



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)



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FINAL REPORT OF THE ACCOBAMS/GFCM PROJECT ON MITIGATING THE NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ENDANGERED MARINE SPECIES AND FISHING ACTIVITIES

*Delegates are kindly invited to bring their own documents to the Meeting.
This document will be available only in electronic format during the Meeting.*

FINAL REPORT OF THE ACCOBAMS/GFCM PROJECT ON MITIGATING THE NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ENDANGERED MARINE SPECIES AND FISHING ACTIVITIES

Thanks to the financial support from the MAVA Foundation, the project, “Mitigating interactions between endangered marine species and fishing activities”, covering the period from 2015 to 2018, was launched to improve efforts to conserve endangered marine species listed in Annex II of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol), by promoting responsible fishing practices in selected fisheries in the western and central Mediterranean.

It was coordinated by the Secretariats of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS) and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), in collaboration with the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (UNEP/MAP-SPA/RAC).

The project had two main objectives: 1) to learn more about how endangered marine species were being affected by fishing activities, and how fishers were being affected by incidental catches and depredation; and 2) to promote the introduction of fishing-tourism and opportunistic whale watching, as a way of generating additional income for fishers, reducing the fishing pressure on targeted fish stocks and, potentially, decreasing their negative interactions with endangered species. The third component of the project was aimed at promoting good practices and communicating on the project and the lessons learnt.

The kick-off meeting was organized on 7 and 8 April 2015 in Tunis (Tunisia) and the closure workshop was organized on 20 March 2018 in Fuengirola (Spain). Both reports can be found on the [ACCOBAMS website](#).

A. Improving the knowledge on interactions between endangered marine species and fisheries activities - Main outcomes of the project first component

Based on a participatory approach implemented by the national partners with fishers, eight pilot actions were implemented in Algeria, France, Morocco, Spain and Tunisia. Each pilot action had a specific objective, and all were aimed at better understanding the interactions between endangered marine species and fisheries. The information gathered through these actions was intended to provide insight into how to approach the issue. After a preliminary phase during which data were collected and the main issues were identified, possible fisheries mitigation measures were implemented to reduce the incidental catch of endangered marine species and to decrease depredation in a number of fisheries.

Given the limited resources allocated to each pilot action in this project, it was not possible to implement equal monitoring efforts across the different pilot actions. The results obtained and presented in each summary, therefore, cannot be compared from one context to another. Yet, for some of the national partners involved, these pilot actions represent a first attempt to establish a cooperative framework between researchers and fishers to better understand and to assess the interactions between endangered marine species and fisheries. All of which contributed to building a regional network of expertise and to supporting the development of future activities.

The eight pilot actions were addressing:

1. Interactions between killer whales and bluefin tuna artisanal fisheries in the Strait of Gibraltar, coordinated by the National Institute for Fisheries Research (INRH) and the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO);
2. Interactions between endangered species and swordfish longline fisheries in southern Spain, coordinated by the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO);
3. Interactions between pelagic longline and gillnet fisheries and sea turtles around the Balearic Islands, coordinated by Alnitak Marine Research and Education Center;
4. Interactions between longline and gillnet fisheries and sea turtles in southern France coordinated by the Center for Research and Conservation of Mediterranean Sea Turtles (CESTMed);

5. Dolphin and seabird interactions with purse seine small-pelagic fisheries in Kelibia, coordinated by the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technologies (INSTM);
6. Interactions between bottom and surface longline fisheries and endangered species in the Gulf of Gabès, coordinated by the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technologies (INSTM);
7. Preliminary study of the interactions between cetaceans and artisanal fisheries in Algeria, coordinated by the National Centre for Research and Development of Fisheries and Aquaculture (CNRDPA);
8. Dolphin interactions with purse seine sardine fisheries in the Moroccan Mediterranean, coordinated by the National Institute for Fisheries Research (INRH).

The reports of the pilot actions are presented in document ACCOBAMS-MOP7/2019/Inf17.

In addition to these practical case studies, bibliographic reviews were produced:

- A review of bycatch rates of endangered species in the Mediterranean and Black Sea: the aim of this document is to present, by GFCM geographical sub-area (GSA), the most significant results of studies published on cetacean bycatch in Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries. The catch per unit effort (CPUE), the mortality rate and the estimated number caught annually are the main parameters used to evaluate and compare the impact of different fishing techniques on the protected species. The cetacean part of this review is presented as document ACCOBAMS-MOP7/2019/Doc29;
- A review of fisheries bycatch mitigation measures: this review is aimed at compiling information on mitigation solutions and technics tested worldwide for the most impacting fisheries (static nets, longlines, trawls and purse seines), for each taxa of vulnerable species impacted by bycatch (or involved in depredation). This report is currently being edited by GFCM in view of its publication in the GFCM Studies and Reviews series (in English and In French). The version of this report presented at the Seventh Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS (ACCOBAMS-MOP7/2019/Doc30) is before scientific editing and complete revision (currently ongoing). The final version will be published on the ACCOBAMS and GFCM websites as soon as available.

B. Promoting the introduction of fishing-tourism and opportunistic whale watching - Main outcomes of the project second component

In areas where fish stocks are overexploited and where there are issues with dolphins and depredation in fishing nets, such as in Morocco and Tunisia, ecotourism could help artisanal fishers to generate complementary and alternative incomes, and it could reduce the pressure on marine resources and risks to endangered species. Activities that aimed to support the development of fishing-tourism and whale watching, building upon the link between traditional fishing and observation of marine fauna, considering fishers as “ambassadors” of the seas, were developed in Morocco and Tunisia.

The purpose of the activities of this component was to improve the conditions for the development of fishing tourism/whale watching activities, and to demonstrate, through demonstration projects, that these activities could generate complementary and alternative income for fishers, reducing in parallel the pressure on marine resources and risks to endangered species.

In both countries, the implementation of the activities was overviewed by a national Steering Committee consisting of representatives of the relevant ministries and public institutions (primarily maritime transport, tourism, environment, fisheries and defense) in order to ensure that all national authorities concerned by tourism transport at sea were involved.

Legal and institutional analysis relating to the maritime transport of passengers / tourists were carried out in both countries by national legal experts. The objective was to identify gaps and constraints that may limit the development of ecotourism activities at sea, including the issues related to licensing and insurance.

A training workshop "Towards the development of sustainable whale watching and pescaturism activities" was then organized in both countries (in Tunisia on 14-15 March 2017 and in Morocco on 18-19 January 2018). Legal and institutional issues to be considered for fishing-tourism and sustainable whale watching activities, and standards to prevent disruption and harassment of the animals, in particular the High-Quality Whale Watching Certificate, were presented on these occasions. The workshops were moderated by two international experts. Around thirty participants attended each workshop, including members of the Steering Committee, representatives of the national administrations concerned by tourism activities at sea as well as private operators associated with the project.

Study visits for Moroccan and Tunisian delegations were organized to discover fishing-tourism and whale-watching activities in France and Italy and to learn from the experiences of professional operators. For the Tunisian delegation, the exchange visit took place on 11-15 September 2017 and for the Moroccan delegation it took place on 16-20 April 2018.

Demonstration projects were carried out in both countries to demonstrate the feasibility of ecotourism activities in close coordination with fishers' organizations, national authorities, and local non-governmental organizations. These pilot projects were carried out in regions identified in consultation with the national authorities.

C. Promoting good practices and communicating on the project and lessons learnt - Main outcomes of the project third component

❖ Training workshop on technical measures to mitigate interactions of endangered species with fisheries and to reduce post-capture mortality

A Training workshop on technical measures to mitigate interactions of endangered species with fisheries and to reduce post-capture mortality was organized on 14-16 September 2015 in Barcelona (Spain).

The aim of this workshop was to provide the national coordinators of the pilot actions with a background on experiences with bycatch mitigation technics and veterinary issues occurring with marine animals entangled in fishing nets. In particular, the first day of the workshop was dedicated to *Mitigation measures tested and adopted in fisheries worldwide and in Mediterranean waters* and the second day was dedicated to *On-board good practices for reducing post capture mortality*.

The workshop was attended by the ACCOBAMS and GFCM Secretariats, a RAC/SPA representative, the national coordinators, the experts of the technical assistance and by invited speakers (from CRAM, IFREMER, University of Barcelona, CNR-ISMAR, SEO/BirdLife, Oceanogràfic de València and SUBMON) who presented their work and shared their knowledge on mitigation of bycatch/depredation as well as on reducing post-capture mortality of animals. The workshop was chaired by Martin Hall, Head of Bycatch and International Dolphin Conservation Programs of Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). The workshop was organized in the CRAM rescue center of Barcelona; the participants had the opportunity to speak with the CRAM staff and visit their facility aimed at hosting marine animals.

The report of this training workshop is available on the [ACCOBAMS website](#).

❖ Preparation of awareness raising material for fishers

Illustrated and water-proof good practice guides for handling sea turtles, seabirds, pelagic sharks and rays, and cetaceans caught incidentally in Mediterranean fisheries were produced in both English and French (FAO and ACCOBAMS, 2018). These guides were specifically designed for fishers and illustrate simple techniques to release these animals from fishing gear and to handle them once onboard the fishing vessel. They also include illustrations to identify the species and guidelines to register properly the incidental catches on the logbooks.

These guides are presented in document ACCOBAMS-MOP7/2019/Inf16.

❖ Presentation of the project activities and results

The project was presented on several occasions, in different fora. In particular, the results of some of the pilot actions were presented during the Forum on Fisheries Science in the Mediterranean and Black Sea organized by GFCM between 10 and 14 December 2018 at FAO Headquarters, in Rome (Italy).

A brochure presenting the main outcomes was also prepared.