UN environment programme

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

Secretariat provided by the Convention on Migratory Species

CMS

17 June 2022

Progress report on activities relevant to UNGA Resolution 76/72 *Oceans and the Law of the Sea*, undertaken within the framework of ASCOBANS

The UN Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS, 1992) is a treaty with ten Parties[1] and seven non-Party Range States. ASCOBANS covers small toothed whales, dolphins and porpoises, with individual measures detailed in a Conservation and Management Plan annexed to the Agreement and in Resolutions adopted by each Meeting of Parties (MOP). Its secretariat is provided by the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), itself a Multilateral Environmental Agreement under UNEP. Given the migration of these small cetaceans across national boundaries, ASCOBANS promotes close cooperation between countries and engagement with relevant stakeholders such as intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. The goal is to achieve or maintain a favourable conservation status for small cetaceans throughout the Agreement Area.

Activities concluded under ASCOBANS between September 2021 and June 2022 have addressed a range of marine conservation and management issues relating to UNGA Resolution 76/72:

1. The following ASCOBANS Technical Series publications were released:

   - **Monitoring Cetacean Bycatch: An Analysis of Different Methods Aboard Commercial Fishing Vessels**: The report reviews the different monitoring options that are available for obtaining counts of the number of cetacean bycatches that occur in European fisheries. Three methods were adjudged able to obtain these data: self-reporting by fishers, at-sea observers, and remote electronic monitoring (REM) systems with CCTV. Only a REM system with integrated satellite tracking, fishing activity sensors, and closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV), was considered a full remote electronic monitoring system with verification. *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*.

   - **Cost-benefit Analysis for Mitigation Measures in Fisheries with High Bycatch**: The report reviews different mitigation measures (acoustic deterrent devices, porpoise alerting devices, reflective nets, acrylic echo enhancers, lights and various technical modifications and changes to fishing practices) that have been trialled in the ASCOBANS region. The cost of implementation and pros and cons of each method are discussed in detail in the relevant sections. The report also reviews alternative fishing methods to replace static nets (i.e. gillnets and entangling nets). The cost of

[1] Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

implementation, and pros and cons of the different gears, are discussed in depth in the relevant sections. *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.*

2. **The 26th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee** was held on 8-12 November 2021, online. For the meeting, Parties reported on the following pressures and threats to small cetaceans: underwater noise, ocean energy, unexploded ordnance, and marine spatial planning. The species in focus at this meeting were harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin, beaked whales, and *Lagenorhynchus* species. The meeting agreed on 29 Action Points and 19 Recommendations in its scientific session related to marine science, regional cooperation, coordination and cooperation.

   The Advisory Committee considered project proposals submitted to the Secretariat and agreed to provide funding to three of them: (1) Using fishers' knowledge to understand the use of alternative gears to static gillnets in the ASCOBANS region, (2) Prediction of the cochlear frequency maps of harbour porpoise, and (3) Status of the Iberian harbour porpoise. Funding was also granted for coordination of the ASCOBANS Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan) and the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat (Western Baltic Conservation Plan); coordination of the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea North Sea Plan); and coordination of the ASCOBANS Species Action Plan for North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin. Please find the meeting report here.

3. Formed in 2010 to facilitate the implementation of the North Sea Plan for **harbour porpoises,** the **North Sea Group** held its 10th meeting in January 2022 in an online format. 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.

4. The ASCOBANS **Jastarnia Group,** established in 2003 to carry forward the Jastarnia and Western Baltic Conservation Plan for **harbour porpoises**, held its 18th meeting in March 2022, in Gothenburg, Sweden. The meeting discussed for example progress on implementation of the action plans, status of the EU 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 agreed action points are available here.

5. 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. Jointly organised by the Ministry of the Environment of Finland, WWF Germany, WWF Sweden, Coalition Clean Baltic, the EU Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process, and ASCOBANS, the workshop built on the results from the first workshop. It 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 completer and more concrete toolbox of conservation measures for small cetacean MPAs. The workshop report will be available on the ASCOBANS website in due course.