*Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area, concluded under the auspices of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)*

*Accord sur la Conservation des Cétacés de la Mer Noire, de la Méditerranée et de la zone Atlantique adjacente, conclu sous l'égide de la Convention sur la Conservation des Espèces Migratrices appartenant à la Faune Sauvage (CMS)*

# REPORT OF THE TWELFTH MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE OF ACCOBAMS

***Monaco, 5th – 8th November 2018***

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# ANNEXES

# REPORT OF THE TWELFTH MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE OF ACCOBAMS

## 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. The Twelfth Meeting of the Scientific Committee (SC12) of ACCOBAMS was convened in Monaco from the 5th to 8th November 2018. It was attended by Members of the Scientific Committee and Representatives from International Organizations and Observers, including Partners of ACCOBAMS.

2. The full list of participants appears as **Annex I** to this report.

3. Florence Descroix Comanducci, Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS welcomed the participants and opened the meeting at 8:45 am, on Monday 5th November 2018, at the Auditorium Prince Rainier III in Monaco.

4. She thanked CIESM and IUCN for their support. She indicated that this is the last meeting of the Scientific Committee for the triennium. Its results and recommendations will be used for the preparation of the Meeting of Parties in November 2019 and more particularly for the elaboration of the program of work for 2020-2022. She underlined that the preparation of documents has been challenging for both for the authors and the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat considering the huge effort provided in the ASI campaign this summer. She recalled the role of the Scientific Committee as stated in Resolution 6.7 and reminded the experts that they were selected for participating to the Scientific Committee as qualified individuals and not as representatives of their Organization or Country.

5. Simone Panigada, the Chair of the Scientific Committee, and Ayaka Amaha Ozturk, the Vice-Chair, also welcomed the participants.

## 2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

6. The provisional agenda of the Meeting contained in the Document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc01** was presented and the participants were invited to review and comment it.

**Conclusion 1.**
The Scientific Committee adopted the agenda, as it appears in **Annex II**, and the proposed timetable.

## 3. MANAGEMENT ACTION

### 3.1 Reports of Regional Representatives

7. The Chair recalled that in accordance with the rules on the Scientific Committee adopted by MOP6, each regional representative should provide a report to the Meetings of the Scientific Committee on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in the region he or she has the responsibility of. He invited the regional representatives to introduce their respective reports contained in the following documents:
   - Report on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in Western Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc 04**)

- Report on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in Central Mediterranean (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc 05**)
- Report on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in Eastern Mediterranean (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc 06**)
- Report on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in Black Sea (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc 07**)

**Western Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area**

8. Vincent Ridoux presented the report of the Western Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area. He indicated that for all countries of the western Mediterranean sub-region of the Agreement, the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative was a major achievement of the year 2018. They all have contributed in various ways, providing funding, permits, cruise-leaders, observers, and various other contributions. Most survey teams were composed of members from different countries in the areas, thus creating the conditions for extensive sharing of expertise and knowledge.
   Beside this, many other activities continued at national levels or in the framework of co-operative projects involving several countries. Topics of interest shared by all countries in the sub-region notably include cetacean stranding responses and interaction of cetaceans with fisheries (by-catch, depredation, competition); the approaches are generally site-specific. In all countries, the rationales for cetacean research or monitoring activities are primarily focused on conservation actions, in particular in the aim of informing MPA designation and management.
   Other activities are less widespread across the western sub-region of the ACCOBAMS. More specific research approaches, including determination or analyses of health status, contaminant, reproductive condition, habitat modelling, abundance estimates, microplastics, behavioral response to vessels, etc., are mainly developed in the northern part of the sub-region. Similarly, topics such as underwater noise, collision, marine litter, whale-watching, and methodologies like passive acoustics, survey from ferries, abundance and species distribution modelling, photo-identification analyses are mostly developed in the northern part of the sub-area.

9. Recommendations expressed by the different partners include two specific topics: visual survey from platform of opportunity, such as ferry lines, should be promoted and the MMO/PAM certification should be used and promoted by all Parties to the Agreement. More generally, every initiative that could contribute to reduce the bias between the northern and southern parts of the sub-region in terms of cetacean research, monitoring and conservation should be promoted.

10. In general, the Habitats Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive are considered as strong levers to develop research, monitoring and conservation actions in Parties of the northern part of the Region. The Agreement is playing a key role in reducing the difference of conservation measures implementation between North Med and South Med Countries.

**Central Mediterranean**

11. Hédia El Hili presented the report of the Central Mediterranean. She explained that, in order to assess the conservation status of cetaceans in the 8 countries of the central region since the previous report, she sent a questionnaire to focal points and some researchers to collect data.

12. The analysis of the data received showed that administratively and organizationally situation have been stationary since 2016 but satisfactory since there are enough governmental and non-governmental institutions that are involved in the conservation and a certain number of international conventions have been signed and ratified.

In terms of research activities, in addition to the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative, Tunisia, Malta, Croatia and Montenegro had implemented some regional research projects related to the conservation of cetaceans during the last two years. Only Libya and Montenegro don't have a national stranding network and most of the countries have contributed to training sessions organized by ACCOBAMS during the last two years.

Concerning the third aspect related to the enhancement of conservation measures, most of these countries carried out public awareness events related to conservation. Malta, Croatia and Montenegro have identified protected marine areas. Except for Croatia, none of the others countries mentioned above has developed whale watching activities. In addition, Croatia and Malta have put in place specific regulations and guidelines to reduce the negative impacts of interactions between cetaceans and human activities.

13. Concerning the main threats or "hot" topics emerged in central region during the two last years, there are the seismic activities to be undertaken in south of Montenegro by the consortium ENI NOVATEK. The BWI has been following the entire process and it is ready to monitor those activities.

14. Finally, the recommendations suggested by these countries are:
    - To help countries to put in place a national stranding network;
    - To help countries to set up a tissue bank;
    - To evaluate the functioning of the stranding network for improvement;
    - To organize regular (annual or biannual) meetings for experts and leading institutions involved in national networks (exchange knowledge and experience between Countries, especially on regional level);
    - To organize training on necropsy (technique and identification of causes of death) for veterinarians;
    - To organize training on pathology of cetaceans;
    - To organize a training for Passive Acoustic Monitoring, MMO-PAM for the certification.

**Eastern Mediterranean**

15. Vasileios Petropoulos presented the report for the Eastern Mediterranean. He indicated that three projects took place in the eastern Mediterranean region for 2018 all still ongoing. An educational project which, when combined with research, resulted in cetacean conservation. This project focused on collecting data on cetacean distribution, abundance, initiate the first ID catalogue and identify important habitats and major threats in Fethiye-Göcek. Sightings consist of four cetacean species (bottlenose dolphins, striped dolphins, Risso's dolphins, beaked whales), one Pinniped species (Mediterranean Monk Seals), two sea turtle species (loggerhead turtle and green turtle). The next project referred to Ecosystem Based Management of Marine Mammals in the North-Western Levantine Sea. Finally the last project refers to Giant Guardians of Deep Seas Critical Habitats of Sperm Whales and Cuvier's Beaked Whales on Levantine Sea. It is a continuation of the previous two projects focused on research for coastal and deep diving species in habitats that had no previous dedicated surveys.

16. The regional representative indicated a basically low willingness of the stakeholders to participate to the projects presented and the shortage on the number of team members who are willing to take the step further. He underlined that the report consisted of data received from an ACCOBAMS partner under the written commitment of the Executive Secretary, which was requested due to the fact that the Focal Point was not aware of. According to resolution 4.20 partners are encouraged to inform the Focal Points of their projects. Therefore he suggested to request to the upcoming SC/MOP to clarify the role of the Focal Point since the fact that it was not received a report from Focal Points but only from partners directly to the regional representative questions the role of the Focal Point as a whole. A document will follow.

    He also underlined that another issue is that not a single country of the region (Focal Point) answered to the call for projects and this should trouble us about the improvement of the procedure.

**Black Sea**

17. Marian-Romulus Paiu presented the report for the Black Sea. He indicated that since 2018, the region includes now 5 of the 6 countries bordering the Black Sea, since Turkey signed the Agreement. The information available indicate that the "member states" (mostly private initiatives and several projects financed through ACCOBAMS Conservation Fund) have undertaken activities for continuous data acquisition in link with comprehensive cetacean population estimate and distribution (mainly coastal waters), habitat use and connectivity, stranding networks and public events for the three species inhabiting the Black Sea (*Delphinus delphis ssp. ponticus, Tursiops truncatus ssp. ponticus and Phocoena phocoena ssp. relicta)* and not least developing National Action Plans or revising the existing ones and a Regional Conservation Action Plan.

18. Research on Noise impact is still at the very beginning, being still less developed or less shared, although there are means in the frame of Marine Strategy Framework Directive (at least for the EU countries), the knowledge and capacity are still low or inexistent. One step forward in this direction was done by the Secretariat with the first HQMMO/PAM training held in Romania, for the Black Sea region. Adding to this training, in order to rise the capacity in the area there were also provided trainings in the frame of ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative and Photo-identification and GIS.

19. Related to the major issues or main threats or hot topics that have emerged it could be mentioned: oil and gas related activities and lack of legislation in order to assess properly the monitoring and conservation of cetaceans; knowledge gaps for offshore areas; lack of reporting on bycatch (in legal and IUU fishing) and issues arising in bycatch in new types of fishing nets (e.g. purse seines in Turkey).

20. It is recommended to push forward on effort of establishing national monitoring programs (stranding network, abundance and distribution, anthropogenic noise, fisheries interaction etc.) in order to develop action guides and legislative tools relevant for conservation of cetaceans. A close collaboration with academic and scientific bodies, decision makers and fora or commissions (e.g. Black Sea Commission, Black Sea Advisory Council) will increase the research capacities and threat assessment which will correctly target the needed conservation efforts.

**Conclusion 2.**
The Scientific Committee took note of the reports of each Regional Representative.

**Conclusion 3.**
The Scientific Committee decided to create a working group with the four Regional Representative, Léa David and the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat to propose some guidelines for the preparation of Regional Representative reports. It appears as **Recommendation 12.1** in **Annex III**.

**Reports of projects funded by the 2015 ACCOBAMS call for proposal**

21. Referring to Documents ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/Inf03, 04, 05 and 06, the Permanent Secretariat introduced the reports of the projects funded under the ACCOBAMS Supplementary Conservation Funds (SCF). It was recalled that at its Tenth Meeting (Casablanca, Morocco, 24-25 November 2015), the Bureau approved the launch of a new round of call for proposals in 2016 for three projects. Following the consultation of the Scientific Committee Members, the Bureau agreed to consider “cetacean population distribution and abundance” as the priority theme

of this call for proposals. On the basis of the evaluation of the eligible proposals done by the Scientific Committee, the Bureau of the Parties decided to provide grants to the three projects presented in the pre-cited documents:

- Increase the regional capacity for developing cetacean distribution and abundance studies in Black Sea;
- Tunisian Dolphin Project: population size and habitat use for bottlenose and common dolphins;
- Identification and initial assessment of cetacean groupings in coastal waters of the north-western Black Sea, Ukrainian sector.

22. For the future projects to be funded under the ACCOBAMS SCF, and once the selection is done by the Bureau, the Scientific Committee recommended that a Member of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee is appointed as a referent for each project in order to provide advice and recommendations to the Project Manager all along the project, including for the preparation of the final report. The referent Member of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee could liaise, if appropriate, with other Members through a small committee.

### 3.2 Evaluation of the effectiveness of the ACCOBAMS Strategy

23. The ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary explained that in accordance with the ACCOBAMS Strategy adopted in 2013 by MOP6, the mid-term evaluation of the effectiveness of the ACCOBAMS Strategy should be carried out in 2018/2019. In this context, the Permanent Secretariat issued a call for consultancy and Alain Jeudy de Grissac, was contracted to undertake the assessment of the level of effectiveness of the ACCOBAMS Strategy 2014-2025.

24. Alain Jeudy de Grissac presented informal summary of the findings to-date of the mid-term (2019) evaluation of the effectiveness of the ACCOBAMS strategy (2014-2025) concerning the elements presented to the Scientific Committee Meeting (2018/11/05-08).

25. The constituency of the ACCOBAMS include different elements and the implementation of the strategy is linked to the activities of each constituents of the Agreement that could be evaluated separately, by group or jointly (the Parties -Ps -and their National Focal Points -NFPs - the Bureau B - the Permanent Secretariat PS - the Follow-up Committee FC – the Scientific Committee SC - the three Sub-Regional Coordination Units SRCUs - the collaborating or cooperating entities as Partners CPs, - the International Partners IPs, and, - the National Partners NPs).

26. The main source of information is coming from the national reports of each country presented at each Meeting of the Parties. Nevertheless, these reports are incomplete and do not allow a straightforward and complete evaluation. All the reports provided by each country have been synthetized in one report, to be reviewed and possibly improved by each Party for the next meeting of Parties in 2019. In addition, there is a need to retrieve the same sections/sectors in the national reports, the Strategy and the resolutions adopted by the Parties.

27. Based on the sections of the national report, a self-evaluation system has been drafted and could be used by each by the countries, the Secretariat, the Bureau, the Follow-up Committee or the Scientific Committee, to evaluate the progress and the needs for improvement or support in the coming years.

28. To date, 83 Resolutions have been passed, 38 concerning the Management of the Agreement (MA) and 45 concerning the Conservation Actions (CA). Considering the topics covered by the Strategy, it seems necessary to simplify (one topic, one resolution) and reorganize the sections based on one side, the responsibilities of the Parties, the Secretariat, the Bureau and the Follow up committee for the Management of the Agreement, and, one the other side, the responsibilities of the Parties and the Scientific Committee for the Conservations Actions.

29. As stated before, the categories of partners and their roles and functions need to be precise. The international and regional instruments could be recognized by establishing triennial (with automatic extension) or permanent Memorandum Understanding (MoU) to be confirmed by the Parties during the MOP. The international and regional Organizations as partners could be recognized by establishing a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) triennial (with automatic extension) or permanent to be confirmed by the Parties during the MOP. The national partners (such as national administrations, institutes, universities, rescue centres, foundations, cooperatives, associations, NGOS or perhaps private companies) with relation to cetacean knowledge or management could be recognized and supervised by each Party and a list provided to the ACCOBAMS with their reports each triennium.

**Conclusion 4.**
The Scientific Committee took note of the information regarding the evaluation of the effectiveness of the ACCOBAMS strategy and welcome the effort to decrease the number of Resolutions, especially by merging them when they cover similar issues in order to make them more effective.
They stressed the importance to link the Strategy with the work programmes and with the National reports.

30. The ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary introduced the document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc34** presenting the new format proposed for the 2020-2022 Work Programme, as requested during MOP6, through the Resolution 6.5. The proposed format takes into account national priorities and is based on the format approved by Parties during the reginal workshops. The objective of this Work Programme was to:
    - Propose more general actions instead of many very specific, in order to take into account the first findings from the mid-term evaluation of the effectiveness of the ACCOBAMS Strategy;
    - Indicate the specific means of implementation of these general actions;
    - Add information on the corresponding budget for each proposed action.

## 4. CONSERVATION ACTIONS

### 4.1 Improve knowledge about state of cetaceans

#### *4.1.1 Cetacean population estimates and distribution*

31. The ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary informed the Meeting that officially launched during MOP6 in November 2016, the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative started early 2017. The major implementation steps taken since then were presented during this session. The Executive Secretary of the ACCOBAMS introduced the context and objectives of the ASI. Aiming to develop a coherent monitoring system for the cetaceans in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, based on objective, robust and comparable data, the ASI is a long standing project that was made possible thanks to ACCOBAMS Parties, ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and with the support of several funding and technical partners.

32. The ASI Project officer presented the work and main actions conducted since the beginning of the ASI, with a strong focus on the preparation, organization and implementation of the macro regional survey that was carried on during the summer 2018 in the Mediterranean Sea. The ACCOBAMS Secretariat coordinated this unprecedented effort in consultation and with the support of the ASI Scientific Coordinator, the ASI Steering Committee and the ASI national Contact Group Members.

33. The ASI includes a key capacity-building component for national stakeholders, which is being developed in collaboration with the RAC / SPA. More than 40 Scientists from all the region benefitted from aerial and ship-based survey trainings workshops organized prior to the campaign. In addition, RV Song of the Whale hosted thirty ACCOBAMS participants from ten countries who received training in visual and acoustic survey techniques, and took part in all aspects of the field work during the ASI campaign. The ASI capacity building programme will be completed in 2019 with a series of sub regional workshops aiming to answer to the specific national monitoring needs identified by the ASI Contact Group Members.

34. The ASI Scientific Coordinator provided additional details on the ASI survey implementation, highlighting the continuous assistance of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, the scientific coordinator and Pelagis Observatory to the aerial survey teams throughout the survey. Vincent Ridoux explained the role of Pelagis team who provided training and technical support to the teams for the use of SAMMOA software along the aerial surveys.

35. The ASI Scientific coordinator presented the preliminary results from the aerial component of the ASI Survey campaign in the Mediterranean Sea, referring to ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc08**. The observation maps show the different species of cetaceans encountered during the ASI survey, but also sightings of other macro fauna, such as sea turtles or sharks, as well as marine litters which were the most sighted objects.

36. The ASI boat component was implemented in collaboration with Marine Conservation International (MCR) who was instrumental in supporting other ASI vessels in survey design, logistics and training. As included in ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc08**, Richard McLanaghan presented the first very preliminary analysis of visual and acoustic analysis of the approximately 22,000 Km of survey effort that was conducted over four months with the R/V Song of the Whale.

37. All results presented will require in depth and multi levels data analysis. While the MCR team started analyzing the acoustic data, a data analysis proposal for visual data is under development. The Scientific Coordinator provided insights of this upcoming analysis exercise which will include a participatory approach through sub regional analysis workshops in 2019 and 2020. Regarding anthropogenic pressure (noise, marine litter) the meeting highlighted the importance of developing collaboration for the analyze and use of the data collected during the ASI.

38. The ASI Project includes a component related to the use of UAV for monitoring cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS Area. IMMRAC and Murdoch University were selected to conduct a joint study and experimentation on this subject and Aviad Scheinin presented the main objectives of the proposal that will be submitted shortly to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat.

**Conclusion 5.**
The ACCOBAMS Secretariat and partners of the ASI were congratulated by the members of the Scientific Committee members, observers' Organisations and participants of the survey for the successful implementation of this challenging and unique Survey.

39. Simone Panigada presented the Term of Reference for a dedicated session on the ASI to be organized at the upcoming ICMMPA5 meeting, on the "ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI): lessons learnt and future plans" (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc09**). The aim of this session is to present and discuss the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative and its up-to-date results and lessons learned. Issues ranging from fund raising, logistical aspects, scientific background, results, and implications, geo-political constraints, capacity building, training and public awareness,

conservation implications and future plans will be presented and thoroughly discussed. The ultimate goal of the session will be to evaluate the overall feasibility of such ambitious, multi-species, multi-countries, multi-cultural, regional programmes and delineate a road-map for the use of the collected data and the potential of long-term systematic replicas. Effort to liaise with international commitments and policy bodies, such as those of the MSFD and the EcAp, will be discussed, to ensure that the ASI collected data would be considered towards addressing international requirements, such as long-term, systematic monitoring. In addition, the session will assess how the ASI could contribute to the design and establishment of the area-based management approach to promote marine mammals' conservation in the Mediterranean Sea and how these results could be integrated to the existing management measures already in place.

**Conclusion 6.**
The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee welcomed the Term of Reference for session on the ASI to be organized at the upcoming ICMMPA5 meeting.

40. The Regional representative of the Eastern Mediterranean informed the meeting of the possibility of accepting, as a contribution to the ASI, the program Hellenic Navy's recordings on marine mammals this summer in the Aegean Sea and western zone of Cyprus. Even if this data may not be used within the ASI context because of differences in collection protocols, the Scientific Committee recognized the great interest of reviewing this data and invited the Representative to liaise with the Secretariat on that issue.

**Conclusion 7.**
The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee adopted the **Recommendation 12.2** "Cetacean population estimates" as it appears in **Annex III**.

### *4.1.2 Monitoring cetaceans status*

41. Recalling that the killer whales are still not included in the Mediterranean IUCN Red List despite the evaluation done in collaboration between IUCN and ACCOBAMS in 2006, the Chair invited Ruth Esteban to present the assessment recently elaborated in accordance with Resolution 6.15 that requested the Permanent Secretariat and the Scientific Committee to liaise with the initial assessors to re-assess the status of killer whales and submit such re-assessment for consideration by the appropriate evaluators.

42. Ruth Esteban introduced Document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc10** containing a Re-assessment of the IUCN Status of killer whales in the Strait of Gibraltar. She briefly presented a synthesis of the available information and recent data about the population. She concluded that the number of adult individuals within this subpopulation is still under 50 individuals and recommended to list the subpopulation of killer whales in the Strait of Gibraltar as Critically-Endangered under criteria D (small population size).

**Conclusion 8.**
The Scientific Committee took note of the evaluation and recommended to submit it for consideration by the IUCN Red List appropriate evaluators. It recommended also that yearly collaborative monitoring programs of this endangered subpopulation should be encouraged and assured by Morocco and Spain governments, in order to allow assessment of the abundance trend and changes in their demographic rates.

### *4.1.3 Citizen Science*

43. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat presented a preliminary overview of opportunity platforms and citizen observations (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc11**). It was recalled that during the Sixth Meeting of the Parties, Parties requested the Scientific Committee to evaluate the relevance of 'Citizen Science' possible inputs. In order to assist the Scientific Committee in this task, the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat prepared a preliminary overview of opportunity platforms and Citizens observations. It was explained that the document presented is a living document that will be regularly updated upon need.

44. Léa David informed the meeting that her institute compiled data of opportunistic sightings from 1996 to 2016. A sorting of these data was carried out, and 56 % of the sightings were considered "reliable" or "probable" and were exploited in cartographic analyzes. The objective of this work was to study the contribution of opportunistic data for knowledge on cetaceans. Several elements were analyzed: (i) the spatial and temporal limits of coverage of these data according to distribution and the operating mode at sea of data providers; (ii) the correspondence of the results on the seasonal stands obtained compared with those observed in the scientific literature in the north-western Mediterranean Sea; (iii) the representativeness and/or complementarity of the results of this dataset with the known scientific results about calves and size of groups. The analyzes of this study showed results most often in agreement with what is already known scientifically from animals in the Pelagos Sanctuary. The supply of opportunistic data is interesting from a spatio-temporal point of view only when the suppliers are in small sampled areas and/or outside the summer period.

45. Some participants raised the relevance of an ACCOBAMS "certification" for most relevant citizen science initiatives.

**Conclusion 9.** The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee welcomed the preliminary overview of opportunity platforms and citizen observations.

**Conclusion 10.** They highlighted that contribution deriving from citizen science projects appears to be very useful for species management, provided that a rigorous control on the data received is carried out by expert researchers.

**Conclusion 11.** They pointed out two major benefits of citizen science initiatives:

- It is an alert system: people can pre-identify "new" threats, new species distribution and can encourage scientists to start long-term research project in not regularly monitored areas
- It makes people more involved in cetacean conservation, especially if they receive feedbacks from expert researchers

## 4.2 <u>Reduce human pressures on cetaceans, in particular those related to bycatch, habitat loss and degradation (pollution)</u>

### *4.2.1 Interactions with fisheries*

46. Referring to Resolution 6.16, the Executive Secretary informed the Meeting about the establishment of the Joint Bycatch Working Group of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS (JBWG). As presented in Document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Inf07**, she pointed out that current members of the ACCOBAMS Task group for Interaction with fisheries have been invited to serve the JBWG. Referring to the Terms of Reference of the Working Group, she

explained that the 2 co-chairs, one for ASCOBANS and one for ACCOBAMS, are to be nominated from among the members.

47. The representative of IWC appreciated the great co-operation with ACCOBAMS on this matter, the IWC's BMI co-ordinators (Marguerite Tarzia, who is replaced by Gianna Minton during her maternity leave) being part of the ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS bycatch working group. He also informed the meeting about the recent development related to the IWC Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI) which recognizes the great importance of collaboration with other organizations. At its recent meeting in Brazil, the IWC adopted the BMI strategic plan for 2018-2020 (document IWC/67/CC01 available from the IWC website) composed of six main objectives: (i) Programme coordination; (ii) Identification of specific fisheries, cetacean species or populations where achievable bycatch mitigation strategies could be tested and/or introduced; (iii) Development, testing and demonstration of effective bycatch mitigation and monitoring solutions; (iv) Bring about change in attitudes within fishing communities towards cetacean mitigation; (v) Raise awareness and capacity within national governments to tackle cetacean ness of cetacean bycatch and available solutions within regional and international fisheries management Organizations.

48. He also informed the meeting about other IWC activities related to bycatch, in particular through the IWC Scientific Committee and the large whale entanglement response initiative. The most recent report of a workshop of the Entanglement Response network can be found on the IWC website (document IWC/67/WKMWI/Rep/01 available from the IWC website). He also informed that the IWC endorsed the report and its updated Principles and Guidelines for Large Whale Entanglement Response Efforts.

49. Referring to the relevant documents (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Inf 08, 09, 10**), the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat informed the Meeting on the main outputs produced within the framework of the Project on mitigating interactions between endangered marine species implemented in collaboration with the GFCM Secretariat and SPA/RAC.

50. Jacques Sacchi introduced the document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc12** on a review of cetacean bycatch rates in the Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries. Based on 71 published documents, it has been highlighted that gillnets, in particular those using high slackness, long net lengths and long soak times in coastal waters as it is used for turbot fishing in the Black Sea, are the most impacting fisheries, affecting mostly dolphins. The persistence of illegal fishing activity, as driftnetting for large pelagic fishes, has been also pointed out despite several recommendations from various internationals conventions. He also underlined that most of the studies reviewed are focused on limited areas or on particular fisheries and that there is a gap in harmonized monitoring program.

51. Referring to Document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc13**, Jacques Sacchi presented a bibliographic review on mitigation solutions and technics tested worldwide to mitigate bycatch of vulnerable species and depredation. The measures are presented according to the 4 large classes of fishing activity (gill and trammel nets, longlines, trawls and purse seines) for the four main groups of protected species (Cetaceans, Birds, Elasmobranches and Sea turtles). Mitigating measures include preventive measures and curatives measures, both technical and management measures.

52. For cetaceans, preventive solutions include fishing gear modifications (reduction of net slackness for the gillnet and trammels), visual/chemical/acoustic deterrents, masking devices and reduction of effort (in sensitive area

and/or in sensitive period of time). Curative solutions are aimed at reducing injuries, threats and mortality and they include fishing gear modifications (breakable hooks, escaping devices…) and also soak time reductions.

53. Before any restrictive recommendation is implemented, he pointed out that following steps should be considered: Characterizing the dimension and the nature of the interaction; Reviewing the reasons why mitigation measures are not yet implemented; Adopting a multi-taxon approach; Involving fishers in the experimentation process; Testing mitigating techniques in real conditions; Developing new acoustics approaches (particularly for bottlenose dolphins); Examining mixed solutions combining both technical and management measures; Assessing the socioeconomic consequences of the implementation of these mitigating measures on the fisheries, including the consequences of alternative solutions such as changing fishing technique and area.

54. Addressing the issue of the depredation caused by bottlenose dolphins in small pelagic fisheries in North Africa, Chedly Rais introduced Document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc14** aimed at raising the attention of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee about the socio-economic impacts of depredation. He underlined that information has been taken from the reports the pilot actions on depredation in purse seine fisheries implemented in Morocco and Tunisia (included in document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Inf08**).

55. Referring to the results of these pilot actions, and given the economic and social importance of the fishery of small pelagics in both countries, he highlighted that the issue of depredation and its impacts on the fishing sector may undermine the efforts deployed for the conservation of cetaceans in these countries. He also introduced the main activities to be implemented in the framework of a new project supported by the MAVA Foundation aimed at further analysing the interactions between bottlenose dolphins and fishing activities in Morocco and Tunisia with the view of mitigating the impacts of depredation.

56. The representative of IWC, while recognizing the importance of this issue on both socio-economic and biological aspects, highlighted that the effectiveness of any measures aimed at mitigating depredation should be determined scientifically, taking into account the long-term effects on cetacean populations and any other potential environmental effects.

57. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat, the Task Manager on interactions with Fisheries and the SPA/RAC representative presented activities carried out in Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey within the framework of the MAVA supported project “Understanding Mediterranean multi-taxa ‘bycatch’ of vulnerable species and testing mitigation - a collaborative approach”.

58. Referring to document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/Inf 11 “Monitoring the incidental catch of vulnerable species in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea: methodology for data collection”, the representative of the GFCM Secretariat informed the meeting that this manual was prepared by the GFCM Secretariat in the context of the MAVA Bycatch project, in collaboration with the partners organizations, including ACCOBAMS. The objective of the manual is to assess the impact of main fisheries on the vulnerable species (i.e. marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, sharks and rays, and also macroinvertebrates), and to collect accurate information on bycatch of these species in terms of quantities, gears, temporal and spatial areas. Furthermore, the collection of biological information (e.g. length, weight, sex, and maturity) on the vulnerable species caught can also help to improve the knowledge of these species that would be difficult to sample in any other way. This manual, that would be applicable to the realities of different countries, describes the standard and harmonized methodologies to be used for the collection of such data and would enable the comparison of data at sub regional and regional level.

59. The GFCM representative pointed out that during the 2017 Regional Coordination Group for the Mediterranean and Black Sea (RCG Med&BS, Cyprus 2017), EU Mediterranean and Black Sea countries, in implementing the data collection activities (under the EU Regulation 2017/1004 and EU Decision 2016/1251), agreed to use this GFCM manual for monitoring incidental catch of vulnerable species and processing the collected data. In particular, EU Mediterranean and Black Sea countries should carry out the following pilot studies: 2018 Study for assessing incidental catches of vulnerable species from bottom trawlers; 2019 Study for assessing incidental catches of vulnerable species from longlines; 2020 Study for assessing incidental catches of vulnerable species from set nets (gillnets). Overall, based on the preliminary results, systematic monitoring programme may be proposed for certain fishing gears/areas.

**Conclusion 12.**
Following the discussions under this agenda item, the Scientific Committee adopted the **Recommendation 12.3** on cetacean interactions with fisheries appearing in **Annex III** to this report.

### *4.2.2 Anthropogenic noise*

60. OceanCare representative presented ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc17** and **Inf14** reporting about the outcomes of a workshop addressing the "Impact of underwater noise on marine biodiversity in the southeastern European waters in the Mediterranean". The workshop which was attended by 65 experts from 15 countries, took place on 22/23 November 2017 in Split, Croatia and was hosted by OceanCare, NRDC and in collaboration and receiving technical support from Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU). To facilitate transparent and uncompromised discussions, views expressed by participants have been voiced in private capacity and not reflected positions of the institutions represented. One of the core objectives of the workshop was "to build the expertise capacity of European countries of the southeastern Mediterranean to adequately assess underwater noise within their territories and the protection of marine habitats from anthropogenic noise was the driving force".
    The outcome of the workshop is a set of 16 Recommendations developed and agreed by the participants (see Doc.17). OceanCare invited the SC to discuss the recommendations and invited the Scientific Committee to endorse those, as well as encouraged the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat to task the ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS/CMS Joint Noise Working Group to reflect the Split Workshop Recommendations and the adoption of the CMS Noise EIA Guidelines when drafting a Resolution on anthropogenic Noise for the next MOP.

**Conclusion 13.**
The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee endorsed the Recommendations developed during the workshop for mitigating the impact of underwater noise on marine biodiversity in the south eastern European waters in the Mediterranean Sea (22-23. November 2017, Split, Croatia). To achieve consensus for such endorsement, the wish was expressed in context to Recommendation No.11 of the workshop to introduce the statement that "the integrated maps will depict a combination of IMMAs and MPAs and will have an advisory role since the nature in the mandate of the two areas differ. Thus, common ground on spatial and area based management on the integrated map areas could be achieved when we speak of the same nature of areas".

61. Léa David, leader of the MMO Working Group, introduced ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc32** regarding the implementation of an ACCOBAMS certification for Highly Qualified MMOs/PAM. Referring to Resolution 6.18 adopted at MOP6, she recalled the ongoing process. She explained that all courses were prepared by an «ACCOBAMS MMO/PAM Courses Committee » composed of experts selected following a call. A pilot workshop

training was organized on 13th November 2017 in Oran, Algeria, with the support of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Principality of Monaco, in order to present the role and objective of trained MMO/PAM.

62. Moreover, she informed the meeting that a call for expertise to become an "ACCOBAMS highly qualified MMOs/PAM operator" trainer organization was launch by the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat in spring 2018. To date, three applications have been received and since they all fulfil the requirements and have been accredited:
    - Blue world
    - Oceanomare Delphis Onlus
    - DMAD - Marine Mammals Research Association

63. Marian Paiu reported on the First training to become an "ACCOBAMS Highly Qualified MMOs/PAM operators" from 12th to 16th September 2018 in Constanta, Romania (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Inf13**). Twelve trainees from 5 countries from the Black Sea (Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Georgia) have followed the training done by four relevant experts and professional MMO/PAM operator. Evaluations are still under examination par the trainers.

64. The representative from OceanCare raised concerns over the two seismic survey initiatives in Montenegro, one of which is already taking place. In addition he reported about the status of some of the seismic survey applications put forward by research Organisations and/or the hydrocarbon industry, some of which had already been rejected by the Spanish authorities. There was appreciation about the news about Spain declaring the whale migration corridor - waters between the Baleares and the mainland - as marine protected area. It is a matter of procedure that this area will be accepted as a SPAMI at the next Meeting of the Barcelona Convention later in 2019. However, he expressed hope that work on developing a Conservation Management Plan is proceeding at an earlier stage.

**Conclusion 14.**
The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee welcomed the progress made on the ACCOBAMS certification for Highly Qualified MMOs/PAM operators.

**Conclusion 15.** Regarding the development a Recommendation on anthropogenic noise, he stressed the need to reflect work addressing speed reductions under the subject of "ship strikes" also under anthropogenic noise and expand the scope to potential positive effects of such measure towards small cetaceans in the Agreement area

65. The ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary informed the participant that a decision to change the group composition of the JNWG has been made following careful deliberation by the three Secretariats with the support of the Co-Chairs. The key change to the Operational Principles is that group membership is now more restricted to ensure that discussions can remain constructive and in line with the objectives of the three treaties. Industry-affiliated experts will be consulted separately from the Group's own discussion by the Co-Chairs when their input is deemed beneficial. Terms of reference for the JNWG Industry Advisory Group is ongoing

66. Alessio Maglio, expert from SINAY and member of the Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS/CMS Working Group on Noise, presented the achievements obtained on the following topics:
    - The implementation of noise mitigation measures, including the development of more detailed guidelines to mitigate impacts of anthropogenic noise, the update of the guide for Parties to use mitigation measures, and the feasibility to develop best practice guidelines for an EIA review process;

- the results of the Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS/CMS/ECS 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" (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Inf12**);
- the progress achieved concerning the QuietMed project (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc15**);
- the overview on the use of Passive Acoustic Monitoring in MPAs (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc31**);
- the progress on the organization of a joint workshop with NATO (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc16**).

67. Concerning the 1st point, no progress has been achieved on the development of guidelines to mitigate the impacts of anthropogenic noise as well as concerning the update of guide for Parties to use mitigation measures. These two documents remain at the same development level than presented at the MOP6. Conversely, the development of best practice guidelines for an EIA review process, where the main objective is to ensure that EIAs meet satisfactory criteria concerning the way the impact of noise on cetaceans is addressed in such assessments, can be considered as having achieved some development. In particular, the progress was achieved thanks to a workshop organised by OceanCare, held in Split in November 2017. During this workshop, the importance was confirmed of establishing such a review process for EIAs particularly when the transboundary scale of the potential impacts is evident as in the case of limited maritime areas with several neighbouring countries. The provisions of the ESPOO Convention were proposed as the best legal framework to develop such best practice guidelines. However, the specific objectives of these guidelines and the stakeholders were not defined, and the guidelines themselves were not drafted.

68. About the second point, the workshop on 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 organised in Middlefart, Denmark, by the ECS, ACCOBAMS, ASCOBANS and the CMS. It gathered representatives of countries of the European Union engaged in the implementation of the MSFD and non-EU Mediterranean countries engaged in the implementation of the EcAp process. The principle results were about the implementation of databases on the use of noise sources (noise registers) in the marine environment. The experience and progress achieved by both national and international institutions in their respective areas of competence were presented and summary tables were drawn during the round table time. The stakeholders from each countries were pointe out and ways to improve regional and inter-regional coherence of efforts were discussed. The output of this workshop resulted in highly relevant new information for the objectives of the QuietMed project, in which ACCOBAMS is a partner.

69. With regards to QuietMed, the project started in January 2017 and the duration is 24 months, which means that the project is in its final stage and the submission of final deliverables is planned for December 5th, 2018. Many important results were achieved during this project, where the key achievements were: i) operationalization of the noise register tool started in 2016 for the ACCOBAMS region; ii) the establishment of guidelines on the implementation of national registers; iii) the execution of a noise modelling and mapping exercise which proposes a common ground for a modelling procedure enabling comparison of results from different regions, subregions and other subdivisions; this modelling exercise also produced results that might be used as baselines for future assessments or for the setting up of monitoring programs; iv) the proposition of a shared view of what the Good Environmental Status looks like, and of consistent assessment criteria among different countries.

70. About the overview on the use of Passive Acoustic Monitoring in MPAs, a preliminary list of PAM-based monitoring programs in MPAs was presented, as well as acoustic monitoring programs planned under the MSFD. An increasing use of PAM techniques in recent years is highlighted in the related document, and it is argued that this increase is likely due to both the impulse given by the MSFD, and to the improved awareness and access to

acoustic techniques to an increased range of people involved with MPA management. However, it appears that the potential of using acoustics for effective monitoring, assessment, and management, is still far under-tapped. Based on this overview, it is proposed that a central repository be built at the regional scale to centralise information on the execution of monitoring programs using PAM techniques. Further, the organisation of training sessions and capacity building is proposed to increase the number of potential monitoring programs using PAM techniques.

71. Finally, the progress on the organisation of a joint workshop with NATO was briefly presented, where the main achievement was the recent potential identification of a person in charge of the organisation and the proposal of the location to host of the workshop (France).

72. Greg Donovan indicated that the IWC Scientific Committee shares interest and collaborates with ACCOBAMS on matters related to underwater noise and cetaceans, including both chronic and acute sources. This is yet another issue where collaboration is key and the IWC have been engaging with Organisations such as IMO, the UN and CMS including ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS. In addition to making recommendations on scientific issues such as soundscape modelling, the IWC Scientific Committee (1) welcomed and drew attention to the relevant CMS Guidelines; (2) recommended that anthropogenic noise be explicitly considered in MPA management; and (3) recognised efforts of multiple bodies to develop guidance on noise strategies, and encouraged continuing efforts to identify synergies and develop priorities for actions to reduce exposure of cetaceans to anthropogenic noise. A summary of the IWC recommendations relevant to shipping noise was presented to IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee in 2018.

73. He added that at the recent Commission meeting in Brazil the IWC adopted a Resolution on the topic (see the IWC website outcomes document). In addition to urging governments to take precautionary action and collaborate with other Organisations, asked the IWC Scientific Committee to continue its work regarding anthropogenic underwater noise and cetaceans, with a particular focus on: (1) evaluation of the extent and degree of exposure of cetaceans to different types of noise; (2) obtaining a better understanding of the effects of noise on cetaceans at the individual and population level, including chronic and acute effects; (3) reviewing the effectiveness of different approaches to reducing cetacean exposure to noise; and (4) reviewing work on the impacts of noise on cetacean prey and considering any implications of this for cetacean populations via the food-chain. He added that IWC will be delighted to continue to collaborate with the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat on this issue that will also be addressed by the IWC's Conservation Committee.

**Conclusion 16.** Following the debates within the framework of this agenda item, the Scientific Committee adopted the **Recommendation 12.4** on noise appearing in the **Annex III** of the report.

**Conclusion 17.** Since underwater noise is very complex issue, the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee encouraged the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat to approach all relevant organizations such as the IWC and Barcelona Convention in order to reinforce collaboration.

### *4.2.3 Ship strikes*

74. The Chair of the Scientific Committee presented a draft document to illustrate a certificate or label to be granted to shipping companies applying some mitigation measures to reduce the risk of ship strikes (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc18**). The so-called 'Whale-Safe Program' is targeting the international shipping industry, which

should take immediate action to prevent ship strikes. ACCOBAMS, through a cooperation with Friend of the Sea and the Tethys Research Institute is suggesting a simple and effective solution, by involving shipping companies in engaging unilaterally, by signing and adhering to a shared and standardized mitigation policy. Some preliminary actions have been presented and discussed with the aim to present a more structured proposal during the next ICMMPA5 meeting.

75. The IWC representative added that the IWC Conservation Committee agreed a Strategic Plan to Mitigate the Impacts of Ship Strikes on Cetacean Populations for the period 2017-20 (this can be found on the IWC website). As part of this, a joint IWC-IUCN Marine Mammals Protected Areas Task Force workshop was proposed to examine how the data and process used to identify Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) could assist the IWC to identify areas of high risk for ship strikes. He indicated that plans are underway to find the necessary funding.

76. Léa David informed the Meeting that a paper will be soon published about a study lead by EcoOcéan Institut through the FLT Med Network. The aim of this study was to collect data on near miss events (NMEs), as a proxy indicator of ship strikes for fin whales and sperm whales, along the main shipping routes in the Pelagos Sanctuary during two different periods of the year characterized by different intensities in traffic presence and cetacean occurrence, “summertime” (April to October) and “wintertime” (November to March). From 2011 to 2016, surveys were performed on 8 lines of ferry crossing the Pelagos Sanctuary by the FLT Med Network, for a total of approximately 111,000 km monitored. On the whole, 27 individuals were involved in NME (25 fin whales and 2 sperm whales). NME of fin whales occur over all routes monitored in summer. Comparing the two periods, it appears that the rate of NME is very similar for fin whales in summer and in winter and for sperm whale the rate is higher in winter than in summer. The analyses of the context of NMEs highlighted that the majority of animals (65.2%) were simply emerging from the deep just within the area of NME in front of the vessel, preventing any time for the vessel to react in order to avoid them. Finally, the localisation of NMEs fall inside the “ship strike high risk areas”, confirming the usefulness and reliability of this approach.

77. Aurelie Moulins from CIMA Foundation presented the project “SICOMAR plus” which is a European project to promote the Italy and France cross-border cooperation activities for the construction of a territorial strategy thanks to the Interreg Italy-France Maritime Program 2014-2020. The project started on 1 June 2018 and will end on 31 May 2021. It is fund on the thematic “Promotion of port sustainability and safety at sea” as a strategic project with 16 Partners, led by Regione Toscana.

    The project aims to contribute to improving the safety of navigation in the cross-border maritime space, which has been strongly threatened in recent years by the increase in marine commercial traffic, especially with vessels transporting hazards or passengers crossing the Mediterranean Sea for work or for attractions. The project is organized in interdisciplinary levels: governance, safety at sea technologies, integrated forecasting systems and security services. The general objective of the project is to promote safety at sea by:

    - increasing the sea surface controlled by monitoring tools (radar, satellites, in-situ instruments and integration of these systems into monitoring platforms);
    - improving the quality of weather and oceanographic forecasts, training and demonstration activities such as piloting in dangerous marine areas;
    - implementing mitigation measures of ship collisions with large cetacean and of negative impacts induced by marine traffic on marine ecosystem;
    - creating tools for managing emergencies.

This objective is to be achieved through the development of surveillance technologies and networks, the reduction of the uncertainty of marine forecasting and sea circulation systems, the creation of models of support for emergencies and risk management and safety services in sea and environmental protection.

78. She added that SICOMAR plus is linked to ACCOBAMS activities through the following activities:
    - archive large cetacean occurrences in a shared database;
    - conduct a training course for commercial crews about the risk of collision with cetaceans;
    - conduct a training course for stakeholders on the use of SEAWETRA platform;
    - implement SEAWETRA platform with products deriving from the project;
    - provide maps of maritime traffic;
    - provide maps of environmental sensitivity index;
    - provide maps of environmental risk index.

**Conclusion 18.**
Following the discussions under this agenda item, the Scientific Committee adopted the **Recommendation 12.5** on ship strikes appearing in **Annex III** to this report.

### *4.2.4 Cetacean watching*

79. The IWC representative informed the Meeting that the IWC Scientific Committee continued to work on the Modelling and Assessment of Whale Watching Impacts (MAWI) initiative and held a workshop in Italy in April 2018 (SC/67b/Rep03 available on the IWC website). It was agreed to: incorporate social and natural sciences to better understand whale watching impacts; develop an aid in the prioritisation of policy and research choices; develop toolkits and resources that can be accessed globally; and standardise of data collection. The IWC is delighted to collaborate with ACCOBAMS on these issues. A third MAWI workshop will held in 2019 in association with the ECS/SMM Barcelona meeting to: specify the data to be collected to best answer the research questions developed in SC/67b/Rep03; identify the best research locations to address these questions; and to continue to develop modelling approaches for assessing the long-term impacts of whale watching.

80. He added that the IWC Scientific Committee also recommended expansion of collaboration with CMS on guidelines for in-water interactions with aquatic mammals including helping to provide the scientific underpinning for these guidelines and reviewing any draft guidelines.

81. Finally he informed the Meeting that the major recent achievement is the launch of the Whale Watching Handbook on 30th October 2018 (https://wwhandbook.iwc.int). This is a 'living' document in three languages (CMS generously provided translations from the original English version into French and Spanish). Comments and suggestions are very welcome. The IWC Conservation Committee also updated its strategic plan on this whale watching.

82. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat presented the Meeting with an update on the implementation and management of the High Quality Whale Watching® Certificate in the Agreement area. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat informed that Meeting that new opportunities to implement the Certificate in management-based marine areas of the Agreement were suggested and thought of in order to keep expanding the High Quality Whale Watching® Certificate in the Agreement area.

**Conclusion 19.**
The Scientific Committee encouraged to keep liaising closely with the IWC and the CMS regarding whale watching activities especially since the IWC Whale Watching Handbook was published.

83. Aurélie MOULINS from CIMA Foundation presented the project "EcoSTRIM" which is European project to promote the Italy and France cross-border cooperation activities for the construction of a territorial strategy thanks to the Interreg Italy-France Maritime Program 2014-2020. The project started on 29 January 2018 and will end on 28 January 2021. It is fund on the thematic "Promotion of sustainable tourism" as a simple project with 7 Partners, led by CIMA Research Foundation.
    The project aims to reinforce the cooperation activities for the construction of a territorial strategy for the development and advancement of sustainable tourism and sporting activities dedicated to the marine and coastal environment. Specifically, the project increase the cross-border networking; create quality ecological labels (ecolabel); develop new sustainable tourism products in order to make seasonal adjustment of tourism and invest in the accessibility of areas of tourist interest. The project improve the competitiveness of companies in the blue tourism sector on national and international markets. The project involves public administrations, tour and touristic operators and research centers. The partner will share the requisites to obtain the ecolabel for whale watching, diving, boat rental, and for eco-sustainable tourism in protected areas.

84. The Chair of the Scientific Committee underlined the fact that the ACCOBAMS Whale Watching Working Group (WWWG) did not complete its tasks since the last SC11.

**Conclusion 20.**
After discussion, the Scientific Committee suggested to contact the WWWG, through the Chair, in order to understand the issues that could have arisen and to revive it.

85. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat informed the Meeting about the raising concern of certificated French commercial whale watching operators regarding the increase and authorized "swim-with" activities proposed to the tourists. These operators have explained that they feel aggrieved by the authorization the "swim-with" activity since the tourists will more likely choose an operator proposing such activity instead of a HQWW® certified one. The Acting Executive Secretary of the Pelagos Agreement, Costanza Favilli, confirmed this raising concern especially since the "swim-with" activity is growing quickly within the Pelagos Sanctuary.

**Conclusion 21.**
After discussion, the Scientific Committee decided that the "swim-with" issue should be brought to the attention of the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee at their next Meeting.
Following the debates within the framework of this agenda item, the Scientific Committee adopted the **Recommendation 12.6** on cetacean watching appearing in the **Annex III** of this report.

#### *4.2.5 Marine debris*

86. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat informed the Meeting about the collaboration with the Mediterranean Pollution Assessment and Control Programme (MED POL) of the Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP), including the development of activities to be implemented in the Adriatic thanks to the 2017 Italian voluntary contribution.

87. Nino Pierantonio presented document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc19** on "Relevant debris to be targeted for cetaceans: a review of available information". As part of the 2017-2019 Work Programme of ACCOBAMS

requesting an assessment of the impact of marine debris ingested by cetaceans, the review considers the available information, which has increased in recent years, although a clear and quantifiable assessment of effects specifically on cetaceans remains elusive. The review is aimed at identifying the cetacean species in which impacts of plastic debris and, more generally, marine litter have been documented. The types of debris affecting cetaceans are also presented. As highlighted in the review, cetaceans are affected by a wide range of types of debris and that effects range from negligible, through chronic to debris-related mortalities, although clear cases of ingested marine debris causing deaths remain few and scattered. It is impossible to point at any specific debris type as presenting a particular threat to cetaceans but the review includes recommendations intended to help this situation to be better understood and addressed. These includes development and dissemination of standard post mortem protocols and further research to identify hot spots.

88. Nino Pierantonio presented document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc20** "Draft protocol for relevant data gathering and sharing related to the issue of marine debris and cetaceans". This document considers what data might be usefully collected to help better understand the interactions between cetaceans and marine debris. Recommendations include that (i) Post-mortem examinations should be conducted using a classical differential diagnostic approach when possible and, when not, efforts to document the presence of marine debris, both ingested and entangled, should still be put into place; and (ii) debris should be characterized by material, size, colour, shape, mass and volume and, where possible, identified to source. A standard list of litter items is also provided.

89. Referring to document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Inf19**, the Chair of the Scientific Committee presented a brief description of the project "Plastic Busters MPAs: preserving biodiversity from plastics in Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas". The overall objective of the Plastic Busters MPAs project is to contribute to maintaining biodiversity and preserving natural ecosystems in pelagic and coastal MPAs, by defining and implementing a harmonized approach against marine litter. The project entails actions that address the whole management cycle of marine litter, from monitoring and assessment to prevention and mitigation, as well as actions to strengthen networking between and among pelagic and coastal MPAs located in Albania, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy and Spain.

90. Lobna Ben Nakhla, SPA/RAC representative, informed the Meeting about the activities related to marine litter monitoring in the Mediterranean implemented within the framework of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP). She referred to the three agreed common and candidate indicators adopted by the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention in 2016 on the basis of the Regional Plan on Marine Litter management coordinated by MED POL. In particular, within the MedMarine Litter EU funded project, SPA/RAC is working on the finalisation of the Candidate Indicator 24: Trends in the amount of litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms focusing on selected mammals, marine birds, and marine turtles (EO10), the elaboration of a protocol for monitoring interactions between marine litter and marine turtles (ingestion and entangling) and the Organisation of sub regional trainings to implement this protocol by the national stranding networks in the South Mediterranean countries.

91. Greg Donovan, IWC representative, informed the Meeting that the IWC has recognised that marine debris (especially plastics and microplastics) is a rapidly emerging threat to cetaceans and it was agreed that an intersessional workshop (with input from both the IWC Scientific Committee and Conservation Committees) should take place, preferably to coincide with the World Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals in Barcelona in December 2019. In addition, the Commission adopted a Resolution on one aspect of marine debris – 'ghost gear'. That Resolution inter alia encourages co-operation amongst Secretariats, Governments, other IGOs

and NGOs to continue to work constructively towards the development of best practices to avoid (and clean up) abandoned, lost or otherwise fishing gear (ALDFG), and its adverse impacts on cetaceans and the marine environment. The IWC Scientific and Conservation Committees will continue to work on this issue including assessing the risk of each gear's propensity to become ALDFG and to pose a threat to harm cetaceans and which species or regions are most affected.

92. Costanza Favilli, representing the Secretariat of the Pelagos Sanctuary, confirmed the interest of the Pelagos Sanctuary to collaborate with ACCOBAMS on the marine debris issue.

93. OceanCare encouraged the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat to follow sustainability procurement criteria, which include avoiding single use tools (dishware, single use plastic…), for any future Meetings of any related ACCOBAMS bodies.

**Conclusion 22.**
Following the discussions under this agenda item, the Scientific Committee adopted the **Recommendation 12.7** on strandings and marine debris appearing in **Annex III** to this report.

### *4.2.6 Chemical and biological pollution*

94. Greg Donovan, IWC representative, reported on the progress made by IWC on chemical and biological pollution. The Pollution 2020 programme, which was endorsed by the IWC Scientific Committee, is vital to provide advice on contaminants and the SC has developed methods to improve its visibility. The individual based model to investigate the effects of pollutants on cetacean populations has been finalised and published and a web-based, user-friendly version is now available (http://www.smru.st-andrews.ac.uk/reports/). The contaminant mapping tool will be completed in 2019, with the inclusion of the data on the concentrations of mercury in cetacean tissues (see Commission's Resolution 2016-4). In addition, given studies highlighting high levels of PCBs in cetaceans the IWC Scientific Committee endorsed international efforts to reduce PCBs in the environment.

**Conclusion 23.**
Following the discussions under this agenda item, the Scientific Committee agreed to keep monitoring this topic, in particular through collaboration with IWC and other relevant organizations, as well as with researchers from the Mediterranean and Black Sea active on this topic.

### *4.2.7 Species Conservation Plans*

95. The Chair of the Scientific Committee introduced the concept of Conservation and Management Plans, developed under the framework of the International Whaling Commission and adopted by the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and Meeting of Parties and presented a draft CMP for Mediterranean fin whales (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc22**). The document presented is a draft outline intended to facilitate discussion during the meeting and it does not represent a final draft version of the CMP, particularly as contributions from key players in the ACCOBAMS area are still missing and could not be integrated during the drafting of this text.
The overall goal of the Mediterranean fin whale CMP is to manage human activities that affect fin whales in the Mediterranean Sea in order to maintain a favourable conservation status throughout their historical range, based on the best available scientific knowledge.

The CMP includes eight sections, of which the first three provide background information including biology and status of the Mediterranean fin whale population. Section 4 reviews actual and potential anthropogenic threats and ranks these as low, moderate or high priority. Section 5 describes mitigation measures for those threats that have been accorded moderate or high priority. These include: vessel strikes, noise (acute and chronic), habitat degradation including chemical pollution and micro- and nano-plastics. Section 6 deals with public awareness and education. Section 7 outlines the actions called for and includes sub-sections on monitoring, on implementation and coordination of the CMP, and on involvement of stakeholders. Section 8 describes in detail the high priority actions identified at this stage. They fall under the following five headings: Co-ordination, Capacity building and public awareness, Research essential for providing adequate management advice, Monitoring, and Mitigation measures. Descriptions of the high priority actions follow a common format, which consists of description of action (specific objective, rationale, target, timeline), actors (responsible for co-ordination of the action, stakeholders), action evaluation and priority (importance, feasibility).

96. It is expected that a drafting workshop is organized in spring 2019, where scientists involved in fin whale research in the Mediterranean will be invited and will be able to collaborate towards a draft final CMP that will also be considered by the IWC Scientific Committee in May 2019 before submission to the ACCOBAMS Meeting of Parties and the IWC for consideration.

97. The draft CMP on Risso's dolphin was presented by Léa DAVID (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc24**). The first part of the document review the knowledge on the species, mainly abundance, distribution and biology. One of the recent results highlight that there are changes in terms of abundance and distribution of this species in the northern part of the occidental basin. Considering the threats, literature stress that the impact comes mostly from bycatch, noise, prey depletion and harassment. Mitigations measures are not identified now, and some first actions are presented. The planned workshop involving all stakeholders will help to complete the draft and all subjects

98. Guido GNONE, expert in charge of the Bottlenose dolphin CMP (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc23**), informed the Meeting that following ACCOBAMS and IWC guide lines, he tried to draw up a bottlenose dolphin CMP which could be simple and feasible in its implementation, starting from the regulatory framework already in force in most of the countries involved and trying to get the best from the current context. The main potential threats identified for the target species are the contraction and degradation of the habitat, overfishing and conflict with fishermen, contamination of the food chain and epidemics. For each of this threat he identified mitigation actions, acting on three main items: political and regulatory, stakeholder engagement, and education and awareness (which should also include the valorisation of the natural environment).
    Fundamental component in the CMP implementation will be the monitoring system, which will be based on the ACCOBAMS zonation (subareas), with a strong effort to connect the local activities in a solid network, coordinated by a steering committee and its coordination centre. The network will have to guarantee the continuity of the system over space and time, favouring the implementation of the mitigation actions (from the centre to the periphery) and monitoring data flow (from the periphery to the centre). The monitoring network should be able to verify the goodness and feasibility of the mitigation actions and to observe possible changes in the presence and abundance of the target species. The system activity will also allow to identify and prioritize the knowledge gaps, in order to plan specific research campaigns.
    The bottlenose dolphin CMP draft will have to be presented and discussed in a dedicated context (a workshop), possibly involving also the potential stakeholders, to finalize a fully shared (leaving) document.
    In order to optimize costs and facilitate a successful outcome, it would be useful to share this process with the groups working on the CMPs for the other Cetacean species (i.e. *Delphinus delphis*), organizing a same single

workshop. Once the final documents will be submitted to the parties, a follow-up pilot experience (3 years?) could be implemented for both species (*Tursiops truncatus* and *Delphinus delphis*).

99. The draft CMP for Mediterranean common dolphins was presented by Joan GONZALVO (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc25**). This is a work in progress and by no means should be considered a final draft version of the CMP, particularly as contributions from key players in the ACCOBAMS area will be proposed and adequately included during a drafting workshop to be organized in spring 2019. This draft was produced following the IWC template as included in ACCOBAMS MOP6/2016/Doc37/Annex12/Res6.21 on Species Conservation Management Plans. Its main goal is to identify the threats faced by the species in the Mediterranean and propose the most adequate actions in order to address them in order to promote and trigger conservation action to protect common dolphins in the region. Some actions were presented as an indication of the future final content to be included in the CMP. These were grouped in five main categories: co-ordination (COORD); public awareness and capacity building (PACB); research essential for providing adequate management advice or filling in knowledge gaps (RES); monitoring (MON); and mitigation measures (MIT).

**Conclusion 24.** It was suggested that the CMP drafting workshops for common dolphins and bottlenose dolphins are held together in 2019 as a single workshop to develop both CMPs, due to the fact that these species share many threats and conservation issues and it would be more effective both from the scientific and logistical/economic point of view.

### *4.2.8 Captivity related issues*

100. The Executive Secretary recalled the Meeting that during the 17th Meeting of the Conference of CITES Parties in 2016, CITES decisions 17.299 to 17.301 on bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus ponticus*) were adopted based on the draft Resolution prepared by ACCOBAMS on the identification of origin of cetaceans bred or kept in captivity. Then ACCOBAMS MOP6 encouraged Parties to implement the CITES decisions based on the draft Resolution prepared by ACCOBAMS on the identification of origin of cetaceans bred or kept in captivity. In 2017-2018, the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat has been contacted by some Black Sea Member States (i) on the methodology to apply for genetic analysis done for the specimens involved and (ii) on whether a kind of protocol or methodology exists for such cases to be followed by relevant authorities. Therefore, the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat has approached relevant international experts to address this issue. It was noted that the development of a system to track Black Sea bottlenose dolphin individuals currently held in captivity and to identify whether any "unknown" individuals represent additional *Tursiops truncatus ponticus* specimens newly imported from the sea, requires:

    1) a type of high-resolution genetic profiling,
    2) a reference library of such profiles, and
    3) a registry of all current captive *Tursiops truncatus ponticus* individuals.

101. She added that during the 30th Meeting of the CITES Animals Committee in July 2018, the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat stressed the need to maintain the zero annual export quota from the wild and indicated continuing to seek advice on the development of a genetic registry for Black Sea bottlenose dolphins, potentially to be developed by CITES, in collaboration with ACCOBAMS. It was decided to continue the collaboration between ACCOBAMS and CITES on this issue

**Conclusion 25.** The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee expressed its deep concerns over the ongoing live captures of the endangered Black Sea bottlenose dolphin by Ukraine (as reported in ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Inf16**) and reiterated its concern over the illegality of such removals of cetaceans from the Black Sea. In particular, the Scientific Committee referred to ACCOBAMS Resolution 5.14 where ACCOBAMS Parties agreed to reinforce the interdiction of the importation, exportation and re-exportation of Black Sea bottlenose dolphins from the Agreement area.

### 4.3 Improve capacities of national organizations and experts

#### *4.3.1 Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situation*

102. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat recalled that during the Sixth Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS (Monaco, 22-25 November 2016), Parties requested the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee to approach the ECS, IWC and ASCOBANS in order to develop a common operational stranding protocol considering the proposed common definitions, the common data collection and the common necropsy protocol annexed to the Resolution 6.22. In addition, cetaceans are known to be affected by marine litter through ingestion and entanglement in fishing nets.

103. In this context a scientific exchange on cetaceans stranding issues was organised, as a dedicated workshop (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc27**), covering also marine litters, at the European Cetaceans Society Conference held on 6th April 2018 in La Spezia (Italy). In order to draft accurate recommendations, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat launched through the national focal points a questionnaire and a template focused on "Stranding Network Organisation". A second set of questionnaires, was sent to national experts (and available in NETCOBBAMS), in order to complete the information on data banks and tissues banks. The objective is to establish a searchable metadata inventory of entities involved in cetacean strandings including the information on availability for exchange and cooperation.

104. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat also presented a report on the follow-up of the MOP6 recommendation related to MEDACES (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc26** & **Inf20**) underlining that some progress were made in :
- a version of new website including a dynamic mapping presentation was prepared;
- the inline documentation was updated;
- a counter was installed in the database.

**Conclusion 26.** The revised deontological code proposed by MEDACES, was discussed, amended and adopted by the Scientific Committee as it appears in Annex IV.

105. Sandro MAZZARIOL, ACCOBAMS expert on stranding, informed Scientific Committee members that during the Joint Workshop ACCOBAMS/ ASCOBANS/SPA-RAC organized in the last ECS Meeting in La Spezia necropsy protocol included in recommendation 6.22 was proposed and discussed focusing on the need of harmonization, standard procedures and a multi-tiers approach. Subsequently, recommendation coming from that workshop were then presented during the last IWC Scientific Committee meeting in Bled (SLO): the IWC SC endorsed the relevance of a multidisciplinary and harmonized approach to this issue and proposed a joint workshop during the World Marine Mammal Conference organized in Barcelona, December 2019. Finally, during the 24th ASCOBANS

Advisory Committee meeting organized in Vilnius (LI) marine debris and strandings issues were discussed. Under the agenda item 2.5 "Use of bycatches and strandings", ACCOBAMS work on common best practices, including the main results from the Joint Workshop of La Spezia and the recommendation that came out from the International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee were presented focusing on what a best practice is and giving some details on ACCOBAMS procedures included in Resolution 6.22 and those to be discussed in the 12th Scientific Committee. During these meeting, Dr. Llonneke and Dr. Browlow presented a proposal for an ASCOBANS necropsy protocol to be also adopted from the ECS as an update of the existing one (agenda item 2.5.4). Their protocol were developed during several ECS workshops also including other experts. Discussing with them and comparing their proposed protocol and ACCOBAMS best practices, it was clear that they are close one each other with some minor differences.

106. For this reason, a harmonization process was proposed in order to achieve a joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS best practice on necropsy and diagnostic framework before the next SMM/ECS meeting in Barcelona. The Chair of the session (Dr. Rob Deaville) proposed to the Parties to support a workshop in early 2019 which will bring together relevant experts from nations across the ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS regions. This workshop shall contribute to harmonizing best practices guidelines for stranding events and necropsy methodologies to ultimately facilitate the comparison of national results. University of Padova offered a possible location. Networks are already established. IWC Expert Panel could be useful for a possible review and validation.

107. Regarding to the best practices under discussion, they maintain a multi-tiers approach and include 3 different documents focusing on:
    - large whales necropsy, completing the basic necropsy best protocol presented in recommendation 6.22;
    - diagnostic framework on most relevant anthropic threats for cetaceans' conservation including but not limited to by-catch, marine debris, sonar related mortalities, microplastics, ship-strikes, etc. All the best practices are organized in 3 different levels;
    - best practices on alive stranded animals and euthanasia.

**Conclusion 27.** All the Scientific Members agreed that all these documents need a revision by regional experts and a harmonization throughout Europe. Harmonization should come from the above-mentioned workshop.

**Conclusion 28.** Following the discussions under this agenda item, the Scientific Committee adopted the **Recommendation 12.7** on strandings and marine debris appearing in **Annex III** to this report.

### *4.3.2 Capacity building*

108. The Chair invited Léa DAVID to inform the meeting about the 5 days training session for experts of the ACCOBAMS area organized in October 2018 in Lebanon, in collaboration with SPA/RAC, IUCN Med, MedPAN and the CNRS (Lebanon). Making reference to document ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Inf17**, Léa DAVID emphasized that the training session aimed at strengthening the capacity of scientists from the ACCOBAMS area in the use of photo-identification and databases of relevance for the ACCOBAMS implementation. She added that the main objective was to promote the standardization of methods and tools used as well as the approaches for data collection and recording.

109. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat informed the meeting that arrangements were underway to organise a new session of the ACCOBAMS training Module on the conservation of cetaceans. It is expected to take place in

Istanbul during the first Quarter of 2019. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat was collaborating with the Faculty of Marine Sciences of Istanbul and the Black Sea Commission; other partners may join the initiative.

**Conclusion 29.**
The Scientific Committee took note of the presented information and stressed the importance of strengthening the capacity of scientists and the need to further promote the standardization of data collection. However, it decided to do not make a special recommendation on capacity building since it is a cross cutting issue that should be included as activity in support of all the issues addressed by the Work Programme of ACCOBAMS.

110. Sandro Mazzariol informed the meeting that a Master course will be launched next year as a joint initiative of Italian Universities. He suggested that the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat joins the initiative using as appropriate the educational material available under the ACCOBAMS Module.

### 4.4 Enhance effective conservation of Cetaceans Critical Habitats

111. Léa DAVID, Task Manager presented an update of the current ACCOBAMS threat-based approach (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc28**). She informed the Meeting that the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat organized two workshops: one entitled "Inputs to the ACCOBAMS ongoing effort to map human threats on cetaceans in the Mediterranean and Black Seas" held on Sunday 30th April 2017 in Middelfart (Denmark) and one entitled "Towards understanding the overlap of selected threats and Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) across the Mediterranean Sea » held on Saturday 7th April 2018 in La Spezia, Italy.

112. She also explained that the objective of the identification of new relevant CCH in the ACCOBAMS area, is to facilitate the implementation of sustainable conservation actions at the regional level.

113. Ayaka Amaha OZTURK, Vice Chair of the Scientific Committee, informed the Meeting that the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity convened the Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea which was in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 24 to 29 April 2017. The results of the workshop (CBD/EBSA/WS/2017/1/3) were made available: https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/50f9/bd6d/21c043b0408fd80e5d2bbb96/ebsa-ws-2017-01-04-en.pdf. Totally 17 areas were approved by the plenary as EBSAs in the Black Sea. All these areas, except areas no. 8, 9, 11, and 17, are relevant to the populations of three cetacean species, which makes one of the basic criteria of EBSA "Importance for threatened, endangered or declining species and/or habitats". Areas no. 7 (Balaklava), 10 (Taman Bay and the Kerch Strait), 12 (Kolkheti Marine Area), and 13 (Sarpi) are included in/overlapping with ACCOBAMS' CCHs. Area No. 7: Balaklava is a critically important habitat for two cetacean species, the Black Sea harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena relicta*) and the Black Sea bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus ponticus*), both of which are listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List. These two cetacean species use this area particularly for reproduction and feeding. Area No. 10: Taman Bay and the Kerch Strait is a shallow semi-closed marine lagoon in the Sea of Azov with no constant source of river inflow and the adjacent Kerch Strait is an important migratory pathway for marine life, including various fish species as well as two cetacean species, harbour porpoises (*P.phocoena relicta*) and bottlenose dolphins (*T.truncatus ponticus*). Area No. 12: Kolkheti Marine Area is an important feeding and nursery ground for cetacean species (*T. truncatus ponticus*, *D. delphis ponticus* and *P.phocoena relicta*) all year-round, but with the particular importance as a wintering ground. Area No. 13: Sarpi is the area Black Sea cetaceans use for feeding and possibly for breeding.

114. Simone PANIGADA, Chair of the Scientific Committee, presented a brief note (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/Doc33) prepared by the co-chairs of the IUCN Task Force on Marine Mammal protected Areas (MMPA TF) on the different and complementary roles of Cetacean Critical Habitat (CCH) and Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA) in the ACCOBAMS area. He provided details on the establishment and use of both CCH and IMMA, underlining the intrinsic difference and complementarity of both approaches: first, IMMAs are selected according to pure bio-centric and rigorous criteria and attributes, secondly human pressure and threats are considered to each of these area, to identify CCH. Using both the IMMA and CCH concept in the ACCOBAMS region will have significant added value compared to using CCH alone, since these two concepts reinforce each other. Indeed, the global scope of IMMAs will help in promoting recognition and visibility at the international level, while CCHs provide a tool to foster the regional commitment and to provide the possibility to revise, on a more frequent basis (every 3 years), the list of areas of special concern for cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS region, as well as supporting the related conservation and management measures.

115. Simone PANIGADA, Chair of the Scientific Committee, also presented a brief description of the project "Plastic Busters MPAs: preserving biodiversity from plastics in Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas". The overall objective of the Plastic Busters MPAs project is to contribute to maintaining biodiversity and preserving natural ecosystems in pelagic and coastal MPAs, by defining and implementing a harmonized approach against marine litter. The project entails actions that address the whole management cycle of marine litter, from monitoring and assessment to prevention and mitigation, as well as actions to strengthen networking between and among pelagic and coastal MPAs located in Italy, France, Spain, Croatia, Albania and Greece.

116. Finally, he presented the Terms of Reference for a joint IWC-IUCN-ACCOBAMS workshop ((ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Inf24**) to evaluate how the data and process used to identify important marine mammal areas (IMMAs) can assist the IWC to identify areas of high risk for ship strike. The workshop will seek to bring experts together from the IWC SC, IUCN, ACCOBAMS, CMS, IMO, Pelagos Sanctuary and shipping industry if possible, in order to:
    - Develop criteria for categorization and prioritization of an IMMA, or other spatially explicit area, as a "high risk area" for ship strikes;
    - evaluate the IMMAs now identified in the Mediterranean Sea, in order to determine the utility of this approach;
    - test the utility of the regional approach suggested by the Ship Strike Standing Working Group SSSWG;
    - enhance engagement with other International partners with similar goals (e.g. identifying high risk areas and mitigating ship strikes there).

**Conclusion 30.**
Following the discussions under this agenda item, the Scientific Committee adopted the **Recommendation 12.8** on Value of the designation of IMMAs and CCH to achieving ACCOBAMS objectives as appearing in **Annex III** to this report.

## 5. COMMUNICATION AND INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

### 5.1 Information /awareness and communication

117. The Executive Secretary introduced the item on information and communication. She recalled that during the triennium strong emphasis has been put on improving the ACCOBAMS communication tools, especially through the use of Facebook and Twitter during the 2018 summer campaign of the ASI.

118. She presented the communication activities implemented by the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat, in particular:
- The 4th edition of the Conference on cetacean conservation for Southern Mediterranean Countries (Algeria, November 2017);
- The workshop, organized jointly with the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force (MMPA TF), entitled "Towards understanding the overlap of selected threats and Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) across the Mediterranean Sea" held during the 2018 ECS Conference in La Spezia, Italy.
- The photographic exhibition organized jointly with the Pelagos Agreement and the CIMA Research Foundation at the occasion of the 2nd edition of the Monaco Ocean Week (May, 2018).
- The 4th edition of the ACCOBAMS Cetaceans Day, in Malaga, Spain, on June 8, 2018, on World Oceans.
- The ACCOBAMS training courses on photo-id and databases for experts organized in collaboration with SPA/RAC, IUCN Med, MedPAN and Lebanese CNRS (Lebanon, 1st -5th October 2018);
- The upcoming implementation of the module on cetacean conservation, in Turkey, at the Istanbul University in March 2019.

119. Some ACCOBAMS Partners highlighted that it could be useful that National Focal Points tighter with the Partners to promote the communication actions rolled by the ACCOBAMS (e.g. ACCOBAMS Cetacean Day) or any other communication at least thought a press release if not in proper public events.

### 5.2 Cooperation with other Organizations

#### *5.2.1 Collaboration with Sub Regional Coordination Units*

120. Irina Makarenko (Black Sea Commission' Permanent Secretariat or BSC PS), representing also the **ACCOBAMS Black Sea Sub Regional Coordination Unit**, was invited to present relevant activities promoting regional cooperation on conservation of cetaceans by establishing partnerships and joint initiatives with ACCOBAMS and other relevant partners (GFCM, CBD Convention, EC etc.). A MoU with UNEP/MAP (Barcelona Convention) was signed in February 2016 and BSC already exchanging the experience in ecosystem-based approach, fisheries, ICZM issues, invasive species, MPAs and Marine Litter. The Regional Action Plan on management of the Marine Litter in the Black Sea was adopted in October, 2018 and now joint actions on cetaceans are being considered and currently negotiated with the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat.

121. She added that BSC plans to organize a Workshop on Cetaceans during upcoming meeting of CBD and FOMLR AGs in beginning of 2019. She informed that joint initiatives were ongoing, especially with GFCM, CBD Convention (EBSA workshop took place in Baku, Azerbaijan in April 2017, and EBSA sites for the Black Sea are planned to be endorsed during upcoming CoP to CBD Convention in Egypt), EC, UN-Environment (on SDG 14), as well as under Regular Process and preparation of World Ocean Assessment II report.

122. She informed the meeting that the BSC welcomed the ratification of ACCOBAMS Agreement by the Republic of Turkey and she informed that negotiations with the Russian Federation are ongoing regarding ratification of ACCOBAMS.

123. She informed the participants that BSC PS appreciated the level of cooperation and assistance of ACCOBAMS and other relevant partners, and was waiting forward to continue this important collaboration (i.e. Black Sea Cetaceans Survey, Project on cetacean by-catch; Cetacean conservation modules in Black Sea universities; underwater noise etc.). With the support of ACCOBAMS, the BSC PS plans to introduce "Cetacean conservation" modules in the existing postgraduate programs and to enroll the English speaking universities of the ACCOBAMS area (starting with a workshop for teachers and PhD students in Istanbul in early 2019). The BSC PS welcomed the Russian translation of the Module.

124. The representative of the BSC PS explained that support and expertise for drafting and improving the relevant documents were needed (in particular the Conservation Plan for Cetaceans, BSIMAP 2017-2022, short format of BSC annual reporting). The item "Specimens of Black Sea bottlenose dolphins in captivity" is in the BSIMAP for 2017-2022, as well as the fisheries indicators to be collected for annual reporting to the Black Sea Commission.

125. To conclude, the representative of the BSC PS emphasized that BSCPS was ready to contribute to other relevant ACCOBAMS activities, in particular in implementation of the project for MSFD implementation for cetaceans, in assisting in ACCOBAMS survey in 2019 and preparation of data on cetaceans for Black Sea Red Data Book.

126. Lobna Ben Nakhla, **representative of the Mediterranean Sub Regional Coordination Unit** (SPA/RAC) explained that the main activities carried out by SPA/RAC are based on the joint work programme (ACCOBAMS-SPA/RAC) for 2017- 2019 established since March 2017.

127. She informed the Meeting about the co-organization of different events in 2017/2018:
- Fourth Biennial Conference on Cetacean Conservation in South and East Mediterranean (Algeria, Nov 2017).
- Joint ACCOBAMS / ASCOBANS/ SPA-RAC / ECS workshop on Marine Litters and Stranding. (ECS 32, Italy)
- Workshop « Towards understanding the overlap of selected threats and Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) across the Mediterranean Sea », (ECS 32, Italy)
- Training courses on photo ID and databases for experts in collaboration IUCN Med, MedPAN and Lebanese CNRS (Lebanon, Oct 2018)
- Fourth edition of the regional workshops of ACCOBAMS (Tunisia, May 2018)

128. She also explained that joint activities are undertaken especially:
- with the Support of the MEDACES functioning through a trilateral MoU ACCOBAMS-RAC/SPA-University of Valencia (the management Body of MEDACES); and
- with the collaboration in mitigating the impacts of the interactions occurring between cetacean species and fishing activities. (MAVA projects on bycatch, depredation….)

129. She added that SPA/RAC supported the Tunisian Dolphin Project: population size and habitat use for bottlenose and common dolphins along the North of Tunisia.

130. Moreover, she explained that in the framework of the EcAp-MEDII project, SPA/RAC assisted the southern Mediterranean Contracting Parties (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) in the

update/development of their national monitoring programme based on the IMAP recommendations and the organisation of Sub-regional trainings on monitoring techniques of cetaceans (July 2017, Tunisia) (September 2017, Greece) as well as the development of the guidance factsheets for monitoring and assessment of the EcAp Common Indicators related to cetaceans : Distribution, Abundance and Demography ;

131. The SPA/RAC representative also informed that during the GFCM Fish Forum (Rome, Dec 2018), SPA/RAC is organizing **a workshop**: Complementarities between MPAs and fisheries spatial measures for area-based management (including SPAMIs, FRAs and national fishing reserves) (10 Dec 2018) and **a side event**: Implementation of the ecosystem approach at the regional level for the coordinated achievement of the targets of SDG14 (12 Dec 2018).

### *5.2.2 Collaboration with ACCOBAMS Partners*

132. Marian Paiu, representative of Mare Nostrum NGO informed the meeting that in the framework of ongoing Monitoring and Conservation of Black Sea Cetaceans Program, were developed activities like: development and coordination of Stranding Monitoring Network, Data collection and analysis (sea and land surveys, disease, ingested litter etc.), awareness and education, capacity building both on national level and in the region, lobby and advocacy. For more information the website www.delfini.ro could be accessed (in Romanian language) or the annual report and be requested at office@marenostrum.ro. He added that Mare Nostrum NGO provided support for capacity building in the region, organizing the First Highly Qualified MMO/PAM training and Marine mammal distribution and abundance training (Distance sampling) for the Black Sea region, in Romania, both supported by ACCOBAMS Secretariat funds. Moreover, the NGO has provided one expert for the ACCOBAMS ASI and has developed project proposals to support the objectives of the Agreement in collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat (continuing the ACCOBAMS ASI effort in the Black Sea).

### *5.2.3 Collaboration with any other Organizations*

133. Alexandra Gigou, presented the cetacean monitoring strategy in the Marine Natural Park of the Gulf of Lion.

134. Joan Gonzalvo informed the Meeting that between 9 and 12 December 2019, the World Marine Mammal Conference will be held in Barcelona as result of a collaboration between ECS and SMM. The host organisations are Submon and the University of Barcelona. This international event will offer a good opportunity to ACCOBAMS and partners to organise some workshop/s relevant to the ACCOBAMS goals and to do effectively networking among high quality cetacean researchers. ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat has already manifested its intention to collaborate and support this important event.

## 5.3 Selection of priority topics to be selected for the 2018 call of proposals launch

135. The Executive Secretary informed the Scientific Committee that a new ACCOBAMS call for proposals should be launched by the end of 2018 (or beginning 2019) to support three projects. This proposal will be presented at the next Bureau Meeting in December 2018 for approval.
Considering the high priority given by the Parties to support capacity building activities, she suggested that the new call for proposals takes into consideration the capacity building issue.

**Conclusion 31.**

Referring to discussions held under previous agenda items, the Scientific Committee recommended the following topics be considered for the next Call for proposals, including the capacity building aspect as a cross-cutting objective:

- Support to the assessment and mitigation of interactions with fisheries in the areas not already covered under the MAVA funded projects on interactions with fisheries;
- Support to the establishment/reinforcement of stranding networks and tissue banks and to the monitoring of marine litter during necropsies, in particular through dedicated collaborations.

## 6. WORKING PROGRAMME OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE FOR THE TRIENNIUM 2020-2022

136. The ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat was invited to present the new format proposed for the 2020-2022 Work Programme, as requested during MOP6 through Resolution 6.5. The Executive Secretary explained that the objective was to:
    - Propose more general actions instead of many very specific, in order to take into account the first findings from the mid-term evaluation of the effectiveness of the ACCOBAMS Strategy
    - Indicate the specific means of implementation of these general actions
    - Add information on the corresponding budget for each proposed action

    She added that the document with proposed conservation actions for the 2020-2022 Work Programme, takes into account national priorities and is based on the format approved by Parties during the regional workshops (ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/**Doc34**).

137. Scientific Committee Members were invited to provide their comments on the conservation actions and the means of implementation of the draft Work Programme for 2020-2022.

**Conclusion 32.**

Following the discussions under this agenda item, the Scientific Committee provided comments and contributed to the means of implementation upon budget availability, for the 2020-2022 work programme as appearing in **Annex V** to this report.

## 7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

138. Some experts from southern countries share their difficulty in publishing their results and data. The research projects are well done, the data enough and of quality, the analyses follow standard methodologies and the results robust, but some journals have higher rejection rates and do not publish their papers. Some of them are asking that an "European" name should be added as co-author. NETCCOBAMS be of some help to support our colleagues, as they may find a co-author within the experts of NETCCOBAMS, dealing with the topic of their study. A discussion can also be started in order to provide some support and help in reaching out to a wider range of journals.

## 8. ADOPTION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

**Conclusion 33.**

The Scientific Committee adopted the 8 recommendations annexed to the report:

- Recommendation 12.1: Guidelines for the preparation of regional reports
- Recommendation 12.2: Cetacean population estimates
- Recommendation 12.3: Cetacean interactions with fisheries: bycatch, depredation and prey depletion
- Recommendation 12.4: Anthropogenic noise
- Recommendation 12.5: Ship strikes
- Recommendation 12.6: Commercial whale watching activities
- Recommendation 12.7: Marine debris and stranding
- Recommendation 12.8: Value of the designation of IMMAs and CCH to achieving ACCOBAMS objectives

## 9. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

139. After the customary exchange of courtesies, the Chair closed the Meeting at 15:30 p.m. on Thursday 8th November 2018.

# ANNEXES

**ANNEX I - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

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|---|
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**ANNEX II - AGENDA**

**1. OPENING OF THE MEETING**

**2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

**3. MANAGEMENT ACTIONS**

**3.1** Report of each Regional Representative

**3.2** Reports of projects funded by the 2015 ACCOBAMS call for proposal

**3.3** Evaluation of the effectiveness of the ACCOBAMS Strategy

**4. CONSERVATION ACTIONS**

**4.1** Improve knowledge about state of cetaceans

*4.1.1 Cetacean population estimates and distribution*

*4.1.2 Monitoring cetaceans status*

*4.1.3 Citizen Science*

**4.2** Reduce human pressures on cetaceans, in particular those related to bycatch, habitat loss and degradation (pollution)

*4.2.1 Interactions with fisheries*

*4.2.2 Anthropogenic noise*

*4.2.3 Ship strikes*

*4.2.4 Cetacean watching*

*4.2.5 Marine debris*

*4.2.6 Chemical and biological pollution*

*4.2.7 Species Conservation Plans*

*4.2.8 Captivity related issues*

**4.3** Improve capacities of national organizations and experts

*4.3.1 Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situation*

*4.3.2 Capacity building*

**4.4** Enhance effective conservation of Cetaceans Critical Habitats

**5. COMMUNICATION AND INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES**

**5.1** Information /awareness and communication

**5.2** Cooperation with other organizations

*5.2.1 Collaboration with Sub Regional Coordination Units*

*5.2.2 Collaboration with ACCOBAMS Partners*

*5.2.3 Collaboration with any other Organizations*

**5.3** Selection of priority topics to be selected for the 2018 call of proposals launch

**6. WORKING PROGRAMME OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE FOR THE TRIENNIUM 2020-2022**

**7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**8. ADOPTION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

**9. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING**

**ANNEX III - RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Recommendation 12.1**: Guidelines for the preparation of regional reports
- **Recommendation 12.2:** Cetacean population estimates
- **Recommendation 12.3**: Cetacean interactions with fisheries: bycatch, depredation and prey depletion
- **Recommendation 12.4**: Anthropogenic noise
- **Recommendation 12.5**: Ship strikes
- **Recommendation 12.6**: Commercial whale watching activities
- **Recommendation 12.7**: Marine debris and stranding
- **Recommendation 12.8**: Value of the designation of IMMAs and CCH to achieving ACCOBAMS objectives

**Recommendation 12.1- Guidelines for the preparation of regional reports on the Regional Representative reports**

The Scientific Committee includes four representatives of the ACCOBAMS Regions appointed by the Meeting of the Parties. According to the rules of the Scientific Committee (annexed to the Resolution on the Scientific Committee) each regional representative shall provide a report to the meetings of the Scientific Committee on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in the region he/she has the responsibility of.
In order to ensure harmonization and consistency in the information to be reported, the Scientific Committee stresses that the reports should be prepared bearing in mind that they are aimed at:

- Presenting a global picture of the activities carried out in the region considered
- Identifying hot topics and proposing recommendations
- Informing the Permanent Secretariat about "new" contacts in order to update the list of experts
- Providing information and feedback to national authorities.

For supporting the preparation of the reports, the Scientific Committee **recommends** that each Regional Representative contacts the ACCOBAMS Focal Points from the countries of the region he/she has the responsibility of, the national relevant experts listed by ACCOBAMS Parties (the list of national experts is updated on the occasion of each Meeting of the Parties by the Permanent Secretariat in consultation with the Parties) and ACCOBAMS Partners in order to collect information on the projects carried out in the region, the arising issues and the recommendations proposed. The Regional Representatives should initiate the request for information 2 months before the Meeting of the Scientific Committee.

The Scientific Committee **invites** the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat to provide a letter of support to each Regional Representative to facilitate the collection of information.

The Scientific Committee **recommends** that the Regional Representatives also consider information included in the national reports as well as in NETCCOBAMS to prepare their report.

The Scientific Committee **recommends** the Parties to:

- Contribute to the preparation of the reports of the regional representatives by sharing any relevant information
- Share any relevant data through NETCCOBAMS
- Include as data providers, in the Resolution on Work Program, all national Experts designated by ACCOBAMS Parties.

On a practical point of view:

- The 1st Regional report (to be presented to the first Meeting of the Scientific Committee after the MOP) shall be based on the national reports presented by Parties during the MOP.
- The 2nd Regional report to be presented to the second Meeting of the Scientific Committee after the MOP) shall be based on the 1st Regional Report (presented to the first Meeting of the Scientific Committee after the MOP). It shall be an update in order to assist FP for their future national reports.

**Recommendation 12.2 on cetacean population estimates**

In 2003, the Scientific Committee first drew the attention of the ACCOBAMS Parties to the fundamental importance of obtaining baseline population estimates and distributional information of cetaceans within the Agreement area as soon as possible through a synoptic summer survey. At that time and subsequently, it was stressed that without such information (and a suitable subsequent monitoring programme) it is impossible to *inter alia* (1) determine whether ACCOBAMS is meeting its conservation objectives, (2) properly assess and prioritise risk from potential threats and (3) identify and evaluate appropriate mitigation measures and the associated determination of priority actions. This work was identified as the highest priority for research within the ACCOBAMS area and a number of workshops and iterations of the programme, known as the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI), have taken place.

Thanks to the several resolutions supporting the ASI and great efforts by many people, the ASI was officially launched in November 2016 during the ACCOBAMS Meeting of Parties. The field-work was mainly carried out in summer 2018 and initial data analyses are underway. Not only is the ASI fundamental to allowing ACCOBAMS to meet its objectives and the ACCOBAMS strategy, but the results will also make a fundamental contribution to initiatives outside ACCOBAMS, including for example the MSFD of the European Commission and the EcAp process of the Barcelona Convention, the Aichi targets and UN SDG14.

In this context, the Scientific Committee makes the following additional and/or reiterated recommendations given below.

*A. Administration, funding and communication*

(1) The Scientific Committee **commends** the efforts of:

(a) the Secretariat to secure funding for the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative, and for the implementation of the different activities carried out so far (in particular the macro regional survey conducted in the Mediterranean) and

(b) those Parties who facilitated the issuance of research permits within the Mediterranean in line with the actions presented in the ACCOBAMS work-plan.

(2) The Scientific Committee **recommends** that the Secretariat to continue its fund-raising efforts and **strongly urges** the Parties and others to contribute with financial or in-kind support (including facilitating the issuance of permits) to complete the ASI by implementing it in the remaining area, the Black Sea, as soon as possible.

(3) The Scientific Committee **recommends** that the Parties, Secretariat and Partners continue to actively promote the ASI, underlining its scientific, conservation, capacity building, educational and awareness raising components.

*B. Scientific process, analyses and use in conservation*

(4) The Scientific Committee **stresses** the importance of having standardised protocols for data collection and analysis and thus

(a) **re-endorses** the document 'Monitoring guidelines to assess cetacean's distributional range, population abundance and population demographic characteristics' (Annex xx)

(b) **recommends** that these guidelines be considered as a living document to be reviewed at least every triennium by the Scientific Committee and updated as necessary as methods and technology evolve and

(c) **recommends** that Parties and Range States ensure that any proposed national programmes on the study of abundance and distribution of cetaceans are compatible with the ASI and the guidelines

(5) The Scientific Committee **stresses** that the data collected under the ASI represent an unparalleled conservation resource for the region and thus every effort should be made to ensure that the data are used in the most efficient and robust way for conservation purposes in the Agreement area. To achieve this the Scientific Committee **recommends** that:

(a) in addition to the already agreed analyses of the cetacean data, additional in-depth analyses occur (including analyses of data on non-cetacean species, as well as data on anthropogenic activities including marine debris and acoustic mapping) are undertaken, in collaboration with other stakeholders as relevant;

(b) the Secretariat produces a summary of the available data for the website and develops a system to allow scientists to request the data with the provision of details of the analytical methods proposed for review and approval by the Scientific Committee;

(c) the analyses of the data are then used to develop recommendations to facilitate area- and threat-based conservation efforts to contribute to the objectives of ACCOBAMS and other targets such as the Aichi targets under the CBD framework;

(d) once the cetacean data are analysed, the Scientific Committee focusses on developing a suitable monitoring programme for the ACCOBAMS region to enable trends and potential distributional changes to be identified, and

(e) efforts are made to survey those additional regions that did not receive either aerial or vessel survey effort in 2018.

**Recommendation 12.3 on cetacean interaction with fisheries: bycatch, depredation and prey depletion**

The Scientific Committee **recognises** that that bycatch poses the main threat to cetaceans in the Black Sea and a significant threat also in the Mediterranean Sea, it reiterates that addressing the issue of bycatch requires collaboration with many stakeholders and in particular it encourages co-operation with the IWC (and its Bycatch Mitigation Initiative), CMS, ASCOBANS (through the joint working group) and GFCM and other relevant organisations.

The SC **stresses** the need to produce a realistic estimate of cetacean (and other megafauna species) bycatch for different types of legal fishing activities, for illegal unreported or unregulated (IUU) fishing and ghost net fishing. To undertake this challenging task, the SC recommends the use of a combination of methods, following guidelines included the Manual "Monitoring Incidental Catch of Vulnerable Species in the Mediterranean and Black Sea: Methodology for Data Collection" developed by GFCM in collaboration with other partners. It includes measures/ methods such as:

a. Trained observers on-board fishing vessels.
b. Fishermen interview surveys.
c. Self sampling by the fishermen (training may be necessary for the fishermen in order to collect accurate and robust data).
d. Strandings data collection.
e. Remote electronic monitoring.

In addition to the methods mentioned above to facilitate data collection, it is also suggested to consider how to integrates information from different media sources including social media channels.
A multi-taxa approach is to be followed in collaboration with other relevant national, regional and global initiatives, as well as liaising with other projects running in the region regarding bycatch and depredation (e.g. the MAVA Multi-taxa Bycatch Project).

The issue of cetacean depredation is another issue of importance in the region, given the economic impact that it may pose to local fishing communities. Hence, socio-economic studies on the extent of these interactions are also recommended, in order to elaborate possible compensation and mitigation measures, which may help to prevent retaliation actions by fishermen.

Finally, prey depletion is a potential threat to cetaceans in the region, and also affects the socio economic situation of fishermen. Assessments to evaluate the sustainability of fish stocks, while securing prey availability for cetacean species, should be conducted in parallel to the aforementioned actions by competent bodies such as GFCM and FAO.

SC **recommends** that the Parties make every effort to support global and regional efforts to investigate the most appropriate measures to mitigate bycatch and depredation, and implement them as necessary in close collaboration with the fishing communities and other relevant stakeholders.

**Recommendation 12.4 on anthropogenic noise**

1- The Scientific Committee did endorse the Recommendations developed during a workshop hosted by OceanCare, NRDC and in collaboration and support by the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU) on 22 and 23.November 2017 in Split, Croatia, for mitigating the impact of underwater noise on marine biodiversity in the south eastern European waters in the Mediterranean Sea, as presented in the Annex of ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/Doc17. To achieve consensus for such endorsement, the wish was expressed in context to Recommendation No.11 of the workshop to introduce the statement that "the integrated maps will depict a combination of IMMAs and MPAs and will have an advisory role since the nature in the mandate of the two areas differ. Thus, common ground on spatial and area based management on the integrated map areas could be achieved when we speak of the same nature of areas".

2- The Scientific Committee **reiterates** the threat posed by anthropogenic noise to cetaceans and **recognises** the continuing importance of ACCOBAMS-MOP6/2016/Res.6.17. the importance to further develop together in the next triennium with the JNWG the concept of "quiet zones" as outlined in Recommendation 10.5 of the Scientific Committee with a focus on a quantitative elaboration and evaluation of the scientific evidence for establishing such areas both in space and time.

3- The Scientific Committee therefore **recommends** that a project is undertaken, similar to that recommended for ship strikes and incorporating acoustic data from the ASI and other sources, that overlays acoustic noise mapping (including main shipping lanes and areas close to ports) and cetacean density mapping, to identify priority areas for mitigation, including consideration of the concept of 'quiet areas'. This effort should include consideration of information on impulsive noise (e.g. areas targeted by seismic surveys or military exercises).

4- Given the existing evidence for anthropogenic noise having an adverse on cetaceans, the Scientific Committee **encourages** Parties and other authorities to undertake mitigation actions as soon as possible including:
   - engaging in the development of incentive programmes to promote speed reduction as a measure by vessels to reduce noise and gashouse emission within the ACCOBAMS area;
   - Parties to apply the IMO *Guidelines for the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life* (circular MEPC.1/Circ.833).

5- Regarding the QUIETMED project, the SC **asks** the Secretariat:
   - to inform Parties about the deliverables of the QUIETMED project on guidance for underwater noise monitoring and assessment (http://www.quietmed-project.eu/deliverables/), and to encourage Parties to make relevant stakeholders of the private sector become aware of these developments.
   - to disseminate the results obtained especially on the establishment of an international register for impulsive noise sources in the ACCOBAMS area to Parties and relevant regional organisations, such as the RSC in the Agreement area.

6- Regarding the QUIETMED project, the SC also **encourages** Parties to contribute to the international noise register.

7- The SC **stresses** the importance to develop noise hotspot maps in the Black Sea.

8- The SC **reiterates** the importance for Parties to grant, in priority, permits for activities in their national area to industrial companies employing ACCOBAMS Highly Qualified MMOs/PAM operators.

9- The SC **encourages** the Secretariat and any stakeholder active in the ACCOBAMS region to promote "Tools ensuring Highly Qualified MMOs/PAM operators in the ACCOBAMS Area" to the private sector

10- Regarding PAM techniques, the SC **recommends** the Secretariat:

- to promote the undertaking of a project aimed at building a central repository (such as Netccobams), at the regional scale, as a tool to have an overview of monitoring programs using PAM techniques in marine protected areas and other area designated as important for cetaceans. The objective of this repository would be to monitor the number of PAM-based programs, the location and periods of execution, the objectives of the programs and target species and/or other environmental elements.
- to organise an expert workshop to examine the available PAM techniques and how they can be incorporated most effectively in the ACCOBAMS context with a view on fostering the implementation of PAM-based monitoring programs as a mean of contributing to conservation.

**Recommendation 12.5 - on ship strikes**

The Scientific Committee **reiterates** that the issue of ship strikes, particularly affecting large whales such as fin and sperm whales, remains of concern within the ACCOBAMS region. These concerns span the issues of conservation, animal welfare and human safety.

The Scientific Committee therefore:

(1) **recognises** the present effective collaborative work with the IWC's Scientific and Conservation Committees on this issue and **recommends** that this continues, along with collaboration with CMS, IMO, ASCOBANS and other international Organisations;

(2) **advises** that the only effective measures to avoiding serious injury and death of cetaceans from ship strikes at present are (a) avoidance (including use of shipping lanes or closed areas) by ships of areas/times with high densities of whales, or (b) speed reductions (slowing vessels down to speeds below about 10-12 knots[1]) in high density areas/times;

(3) **advises** that speed restrictions can also reduce underwater noise and greenhouse gas emissions that can assist with meeting other international targets;

(4) **notes** that advice to ACCOBAMS range states on measures to avoid and reduce ship strikes will arise out of several forthcoming activities including (a) the drafting of a CMP for Mediterranean fin whales and (b) the holding of a joint IWC-IUCN-ACCOBAMS workshop on how the data and process used to identify Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) can assist in identifying areas of high risk for ship strikes and (c) the project to develop and evaluate mitigation strategies to reduce the risk of ship strikes to fin and sperm whales in the Pelagos Sanctuary; and any other relevant initiatives, projects and workshops in the ACCOBAMS Area

(5) **encourages** Parties to

(a) take note of the recommendations and advice coming out of the activities noted in (4);

(b) begin to integrate speed reduction of vessels into port policy strategies and within key areas (e.g. Marine Protected Areas, SPAMIs, IMMAs, etc.) at times of the year when large whales might be present;

(c) develop incentive programmes to promote the application of speed and gashouse emission reduction measures by vessels / operators within the ACCOBAMS region;

(d) develop a 'whale safe' certificate to be delivered to shipping companies adopting suggested mitigation measures to reduce ship strike risk;

(e) submit a proposal for Traffic Separation Schemes (TSS) where scientific evidences have demonstrated to be an effective mitigation measure, such as the Hellenic Trench, as recommended by the IWC Scientific Committee, by the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee within Recommendation 10.6 and in Resolution 6.19 adopted by the Parties in 2016; and

(f) support the undertaking of a project within the next triennium identifying areas of potential conflict (CCH) where main shipping lanes / maritime traffic cross sensitive / important habitat for large cetacean species (sperm and fin whales) in the Agreement area following methods developed by the activities referred to under (4).

g) consider other IMO measures to mitigate ship strikes through the ACCOBAMS area.

[1] https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2008-10-10/pdf/E8-24177.pdf

**Recommendation 12.6 on commercial whale watching activities**

The ACCOBAMS region is an important area for a great number of cetacean species, whether as a permanent habitat, a breeding or feeding ground or a migratory corridor. The presence of such a diversity of cetaceans has led, over the past decade, to the development of high number of commercial whale watching (that term is used to include all cetaceans) operators.

Recalling that commercial whale watching activities, if well managed and within a suitable management framework, can foster a valuable educational tool, create direct and indirect economic benefits for many countries and communities and can promote research on cetaceans and their conservation. However, it is also important to underline the potential negative impacts of commercial whale watching activities that have been documented in some cases including both short-term and long-term negative effects on cetaceans such as: changes in their swimming behaviour, fast changes in direction, a decrease in population size, or a movement of cetaceans away from the area targeted for tourism.

In addition, with reference to ACCOBAMS Resolutions 4.7 and 4.18[2], adopted by ACCOBAMS Parties (November 2010), it is also important to recall that harassment risk begins when a vessel is voluntarily closer than the minimum distance identified in common rules for commercial cetaceans watching as such it is obvious that swim-with dolphin activities which implies a proximity of the boat and the animals should be considered as harassment. Moreover, direct interactions between swimmers and animals is demonstrated as presenting risks of animal violent behaviour and transmission of diseases. The Scientific Committee is also concerned by the emergence of some dolphin-feeding mainly proposed during whale watching activities, which could change the behaviour of the animals, favouring confidence and proximity.

In an effort to minimize the risk of negative impacts of cetaceans and to ensure the sustainable development of such commercial activity, effective management strategies need to be reinforced. The Scientific Committee noted that the development of guidance for sustainable whale watching is also priority topic for the IWC and the CMS and as such is an item for further cooperation.

In light of the above, the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee:

- **Welcomes** the online whale watching handbook developed by the IWC with CMS and **recommends** continued co-operation with those bodies on the evaluation of effects of whale watching on cetaceans and the review and update of guidelines for sustainable whale watching;

- **Urges** Parties to ensure the effective implementation of the existing ACCOBAMS Resolutions on whale watching;

- **Recommends** that Parties do not authorise/ grant any exception for direct interactions with cetaceans in particular while carrying out commercial whale watching activities (such as feeding and 'swim-with' cetaceans);

- **Recommends** that the Secretariat, Parties and partners continue to raise awareness and communication about the ACCOBAMS "High Quality Whale Watching ® Certificate (a) with official regional, national and international tourism Organisations; (b) with commercial whale watching operators, stressing the positive impact of the granting of the HQWW Certificate and the long-term benefits both from an economic and ecological sustainability of such commercial activity; (c) with the public at-large to promote awareness about participating only with certified responsible operators.

[2] http://www.accobams.org/documents-resolutions/resolutions/

**Recommendation 12.7 on strandings and marine litter**

Marine debris (or marine litter) pollution is a global environmental concern, with the Mediterranean Sea being heavily affected. It can be a conservation concern for many marine species that may be harmed and/or killed. To help evaluate the actual and potential deleterious effects of marine debris (including entanglement in abandoned, discarded and lost fishing gear (ADLFG) and direct ingestion of both macro- and micro plastics) and other threats to cetaceans, common best practices for strandings have been drafted and discussed by several other Organisations (e.g. IWC, ASCOBANS and ECS).

The IWC has held two Expert Workshops (IWC, 2014 and 2015)[3] one science-oriented and the other policy oriented on this issue. Building upon these, a Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS/SPA-RAC Workshop on marine debris and cetacean stranding was held on 8 April 2018 in La Spezia (Italy) and a joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS workshop will be organised between to harmonize the existing documents before the Seventh Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS.

The Scientific Committee notes that evaluating and addressing threats such as marine debris is a key part of the ACCOBAMS objectives and it is relevant to past decisions related to *inter alia* the ACCOBAMS Conservation Plan, the 2017-2019 work programme and Resolutions 6.22 and 8.10. The Scientific Committee therefore:
(1) **reiterates** the importance of evaluating and addressing issues related to marine debris in the ACCOBAMS region;

(2) **recommends** that the Scientific Committee identifies pilot areas with an existing stranding network where the level 1 basic tiered guidelines on necropsies approach can be adopted and systematically implemented throughout 2019 to gather a *de minimis* set of data including presence/absence of ingested and entangling debris, species, sex and total length of the animals[4];

(3) **endorses** increased international co-operation on this issue with other bodies including those with an emphasis on cetaceans (e.g. IWC, ASCOBANS, ECS) as well as regional initiatives on marine debris (e.g. MSFD, ECAP and EU) and **supports** the proposal for a workshop on Marine Debris organised by IWC, preferably to coincide with the World Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals in Barcelona in December 2019;

(4) **stresses** that a multi-disciplinary approach delivered across different spatial and temporal scales is necessary to tackle the issue effectively and **advises** ACCOBAMS and its Parties to liaise with other relevant bodies, Organisations and initiatives at the Regional scale to:

- support effective means to reduce marine debris in the environment (including voluntary and legislative initiatives to reduce production and consumption of single-use items, and investment in the collection, recycling and sustainable disposal of waste) and

3 International Whaling Commission. 2014. Report of the IWC Scientific Committee Workshop on Marine Debris. Journal of Cetacean Research and Management 15 (suppl.): 521-41.
International Whaling Commission. 2015.
Report of the IWC Workshop on Mitigation and Management of the Threats Posed by Marine Debris to Cetaceans. Report of the 65th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission 2014: 277-305

4 Refer to: R. Puig-Lozano, Y. Bernaldo de Quirós, J. Díaz-Delgado, N. García-Álvarez, E. Sierra, J. De la Fuente, S. Sacchini, CM. Suárez-Santana, D. Zucca, N. Câmara, P. Saavedra, J. Almunia, M.A. Rivero, A. Fernández, M. Arbelo. 2008. Retrospective study of foreign body-associated pathology in stranded cetaceans, Canary Islands (2000–2015). Environmental Pollution 243 Part A: 519-527. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envpol.2018.09.012

- develop an implement educational and public awareness programmes related to marine debris and cetaceans and steps individuals can take to reduce marine debris; and

(5) **recommends** that work is undertaken under the auspices of the Scientific Committee to identify potential hotspot areas for cetacean entanglement and ingestion of marine debris, for example through ecological risk assessment methods or other mapping and modelling approaches.

In addition, recognising the importance of data from strandings in addressing this and other threats, the Scientific Committee:
(1) **endorses** the work and recommendations of ACCOBAMS, ASCOBANS, ECS and IWC towards the identification of standardised best practices and on this matter;

(2) **reiterates** the importance of effective strandings networks throughout the ACCOBAMS region and **encourages** ACCOBAMS and its Parties to assist in establishing or strengthening such networks through co-operation, capacity building and sharing of best practices;

(3) **recommends** the re-establishment of an ACCOBAMS expert panel on strandings to assist with emergencies and unusual mortality events as well as to assist in the establishment and strengthening for regional networks referred to under (2) above;

(4) with respect to data on marine litter in particular, **recommends** that:

- standard post-mortem protocols to support systematic collection of data on marine macrolitter ingestion/entanglement are disseminated throughout the region by the Secretariat;
- all stranding networks adopt at least the basic level of the tiered common best practices on macro-litter to collect *de minimis* information on marine debris;
- ingested and/or entangling marine macrolitter recovered during post-mortem examinations is collected and preserved for further identification analysis including retrospective studies;
- rates of debris ingestion and entanglements in stranded/bycaught cetaceans are collated and submitted via national progress reports and/or other reporting mechanisms;
- increase efforts to quantify the relevant contributions of ADLFG and active gear to cetacean entanglement following the approaches discussed in Bernaldo de Quirós *et al.* (2018)[5];

(5) **recognises** the benefits of a well-documented, searchable database on entities involved in stranding networks, databanks and tissues banks (NETCOBAMS) and calls upon the Scientific Committee and other scientists involved in stranding networks to provide the ACCOBAMS secretariat with relevant information using the templates available on NETCOBAMS; and

(6) **encourages** the development of new tools and the use of existing tools for citizen science participation in the ACCOBAMS Region having a potential for strandings early warning and/or preliminary action (e.g. OBSenMER, WhatsApp groups).

[5] Bernaldo de Quirós *et al.* (2018), Hartwick M, Rotstein D, Garner M, Bogomolni A, Greer W et al. (2018) Discrimination between bycatch and other causes of cetacean and pinniped stranding. Diseases of Aquatic Organisms 127: 83–95.)

**Recommendation 12.8 on the value of the designation of IMMAs and CCH to achieving ACCOBAMS objectives**

*Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs)*

IMMAs, are "discrete portions of habitat, important to marine mammal species, that have the potential to be delineated and managed for conservation", and are an initiative of the Joint IUCN SSC/WCPA Task Force on Marine Mammal Protected Areas (the "Task Force"). Identification is achieved through the application of IMMA criteria covering key biological and ecological considerations for marine mammal species (Tetley et al. 2016). These criteria were created through an expert process with additional public consultation with the wider marine mammal science and conservation community. The Convention on Migratory Species, with Resolution 12.13 adopted at COP12 in Manila in October 2017, acknowledged the IMMA process, and *inter alia* requested Parties and invited Range States to identify specific areas where the identification of IMMAs could be beneficial.

In October 2016, the Task Force joined efforts with ACCOBAMS to identify IMMAs in the Mediterranean Sea, with support from the MAVA Foundation. An expert workshop proposed the identification of 41 candidate IMMAs (cIMMAs), later reduced to 26 IMMAs, 5 cIMMAs and 39 Areas of Interest (AoI) by an independent Review Panel[6].

*Cetacean Critical Habitat (CCH).*

According to the Agreement's Conservation Plan (Annex 2 of the Agreement), Parties shall 'endeavour to establish and manage specially protected areas corresponding to the areas that serve as habitat of cetaceans'. To assist in the meeting of ACCOBAMS objectives, Resolution 3.22 was adopted in 2007 on the need for criteria for the selection of protected areas in the region. The concept of "Critical habitat" is commonly referred to in the context of MPAs. However, in the context of cetacean conservation and management in the ACCOBAMS region, it is important to incorporate within the concept of 'Cetacean Critical Habitat (CCH)', information on actual and/or potential threats at the population level; this will then form the basis for determining appropriate candidates for an MPA or network of MPAs. This can be best addressed on a case-by-case basis in the light of the available scientific knowledge. The spatial modelling approach is a powerful tool in this regard.

Criteria to identify potential sites for ACCOBAMS CCH may include:

- areas used by cetaceans for feeding, breeding, calving, nursing and social behaviour;
- migration routes and corridors and related resting areas;
- areas where there are seasonal concentrations of cetacean species;
- areas of importance to cetacean prey;
- natural processes that support continued productivity of cetacean foraging species (upwellings, fronts, etc.);
- topographic structures favourable for enhancing foraging opportunities for cetacean species (canyons, seamounts).

These criteria can be used to identify potential sites for evaluation of the occurrence of significant interactions between cetaceans and human activities, e.g.:

- reported conflicts between cetaceans and fishing activities (mainly due to depredation when cetaceans are taking fish from fishing gear);
- reported significant/frequent bycatch of cetaceans;
- intensive whale watching or other marine tourism activities occur (i.e. potential for harassment);
- intensive shipping that may lead to ship strikes (and noise);
- military exercises are known to routinely occur that may involve ship strikes and noise); and
- seismic activities are known to occur (primarily noise but the potential for ship strikes).

[6] These IMMAs have now been added to IMMAs from other regions in the world's oceans, accruing within the framework of a global process, and available to users and public scrutiny on the Task Force's website (www.marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-eatlas/).

The Scientific Committee stresses that the two tools are **different** and **complementary**:

| | IMMA | CCH |
|---|---|---|
| **Spatial scale** | Global tool (not Black Sea for the moment) | Regional tool (Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea) |
| **Baseline info given** | Baseline info on marine mammal important areas | Cetacean important areas under threat |
| **Role** | Identify specific areas for marine mammals (biocentric) | Identify issues in specific areas for cetaceans and propose management measures (threat-based) |
| **Species covered** | All marine mammals | Cetaceans |
| **Assessment** | 10 years | 3 years |
| **Link** | The process of identification of CCH uses IMMAs, candidate IMMAs and Areas of Interest where they are in place (along with other baseline data on cetacean distribution, abundance). CCH can be one of the sources for consideration of IMMA identification. | |

The Scientific Committee **recommends** that in providing advice to the Parties under the ongoing ACCOBAMS threat-based management approach, it incorporates the concepts of both IMMAs and CCH. IMMAs provide an initial biocentric process (through the spatial definition of the animals' most important habitats) to be followed by use of the CCH, in which the spatial distribution of threats is identified. Management advice is then based upon an integration of the two approaches and the prioritization of mitigation approaches on a case-specific basis. This will assist in providing the parties with advice on targeted and effective conservation measures (where appropriate on a seasonal basis) including:

- designation of new (or the extension of existing) MPAs with appropriate focused management actions
- zoning within existing MPAs
- corridors between MPAs
- threat-specific mitigation measures for application throughout the region (e.g. shipping or noise guidelines, e.g., through CMS, IMO)
- during marine spatial planning processes.

Using both the IMMA and CCH concept in the ACCOBAMS region will have significant added value, since these two concepts reinforce each other. Indeed, the global scope of IMMAs will help in promoting recognition and visibility at the international level, while CCHs provide a tool to foster the regional commitment and to provide the possibility to revise, on a more frequent basis (every 3 years), the list of areas of special concern for cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS region, as well as supporting the related conservation and management measures.

The Scientific Committee **encourages** Parties to use both tools in order to feed other initiatives in the region.

**ANNEX IV - REVISED DEONTOLOGICAL CODE FOR MEDACES**

The following Deontological Code defines the principles and the norms that all MEDACES contributors are called to observe and fulfil:

- MEDACES is an international scientific service related to research and management for the conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea. With the support of ACCOBAMS and the UNEP-MAP-SPA/RAC, the Database will cover the whole ACCOBAMS area.

- The SPA/RAC, will act as depository and trustee of the database. The SPA/RAC might delegate its management to a public institution of any Mediterranean country.

- The main objective of MEDACES is to gather the basic information of all the cetacean stranding in the Agreement Area.

- The information will be submitted to the database annually by individual contributors or, preferably, through the local stranding networks managers or the National Focal Points of SPA/RAC and ACCOBAMS.

- Each author will have the right to free use of the information submitted by him after submission to the database.

- A report will be periodically published with the information provided to MEDACES, in which all contributors will be listed.

- The public, through an Internet web site, will have access to basic data deposited by researchers of the different states.

- Persons other than contributors will not make use of the data registered to MEDACES for scientific publications, unless permission is given in written by the contributors and MEDACES managers. In order to safeguard the property of the data, MEDACES will record the contributors of every data. If publishing, the acknowledgment of the data providers and MEDACES with explicit quotation in the publication is required.

## ANNEX V - PROPOSED CONSERVATION ACTIONS FOR THE 2020-2022 WORK PROGRAMME

| **CA 1 a** | **Cetacean population estimates and distribution** |
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| **Expected outcomes** | Improved knowledge of cetacean populations in the ACCOBAMS Area<br><br>Global distribution and abundance of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea and Black Seas established, based on results of surveys |

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Action lead by and in cooperation with** | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interpret and Disseminate results / subsequent recommendations of the ASI | Main | **Scientific Committee**<br>**Secretariat**<br>Parties,<br>Non-Party Range States<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Organizing workshops dedicated to ASI data analysis/interpretation (CB)<br>● Publishing a report on the ASI results<br>● Disseminating the ASI results and experience in relevant regional/international fora | |
| Support monitoring at a sub-regional level using the ASI framework (methodology, network,…) | Main | **Secretariat,**<br>**Parties**,<br>**Non-Party Range States,**<br>Scientific Committee<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Organizing coordination meetings at the sub-regional level<br>● Supporting the development of specific collaborations among scientific entities<br>● Supporting implementation of sub regional surveys | |
| Undertake comprehensive survey of abundance and distribution of cetaceans in the Black Sea | Main | **Partners**<br>**Parties**<br>**Non-Party Range States**<br>**Secretariat**<br>Scientific Committee<br>SRCUs | ● Developing Regional project in the BS to raise funds<br>● [Implementing a comprehensive survey of abundance and distribution of cetaceans in the Black Sea] | |
| Promote the use of multidisciplinary surveys (such as fisheries / acoustic surveys), innovative technologies (UAV, satellite) and of platforms of opportunity (ferries, whale watching vessels, navy vessels, etc..) to collect data on cetaceans distribution and abundance | High | **Scientific Committee**<br>**Secretariat**<br>Parties,<br>Non-Party Range States<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Developing guidelines / best practices on the implementation of multidisciplinary surveys and on the use of platform of opportunity and innovative technologies to collect data on cetaceans distribution and abundance | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ● Reviewing the existing surveys/scientific efforts at the national/regional scale that could be used to collect data on distribution and abundance of cetaceans<br>● Collaborating with relevant Organisations, such as ICCAT, to collect data on distribution and abundance of cetaceans | |
| Initiate the establishment of a regional repository for data on cetaceans distribution and abundance based on the conclusion of the ASI preparatory study for an information management system for cetacean survey data | High | **Scientific Committee**<br>**Secretariat**<br>SRCUs<br>Parties,<br>Non-Party Range States<br>Partners | ● Undertaking a feasibility study to support pre-identification of a data repository system | |

| **CA 1 b** | **Population Structure** |
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|---|---|
| **Expected outcomes** | Improved knowledge on population structure in the ACCOBAMS Area<br><br>Exchanges of samples facilitated for joint analysis<br><br>Data exchanges facilitated for basin wide analysis |

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Improve data collection on cetacean populations genetic in the ACCOBAMS Area | High | **Secretariat**<br>**Scientific Committee**<br>**Parties**,<br>Non-Party Range States<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Organizing regional trainings on data collection and analysis (CB)<br><br>● Establishing Guidelines / Best Practices (?) | Add link with CMP (+ open to other sp)<br><br>Add contact with ref laboratories |
| Encourage better **collaboration** between tissue banks to facilitate **exchanges of samples** for joint analysis | High | **Scientific Committee**<br>**Secretariat**<br>Parties,<br>Non-Party Range States<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Supporting the development of specific collaborations among scientific entities | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| Improve photo ID data collection and dissemination | High | **Partners**,<br>**Parties,**<br>**Non-Party Range States**<br>**Scientific Committee**<br>**Secretariat**,<br>SRCUs | ● Entering data in photo ID Catalogues<br>● Using Web based databases<br>● Organizing regional trainings on photo ID Catalogues (CB) | Add also link with CMP (+ open to other sp) |

| **CA 1 c** | **Monitoring cetaceans status** |
|---|---|

| **Expected outcomes** | IUCN threat status of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area is assessed<br><br>ACCOBAMS Status report on the State of Conservation of Cetaceans is updated and made available on IUCN and ACCOBAMS websites |
|---|---|

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assess **IUCN threat status** of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area and update it as relevant | High | **Scientific Committee**<br>Secretariat,<br>Parties,<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Undertaking species assessments<br>● Organising joint ACCOBAMS-IUCN experts workshop(s) | |
| Update ACCOBAMS Status report on the State of Conservation of Cetaceans, using ASI results | High | **Scientific Committee**<br>**Secretariat**,<br>Parties,<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Preparing and publishing an updated ACCOBAMS Status report on the State of Conservation of Cetaceans | |

| **CA 1 d** | **Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situation** |
|---|---|

| **Expected outcomes** | ● Official National Stranding networks are established and operating<br><br>● Information on stranding events regularly exchanged among national networks |
|---|---|

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Set up /Reinforce official national stranding networks (with all national institutions concerned) and encourage collaborations among national networks | Main | **Parties**,<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>**Scientific Committee**,<br>**Secretariat**,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Preparing a study on legal/institutional status of National stranding networks<br>● Organizing trainings on necropsies, live strandings and response to emergency situation in the ACCOBAMS area, and on the use of relevant databases (CB)<br>● [Revising existing Guidelines / Best practices - causes of death]<br>● Entering relevant national data into relevant databases, [such as MEDACES]<br>● Promoting the use of Regional mailing list of experts/stranding authorities | Assisting to establish official national stranding network<br><br>Add reference to Marine Litters<br><br>(last point: database)<br><br>Add a point: encourage the creation of a permanent expert panel on strandings to assist on emergencies and unusual mortality (see recommendation) |

| **CA 2 a** | **Interactions with fisheries / aquaculture** |
|---|---|

| **Expected outcomes** | ● Impacts of cetaceans bycatch and depredation are assessed and reduced<br>● Regional bycatch strategy is developed<br>● Ecotourism activities (whale watching and pescatourism) are proposed as an alternative income source to fishermen impacted by depredation |
|---|---|

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assess / Monitor the impacts of interactions with fisheries/ aquaculture (bycatch, depredation and prey depletion) and propose alternative best practices measures and / or technics | Main | **Parties**<br>**Scientific Committee, through the JBWG**<br>Secretariat,<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Implementing on-board observers programme and port questionnaires, and testing mitigation measures in the countries supported by the MAVA funded projects | Add a point a replicating MAVA projects on interactions with fisheries |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ● Assessing /updating the extent of interactions with fisheries/ aquaculture in other countries, including through the use of stranding data<br>● Collaborating with relevant entities, in particular with GFCM | |
| Develop a regional strategy on bycatch of cetaceans | High | **Scientific Committee, through the JBWG**<br>**Parties**<br>Secretariat,<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Preparing a regional strategy document on cetaceans' bycatch | Add also "depredation", and add all relevant collaborations |
| Provide support to Parties to promote the development of ecotourism activities as an alternative income to fishermen | High | **Scientific Committee, [through the WWWG]**<br>**Parties**<br>Secretariat,<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Developing a Guidance policy document .for the development of sustainable ecotourism and whale watching activities<br>● Supporting the identification of areas for the development of Pescatourism, (ittitourism) / whale watching activities | Provide support to Parties to xxx<br><br>Modify the last point "…the development of ecotourism activities as an alternative income to fishermen" |

| **CA 2 b** | **Anthropogenic underwater noise** |
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| **Expected outcomes** | ● Main anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise are monitored in the ACCOBAMS Area<br><br>● Mitigation measures for anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise are used |

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Encourage the monitoring of anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise | Main | **Scientific Committee including through the JNWG**<br>**Secretariat**,<br>**Parties**<br>Non-Party Range States, | ● Organizing trainings for national entities on noise monitoring (CB), including analyses of PAM collected data in some identified priority areas | Take into account work done by the JNWG<br><br>Add the management of the register on noise |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Revising/completing impulsive noise hotspots maps of the ACCOBAMS area<br>● Revising and updating the ACCOBAMS Guidelines on underwater noise<br>● Developing cooperation on underwater noise issue with other international Organizations | |
| Encourage the use of mitigation measures for anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise | Main | **Scientific Committee including through the JNWG**<br>**Secretariat**,<br>**Parties**<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Promoting the ACCOBAMS Highly qualified MMO/PAM operators certificate<br>● Granting the status of ACCOBAMS HQMMO Partners to entities for the implementation of the Highly qualified MMO/PAM operators certificate<br>● Revising and updating the ACCOBAMS Guidelines on underwater noise<br>● Developing cooperation on underwater noise issues with other International Organizations | "Revising Guidelines" is not appropriate since there is no Guidelines on mitigation measures |

| **CA 2 c** | **Ship strikes** |
|---|---|

| **Expected outcomes** | ● Occurrence of ship strikes in high risk areas is reduced |
|---|---|

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Monitor / assess high-risk areas for ship strikes (CCH) in the Mediterranean Sea | High | **Scientific Committee Secretariat**,<br>Parties,<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Encouraging the entry of ship strikes data in relevant Databases/developing a relevant database<br>● Developing a protocol for investigating and documenting | In the first point, delete "developing a relevant database"<br><br>Add other ongoing activities and projects (see recommendation) |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ship strikes injuries and mortalities<br>● Developing cooperation on ships strike issue with other International Organizations, such IWC, EMSA (EU) / REMPEC / IMO and Pelagos Sanctuary Agreement, to contribute to their initiatives | Add a new point: Identifying high risk areas (CCH) |
| Promote the use of mitigation measures | High | **Secretariat**,<br>**Scientific Committee**<br>Parties,<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Promoting the use of relevant mitigation tools/measures (CB)<br>● [Implementing the certificate… / guidelines…] | Add the follow up of any mitigation measures |

| **CA 2 d** | **Cetacean watching** |
|---|---|

| **Expected outcomes** | ● Cetacean watching activities are properly conducted in the ACCOBAMS Area |
|---|---|

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maximize the chance of detecting potential adverse impacts of whale watching activities on individual cetaceans and on populations | High | **Scientific Committee through the WWWG**<br>Secretariat,<br>**Parties**<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | Gathering information on the development of cetacean watching operators' activity and identifying potential issues in order to identify the hotspots of WW activities in the ACCOBAMS area<br><br>[Providing a definition of the different types of whale watching operators (commercial, research, others)] | Add : Testing the proposed common procedure (data collection system) for whale watching vessels in pilot areas and a variety of operation types (e.g. the Liguro-Provençal Basin, Gibraltar Strait, and south Portugal); in collaboration with relevant projects such as EcoStrim |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Testing the proposed common procedure (data collection system) for whale watching vessels in pilot areas and a variety of operation types (e.g. the Liguro-Provençal Basin, Gibraltar Strait, and south Portugal);<br><br>Revising accordingly, if necessary, the Guidelines<br><br>Working in close cooperation on WW with IWC and other relevant International Organizations | Modify "Revising accordingly, if necessary, the Guidelines" (tourism guidelines / see previous point) |
| Support the implementation of the HQWW certificate in the ACCOBAMS area | High | **Secretariat**,<br>**Partners**<br>Parties<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Scientific Committee<br>SRCUs | ● Promoting the implementation of the HQWW certificate by Parties and in areas -based management measures<br>● Organizing Trainings on HQWW (CB) | ● Modify the first point as follow: Promoting the implementation of the HQWW certificate by Parties and in areas -based management measures, in collaboration with relevant projects such as EcoStrim<br><br>● Regarding HQWW: Liaise with tourism organisations. |

| **CA 2 e** | **Marine debris** |
|---|---|

| **Expected outcomes** | ● The monitoring of marine litter in relation with cetaceans is improved |
|---|---|

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| tor the impacts of marine litter (ingested marine litter / microplastics) on cetaceans | High | **Scientific Committee**<br>**Secretariat**, | ● Supporting pilot actions to implement the standardized | ● Add : Promote/ support/ liaise with projects, researchs |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Parties<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | necropsy protocol including the assessment of ingested marine litter<br>● Organizing a regional training on the methodologies to monitor ecotoxicological impacts of microplastics on cetaceans (CB)<br>● [Developing best practices to assess the impacts of microplastics on cetaceans]<br>● Collaborating with relevant Organizations (MEDPOL) and projects, in particular Medsealitter, Plastic buster, Healthy Sea and Black Sea projects | activities in order to evaluate and assess effects of microplastic<br>● Modify the second point on regional training<br>● Add entanglement with ghost nets (see recommendation)<br>● Add public awareness actions<br>● Contribute to implementation of ML regional action plans for Med & BS including thuouhg the assessment of ingested ML during necropsies<br>● Add databases stranding |

| **CA 2 f** | **Chemical & biological pollution** |
|---|---|

| **Expected outcomes** | ● ACCOBAMS collaborates on this issue with relevant organizations |
|---|---|

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Liaise with relevant other organizations, such as IWC, to assess the impact of chemical & biological pollution (such as pathogens, invasive species) on cetaceans | Medium | **Scientific Committee Secretariat**,<br>Parties<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Developing specific collaboration<br>● Participating in Meetings and Side events | |

| **CA 2 g** | **Climate change** |
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|---|---|
| **Expected outcomes** | ● ACCOBAMS cooperates with regional initiatives on climate change, taking into account cetacean conservation |

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contribute to regional initiatives on climate change | Medium | **Scientific Committee**<br>**Secretariat**,<br>Parties<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Liaising with relevant CMS Working Group<br>● Participating in Meetings and side events | |

| **CA 2 h** | **Species conservation plans** |
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| **Expected outcomes** | ● Regional conservation plan for cetacean is implemented at the national level<br>● Relevant conservation management plans are developed and implemented<br>● National Action Plans are developed and implemented in relevant Countries |

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revise the Regional Conservation Plan for cetacean in Black Sea | Main | **Secretariat**,<br>**SRCUs**<br>**Parties**<br>**Non-Party Range States**<br>Scientific Committee,<br>Partners, | ● Undertaking the revision of the Regional Conservation Plan for cetacean in Black Sea, in collaboration with the BSC | ● Add reference to the IWC CMP |
| Develop/ revise/ implement relevant Conservation Management Plans for cetacean species | Main | **Scientific Committee**<br>**Secretariat**,<br>Parties<br>Non-Party Range States,<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Organizing Experts Workshop(s) to develop/ revise/ conservation Management Plans for cetacean species<br>● Supporting the implementation of relevant actions of the approved Conservation Management Plans for cetacean species | ● Add stakeholders workshop<br>● Take into consideration all national conservation plans<br>● Modify the last point: "Supporting the implementation of relevant actions of the approved Conservation Management |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Plans for cetacean species, with emphasize of coordination actions and organization with stakeholders workshop" |
| Facilitate the Development/ revision/ implementation of National Action Plans for cetaceans | High | **Parties**<br>**Non-Party Range States,**<br>**Secretariat**,<br>**SRCUs**<br>Scientific Committee,<br>Partners | ● Supporting the revision / development of National Action Plans for cetaceans in collaboration with SRCUs and national authorities | |

| **CA 2 i** | **Captivity related issues** |
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| **Expected outcomes** | ● All specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS area are listed<br>● The identification of origin of *Tursiops truncatus ponticus* bred or kept in captivity is done |
|---|---|

| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Identify specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS area, including the case of reintroduction in accordance with the provision of the Resolution 3.20 | High | **Scientific Committee**<br>**Parties**<br>**Non-Party Range States**,<br>Secretariat<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● Updating and completing the overview of specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS area, including the case of reintroduction in accordance with the provision of the Resolution 3.20 | ● Add: Evaluate situation of semi-captivity in ACCOBAMS area and provide Guidelines or reference document |
| Identify origin of cetaceans bred or kept in captivity /Genetic passport for dolphins in captivity / in order to support the implementation of the CITES decisions 17.299 to 17.301 on bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus ponticus*) | High | **Scientific Committee**<br>**Parties**<br>**Non-Party Range States**,<br>Secretariat<br>Partners,<br>SRCUs | ● [developing protocol or methodology for such cases to be followed by relevant authorities]<br>● [supporting the development of a genetic registry for Black Sea bottlenose dolphins by CITES] | |

| **CA 3 a** | **Area-based measures for cetacean conservation** |
|---|---|

| **Expected outcomes** | ● Cetacean Critical Habitats are updated<br>● Implementation of relevant measures are initiated in some pilot CCH |
|---|---|

| Proposed Action(s) | Priority | Lead and in cooperation with | Means of implementation | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regularly update Cetacean Critical Habitats (CCH) including by identify in priority areas for action to mitigate the known threats (bycatch,…) / area-based management measures | Main | **Scientific Committee Secretariat**, **Parties** Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs | ● Gathering data, in particular through the organization of regional workshops to update CCH, taking into account the IMMAs and EBSAs process) | **General comment: modify "spatial" with "area-based"** |
| Support implementation of relevant measures for adequate management in CCH | Main | **Scientific Committee Secretariat**, **Parties** Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs | ● Identifying and promoting relevant management measures in pilot CCH, in collaboration with all stakeholders (CB)<br>● Collaborating with other Organizations, such as UNEP-MAP/RAC-SPA, BSC, IMO, IWC, and GFCM, and in particular through the Strategical alliance | |

| CA 4 a | Information /Communication / Awareness about cetaceans |
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| Expected outcomes | ● All ACCOBAMS Bodies, national focal/contact points, Partners and other relevant national institutions, organisations and experts are familiar with activities implemented by or relevant for ACCOBAMS and share accurately information<br>● General public and other relevant stakeholders are aware about cetaceans and need for their conservation through activities supported by or linked to ACCOBAMS |
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| Proposed Action(s) | Priority | Lead and in cooperation with | Means of implementation | Comments |
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| tain regular information/ communication about ongoing activities, cooperation and funding possibilities, cetacean conservation scientists and experts operating in the region and other relevant information; facilitate communication among cetacean conservation actors of the ACCOBAMS area, in particular in Southern Mediterranean countries | Main | **Secretariat**, **Scientific Committee, Partners, SRCUs,** Parties, Non-Party Range States | ● Developing an information/ communication strategy<br>● Developing Information material and tools<br>● Promoting cetacean conservation actions during national and international events | ● Modify: Promoting the use of the ACCOBAMS **certificate** on "High quality whale watching"<br>● Add: "Reviewing the current citizen sciences initiatives in the ACCOBAMS area and produce basic guidelines on |

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| | | | ● Promoting the use of the "High quality whale watching" certificate by Parties<br>● Organizing a CSMC (CB)<br>● Organizing Public awareness events<br>● Evaluating the relevance of "Citizen Science" input of cetaceans sightings in expert-supervised data<br>● Producing annual newsletter (FINS)<br>● Posting on ACCOBAMS Website and social media<br>● Posting on NETCCOBAMS | the use and how to gather information" |
| nce public awareness about cetaceans conservation in the ACCOBAMS area | Main | **Secretariat**,<br>**Parties**<br>**SRCUs**<br>Non-Party Range States<br>Scientific Committee,<br>Partners | ● Implementing the ACCOBAMS Cetacean Day<br>● Delivering a Partner Award<br>● Producing Press releases<br>● Posting on social media | |

| **CA 4 b** | **Capacity building for cetacean conservation issues** |
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| **Expected outcomes** | ● Capacities of national organisations and experts regarding cetacean conservation in the ACCOBAMS Area are improved |
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| **Proposed Action(s)** | **Priority** | **Lead** and in cooperation with | **Means of implementation** | **Comments** |
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| **Workshops** | Main | **Secretariat**,<br>**Scientific Committee,**<br>**SRCUs,**<br>Partners,<br>Parties,<br>Non-Party Range States | ● Organizing workshops dedicated to ASI data analysis/interpretation (CA1a)<br>● Organising joint ACCOBAMS-IUCN experts workshop(s) to reassess IUCN threat status of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area (CA1c)<br>● Organizing Experts Workshop(s) to develop/ revise/ conservation | |

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| | | | Management Plans for cetacean species (CA2g)<br>● Gathering data, in particular through the organization of regional workshops and trainings to update CCH, taking into account the IMMAs process (CA3a)<br>● Organizing conference such as the Conference for South Mediterranean Countries for the Conservation of Cetaceans (CSMC) (CA4a) | |
| **Trainings** | Main | **Secretariat**,<br>**Scientific Committee,**<br>**Partners,**<br>**SRCUs,**<br>Parties,<br>Non-Party Range States | ● Organizing regional trainings on data collection and analysis (CA1b)<br>● Organizing regional trainings on photo ID Catalogues (CA1b)<br>● Organizing trainings on necropsies, live strandings and response to emergency situation in the ACCOBAMS area, and on the use of relevant databases (CA1d)<br>● Organizing trainings for national entities on noise monitoring (CB), including analyses of PAM collected data in some identified priority areas (CA2b)<br>● Organizing Trainings on HQWW (CA2d)<br>● Organizing a regional training on the methodologies to monitor ecotoxicological impacts of microplastics on cetaceans (CA2e) | ● Modify the point regarding point on regional training on ecotoxicological impacts of microplastics on cetaceans |
| **Technical assistance** | Main | **Secretariat**,<br>**Scientific Committee,**<br>**Partners,**<br>**SRCUs,**<br>Parties,<br>Non-Party Range States | ● Developing a Capacity Building programme<br>● Promoting the ACCOBAMS Highly qualified MMO/PAM operators certificate (CA2b)<br>● Encouraging the entry of ship strikes data in relevant | ● Modify**: "**Encouraging the entry of ship strikes data in relevant Databases (CA2c)" |

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| | | | Databases/developing a relevant database (CA2c)<br>● Promoting the use of relevant mitigation tools/measures (CA2c)<br>● Supporting the implementation of relevant actions of the approved Conservation Management Plans for cetacean species (CA2h)<br>● Supporting the revision / development of National Action Plans for cetaceans in collaboration with SRCUs and national authorities (CA2h)<br>● supporting the development of a genetic registry for Black Sea bottlenose dolphins by CITES (CA2i)<br>● Identifying relevant management measures in pilot CCH, in collaboration with national authorities (CA3a) | |
| **ACCOBAMS teaching module** | Main | **Secretariat**,<br>**SRCUs,**<br>Parties,<br>Partners,<br>Scientific Committee,<br>Non-Party Range States | ● Introducing the Teaching Module in a new country and supporting its dissemination where the module has already been introduced | ● Add information on Sandro initiative |