
Document : ACCOBAMS-SC13/2020/Inf 18
Distribution : 14/02/2020

SUMMARIES OF THE PROJECTS SELECTED UNDER THE 2018 ACCOBAMS CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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Background

At their First Meeting (Monaco, 28 February – 2 March 2002), and as provided by Article IX, para. 3 of the Agreement, the Parties to ACCOBAMS established a Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund (SCF) from voluntary contributions of Parties or from any other source in order to increase the funds available for monitoring, research, training and projects relating to the conservation of cetaceans.

The SCF became operational as of the Second Meeting of the Parties (Palma de Mallorca, Spain, 9-12 November 2004) and had since then a significant role in supporting ACCOBAMS conservation initiatives in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

Since 2011, projects to be funded under the SCF are selected through calls for proposals launched by the Secretariat in consultation with the Bureau of the Parties, and following the scientific evaluation made by the Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS.

In 2013, at their Fifth Meeting (Tangier, 5-8 November 2013), the Parties to ACCOBAMS adopted the [Resolution 5.5](#) on the Procedure for the ACCOBAMS calls for proposals for projects to be funded under the Supplementary Conservation Fund.

As provided by Resolution 5.5, the goals and objectives of the SCF are as follows:

- to catalyse the development and implementation of concerted or cooperative actions that should clearly contribute to the implementation of the Agreement and the priorities adopted by the Parties;
- to support applied conservation projects;
- to provide seed money to initiate long-term projects that have a multiplying impact well beyond the funding period;
- to stimulate dialogue and cooperation at the local and regional level in order to improve the conservation status of the cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area;
- to assist in development of capacities to conserve cetaceans and their habitats;
- to raise awareness of the conservation and management needs of cetaceans and their habitats;
- to make relatively small funds available to communities and other conservation stakeholders with limited access to alternative funding sources.

2018 ACCOBAMS call for proposals

During its Twelfth Meeting (Monaco, 3-4 December 2018), the Bureau approved the launch of a new round of call for proposals in 2018 for three projects.

In view of supporting the implementation of the 2017-2019 ACCOBAMS Program of Work, the projects proposed under this call for proposals should address one of the following priority topics:

- 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.

In addition, considering the high priority given by the Parties during the Regional Workshops organized in May 2018 to support capacity building activities, the projects proposed under this call had to also include activities contributing to increase expertise of national experts/scientists from the countries where the proposed projects are to be implemented.

On 19 December 2018, the Permanent Secretariat informed the ACCOBAMS Focal Points, the Members of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, the ACCOBAMS Partners and other relevant Organisations, about the launch of the 2018 call for proposals.

Due to administrative constraints encountered by some proponents, the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat postponed the initial deadline (4 March 2019) for submitting the project proposals to 18 March 2019.

During this round, the Permanent Secretariat received eight project proposals. In accordance with the selection procedure, the eligibility of the proposals was checked by the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat and the projects proposals were sent to the Scientific Committee for evaluation.

During the Fourth Meeting of the Extended Bureau (Monaco, 18-19 April 2019), the Bureau considered the project proposals and their evaluation by the Scientific Committee and decided on the following three projects to be financially supported by the ACCOBAMS SCF:

1. *“Establishment of a new operational cetacean stranding network in Algeria”* coordinated by the National Centre for Research and Development of Fisheries and Aquaculture (Algeria).
2. *“Monitoring and mitigation of cetacean bycatch in Bulgarian waters”* coordinated by Green Balkans (Bulgaria)
3. *“Establishing the bank of cetacean tissue samples in Ukraine”* coordinated by the I.I. Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Ukraine)

Summaries of these projects are presented hereafter.

Establishment of a new operational cetacean stranding network in Algeria

Country: Algeria

Beneficiary: National Centre for Research and Development of Fisheries and Aquaculture (CNRDPA)

Total cost of the project: 14.700 Euros

SCF contribution: 14.700 Euros

Duration: 18 months

PROJECT SUMMARY

The monitoring of cetacean strandings contribute to improve the knowledge on the different species and the causes of their strandings. For several years, various Algerian institutions promote efforts to collect data during stranding events, but the information collected is not always complete and some areas are better covered than others.

For this purpose an operational network will have to be set up thanks to the collaboration between researchers (CNRDPA, Universities), administrations (DPRH, DEW, CNL), local authorities, services in charge of the coasts surveillance and safety monitoring (coast guards, gendarmerie, police, civil protection), and civil society, in order to better organize data collection in a standardized way and to centralize it by pooling efforts along the Algerian coast.

Awareness-raising and consultation will have to be done to organize and define the conditions of intervention of the different stakeholders and authorities involved. The network will have then to be structured and to be established with a regulatory basis (official decision).

Building capacity of the various stakeholders is necessary to establish a coordinated and operational stranding network. Scientists (biologists and veterinarians) will need training on necropsy protocol and tissue sampling. This training could be provided by an international expert who could be assisted by national experts.

In the field, the work will consist in the taxonomic identification, the collection of biometric data and the realization of necropsies to carry out macroscopic examinations that could support the identification of the causes of the different strandings (ingestion of waste, pathology, collision, ...). Tissue sampling can be made and correctly preserved. Even if it will not be simple to carry out toxicological, histological and / or genetic analyzes immediately (exp: DNA barcoding necessary for the identification of degraded individuals), a tissue and DNA bank could be set up to store the information.

The collected data will be reported in a centralized Excel database that will be integrated into a geodatabase under QGIS. Analyses and interpretations could be then performed on time series.

Monitoring and mitigation of cetacean bycatch in Bulgarian waters

Country: Bulgaria

Beneficiary: Green Balkans NGO

Total cost of the project: 24.760 Euros

SCF contribution: 14.260 Euros

Duration: 12 months

PROJECT SUMMARY

This project's main goal is to continue tests of pingers as mitigation measures for lowering levels of cetacean bycatch in turbot fishery that is considered most important threat to Black Sea Harbour Porpoise (Endangered subspecies in IUCN Red List). The on-board monitoring during setting and hauling of nets will assure appropriate pingers' use and on the other hand will provide opportunity for samples collection from bycaught animals that will be examined for parasites and marine debris. The project is in compliance with CA 2a Interaction with fisheries of ACCOBAMS Work program 2017-2019 adopted with Resolution 6.5.

Typical turbot fishing is made in two period: spring – before fishing ban and in summer after the ban. Monitoring of bycatch during turbot fishery will be continued thus building on data collected in 2019. Testing of pingers will continue to assess their effect on bycatch. That will require delivery of pinger on-time for preparation of nets. New models of pingers will be tested to compare results with tests in 2019. Bycaught cetaceans will be necropsied and samples will be collected for health studies by vet expert. Stomach content will be studied for traces of marine debris.

Establishing the bank of cetacean tissue samples in Ukraine

Country: Ukraine

Beneficiary: I.I. Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine

Partner: Ukrainian Scientific Center of Ecology of Sea (UkrSCES)

Total cost of the project: 15.000 Euros (plus in-kind contribution)

SCF contribution: 15.000 Euros

Duration: 18 months

PROJECT SUMMARY

The project is conducted by the I.I. Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, in Kyiv, with the expert support of the Ukrainian Scientific Center of Ecology of the Sea (UkrSCES) in Odesa. The project is primarily focused on the Ukrainian coast and coastal waters of the northern Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and the newly established tissue bank will be focused on the Black Sea cetaceans: the harbour porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*, the bottlenose dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* and the common dolphin *Delphinus delphis*. The tissue bank will be open for hosting the samples from other countries upon the request of collecting institutions operating in the region, in compliance to the CITES provisions.

The objectives of the project are:

- a) establishing the national tissue bank of cetacean samples, the first Ukrainian facility of this type for wild animals;
- b) starting collection and archiving of cetacean tissue samples obtained from strandings, bycatch, biopsy, environment sampling and captivity.

The project is directly implementing the ACCOBAMS Conservation Plan for Black Sea cetaceans (Resolution 3.11), especially activities 15c, 15d and 16a. The project is particularly focused on implementation of the Activity 15c "Establishing Black Sea cetacean tissue bank(s) accumulating samples from stranded and bycaught cetaceans", filling the gap in this provision. The project is also directly implementing the Resolution 3.9 (Guidelines for the establishment of a system of tissue banks). In addition, it relates to the CITES CoP 17 Doc. 41 (Identification of origin of cetaceans bred or kept in captivity).

Following the provisions of the Resolution 3.9, the national cetacean tissue bank is launched within the oldest, well established non-profit zoological research institution in the country holding museum collections specially protected by national law. It is contributed by the old collections preserved in the institute.

The project is scheduled from July 1, 2019, to December 31, 2020. Project activities include purchase and mounting of equipment, including the freezer of large capacity supporting -80°C regime needed for adequate storage of RNA samples and the emergency power supply unit; development of the Action Plan for the Ukrainian Tissue Bank; promoting the new facility and contribution to it with networking with other tissue banks and relevant institutions; capacity building focusing on the coastal regions; enhancing reporting of strandings; collecting and archiving the samples from dead animals, environmental samples, samples provided by authorities and offered by other facilities; compiling and presenting the catalogue, database and reporting.

At present, the purchase of the freezing and power supply unit is in progress; stakeholders are contacted and aware of the new facility; the relevant student projects started; volunteers are called for reporting, and the citizen science campaign started for timely informing the researchers and civil services; the Mediterranean Tissue Bank is networked for sharing expertise and cooperative action; the draft agreement for sample providers is prepared and sent to relevant institutions; the old samples are consolidated, specifically labelled and catalogized; the electronic dataset is in progress, and the information facilities are contacted for presenting the data online.