Baltic Sea, experts from six Baltic countries came together for the first workshop and a later follow-up meeting to explore the possibilities of a Baltic-wide joint acoustic monitoring project. The feasibility of different set-ups was discussed and an outline for a project proposal to be submitted to the European Union produced. Also, preliminary tasks such as the creation of habitat maps were coordinated and methods for site selection and open sea surveys agreed.
- (iv) Small Cetacean Population Structure in the ASCOBANS Area (Bonn, 8-9 October 2007) – The workshop, convened jointly with HELCOM, aimed at contributing to the definition of population units of interest to management and to the identification of the strengths and limitations of different approaches used in discriminating between populations, such as genetic techniques, skeletal variation, stable isotope signatures, results of telemetry studies and other approaches. The output will include a Summary of methodological approaches and their features, a definition of management units and their relationship to population units, a summary of our current knowledge and recommendations on population differentiation/possible management units for each of the species under consideration and recommendations.
- (v) Genetics and Population Structure of the Harbour Porpoise in the Baltic Sea (Bonn, 10 October 2007) – The workshop was also convened jointly with HELCOM. In order to reach agreement on biologically meaningful boundaries for conservation management of the harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea, the invited experts reviewed the status of knowledge on population structure of harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea

(including Kattegatt and Belt Sea), as derived from genetic evidence, morphometric skeletal variation, contaminant and parasite burdens or results of telemetry studies. Participants made concrete plans on how to coordinate their research efforts better and share material across the Baltic region. Also, options for a large-scale multidisciplinary research project providing much needed data on abundance, distribution and status of Baltic harbour porpoise populations were discussed.

f) International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise

On Sunday, 20 May 2007, for the fifth year running, museums and aquaria around the Baltic Sea celebrated the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise (IDBHP), which was established to draw the attention of the public to this endangered animal about which so little is known. Various institutions in Finland, Lithuania and Germany took part in the event. An updated report on IDBHP activities and suggestions for outreach events on that occasion, the "IDBHP Handbook", will be available on the ASCOBANS website shortly.

g) Newsletter

Following a request by the Advisory Committee, the ASCOBANS Secretariat has started publishing a newsletter, containing useful information for Parties, reporting on current events and highlighting upcoming ones of interest to the Parties. The second edition is under preparation and will be sent out shortly.

h) Representation at Meetings

CMS/ASCOBANS Secretariat staff was able to represent ASCOBANS at a number of meetings, increasing the visibility of the Agreement and networking with relevant organisations. These meetings include the 21st Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society (San Sebastián, Spain, 22-26 April 2007), 20th Anniversary of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (Wilhelmshaven, Germany, 30 August 2007), ACCOBAMS 3rd Meeting of the Contracting Parties (Dubrovnik, Croatia, 22-25 October 2007), Year of the Dolphin in Europe (Stralsund, Germany, 30 October-1 November 2007).

3. Amendment of the Agreement

The extension of the Agreement Area, agreed on at the 4th Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS in 2003, is very close to entry into force. Of the required five deposited instruments of acceptance, four have been received by the Depositary of the Agreement: France, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. Finland has notified the Secretariat that the process in their country has been completed. With the taking effect of the extension 90 days after the deposit of the fifth instrument, the Agreement area will be considerably enlarged westward to include the North East Atlantic and Irish Seas, including Ireland, Portugal and Spain as new Range States to ASCOBANS.