

REPORT OF THE BUREAU

During the 2020-2022 triennium the composition of the Bureau was as follows:

- Chairperson: Mr. Fahrettin ULU (Türkiye);
- Vice-Chairperson: Mr. Gaby KHALAF (Lebanon);
- Vice-Chairperson: Mr. Duncan BORG (Malta) replaced by Ms. Marie-Therese GAMBIN since June 2021;
- Vice-Chairperson: Mr. Abdelali LOUDRHIRI (Morocco);
- Vice-Chairperson: Ms. Elvira GARCIA-BELLIDO CAPDEVILA (Spain).

Three Meetings of the Bureau were held during the 2020-2022 triennium, of which the first two were organized online due to the COVID-19 pandemic and followed specific procedures agreed by the Bureau Members:

- The Thirteenth Bureau Meeting (BU13, Online, 9-11 December 2020),
- The Fourteenth Bureau Meeting (BU14, Online, 18-19 January 2022),
- The Fifth Meeting of the Extended Bureau (BUEXT5, Monaco, 26-27 April 2022).

In addition, and in accordance with the Recruitment procedure for the Executive Secretary foreseen in Resolution 7.3, the Bureau acted as Recruitment Committee and met on 10 February 2020 to interview the shortlisted candidates for the position of Executive Secretary. On 7 April 2021 an online Extraordinary Meeting of the Bureau was organized to assess the effectiveness of the first (probation) year of the Executive Secretary appointed in 2020, which was followed by a favourable *advice issued by the Bureau on the continuation of her mandate*. A letter from the ACCOBAMS Chair was circulated to the National Focal Points on the 9th April 2021.

On 1st September 2022 another online Extraordinary Meeting of the Bureau was devoted to a decision-taking on the projects to be selected for funding under the 2022 ACCOBAMS Call for proposals.

All the Meetings of the Bureau were attended by the Bureau Members, as well as by the Advisor to the Bureau Chair (Mr. Aybars ALTIPARMAK), the Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (Mr. Simone PANIGADA) and by members and experts working with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat.

The Fifth Meeting of the Extended Bureau was also attended by:

- A Country representative: Mrs. Céline IMPAGLIAZZO (Monaco);
- Three experts nominated by the Bureau Members - Ms. Mihaela CANDEA, Mr. Alain JEUDY DE GRISSAC and Ms. Ana ŠTRBENAC;
- The representatives from Sub-Regional Coordinating Units - Ms. Lobna BEN NAKHLA (SPA/RAC) and Ms. Iryna MAKARENKO (BSC).

A report was prepared by the Secretariat after each Meeting. All three reports are presented to the Eighth Meeting of the Parties as reference documents:

- ACCOBAMS-BU13/2020/Doc25,
- ACCOBAMS-BU14/2022/Doc20, and
- ACCOBAMS-BUEXT5/2022/Doc11.

The purpose of the present report is to provide an overview on the main issues addressed by the Bureau during the 2020-2022 triennium.

I. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

1) Recruitment of the new Executive Secretary

Following the adoption of Resolution 7.3 by the Seventh Meeting of the Parties in November 2019, and considering Ms. Florence DESCROIX-COMANDUCCI end of mandate, in December 2019 the Secretariat published on the ACCOBAMS website the vacancy notice for the Executive Secretary, in English and French, upon request of the President of the 2017-2019 Bureau.

Five candidates were selected and invited for a face-to-face interview at the ACCOBAMS Secretariat on 10 February 2020. Acting as Recruitment Committee, the Bureau selected Mrs. Susana SALVADOR for the position of ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary and she was recruited on 12 April 2020.

According to Resolution 7.3, the Executive Secretary is recruited for a period of six (6) years, including the first year on probation. Before the end of the first year, the Bureau prepares an assessment of the effectiveness of the person concerned, in order to issue an advice on the continuation of the mandate. The term of office of six (6) years may be extended for a period of three (3) years.

During BU13, the Bureau agreed to hold a meeting to evaluate the effectiveness of the Executive Secretary before the end of her first year in post. The Bureau members thus met online on 7 April 2021.

A favorable decision regarding Mrs. Susana SALVADOR continuation in post was delivered by the Bureau, based on her recognized competence and high sense of responsibility, as well as on her outstanding capacity in leading an international Secretariat with all it embraces, notably the financial management of the budget allocated by the Parties, the Secretariat human resources, and the ACCOBAMS Program of Work.

2) Budgetary matters

Report on incomes and expenditures:

The Secretariat regularly informed the Bureau about the Trust Fund and the Supplementary Conservation Grant Fund. In accordance with Resolution 7.6, reports on incomes and expenditures were presented for 2019, 2020 and 2021.

The Bureau approved the 2019, 2020 and 2021 accounts that had been properly validated, and commended:

- the financial supports provided by some countries through voluntary contributions offered during the triennium (Italy, Malta and Monaco),
- the work of the Secretariat to develop projects and activities supported through co-funding (EU- and MAVA-funded projects, collaboration with IUCN).

At BU13 and BU14, the Secretariat presented a list of proposed activities with estimated expenditures (respectively for 2021 and 2022), in accordance with the Work Programme adopted by Parties through Resolution 7.6, taking into consideration relevant budgetary implications. The Bureau agreed with the proposed activities for 2021 and 2022 and the estimated expenditures while encouraging the Secretariat to continue monitoring opportunities for funding and to develop proposals for multilateral projects and co-funded activities.

Unpaid contributions:

At each meeting the Bureau addressed the issue of unpaid contributions and requested the Secretariat to send a reminder to the Parties concerned urging them to swiftly fulfil their obligations towards the ACCOBAMS Trust Fund, in order to enable the implementation of activities relevant to the Agreement before MOP8. In particular, the Bureau advised the Secretariat to contact the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Countries with more than 3 unpaid annual contributions.

Creation of an intersessional Working Group on budgetary provisions:

In accordance with para. 15 of Resolution 7.6, BU13 reviewed the Terms of Reference for an intersessional Working Group to elaborate a proposal of revision of budgetary provisions, such as, but not limited to, the methodology for the calculation of Ordinary Contributions, the modalities of eligibility for funding to attend ACCOBAMS institutional meetings and the different kinds of funds. These Terms of Reference as reviewed by the Bureau Members were circulated to all National Focal Points on 1st February 2021, but no Party has designated a representative.

2022 ACCOBAMS Call for proposals:

In accordance with BU14 decision, a new ACCOBAMS Call for proposals for projects to be funded under the Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund was launched by the Secretariat in February 2022 thanks to voluntary contributions perceived from Italy and Monaco. During BUEXT5, Bureau Members agreed on a temporary modification of the eligibility rule, so to allow organizations from eligible countries having amongst their employees or board one or more members of the Bureau of the Parties or of the Scientific Committee, to submit proposals in the framework of the 2022 ACCOBAMS Call for proposals. The Bureau also agreed to postpone the deadline of the 2022 ACCOBAMS Call for Projects by one month (until end of May 2022).

In September 2022 a dedicated online meeting of the Bureau was held in order to select the projects to be funded.

Lastly, the Bureau invited the Secretariat to revise the Procedure on ACCOBAMS Calls for proposals for projects to be funded under the Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund, in order to cover gaps and weaknesses encountered during the 2022 Call for proposals, in particular:

- the question posed by eligibility criteria posed to organizations having among their employees or board, one or more members of the Scientific Committee or of the Bureau of the Parties,
- the letter of endorsement on project proposals to be signed by the respective National Focal Point.

The Bureau invited the Secretariat to include a proposal on a revised Procedure in a draft Resolution to be presented to the MOP8.

3) Communication Strategy

In accordance with Resolutions 7.4 and 7.5, as provided by the 2020-2022 Programme of Work, and in consultation with the Bureau a specialized company was recruited in 2020 to develop the draft ACCOBAMS Communication Strategy in view of its presentation for adoption at MOP8.

During BU13, the Bureau agreed to create a Steering Group to liaise with the Secretariat and the company during the drafting of the Communication Strategy and requested the Secretariat to provide all the National Focal Points with this information.

A Diagnostic Report on the examination of the communication tools currently used by ACCOBAMS was presented to BU14.

BU14 appreciated the work undertaken by the company and underlined the importance of having a Communication Strategy and of promoting ACCOBAMS as a brand, in particular to support future fundraising efforts. The Meeting requested the Secretariat to finalise the draft Communication Strategy and to include it in the related draft Resolutions to be submitted to MOP8.

During BUEXT5, recognizing the need to strengthen the ACCOBAMS brand positioning, the Bureau agreed that it would be beneficial to have all conditions in place for an efficient implementation of the Communication Strategy during the next triennium. With that in mind and considering the recommendation by the company to refresh the visual image of the ACCOBAMS brand before launching the implementation of the Communication Strategy in 2023, the Bureau mandated the Secretariat to work on proposals for a new or a modernized *logo* to be submitted for the consideration and decision by MOP8, through a corresponding draft Resolution.

4) NETCCOBAMS

During the 2020-2022 triennium, the Bureau was informed of the progress in the development of the new version of the NETCCOBAMS platform (i) by updating and improving the previous versions of the NETCCOBAMS platform and (ii) by tackling the willingness expressed by the Secretariat to experiment best available science and new technologies to collect, analyze, and model data on cetaceans, as well as on acoustic risk areas, in order to support the threat-based management approach and to implement all relevant conservation measures promoted by ACCOBAMS.

The Bureau welcomed the progress in the development of NETCCOBAMS and requested some adjustments, such as adding projects and a template to be used for national reporting. During BU14, the Bureau requested the Secretariat to provide all National Focal Points with their password and invite them to fill in their National Reports for MOP8 before the end of July 2022.

The Bureau invited the Secretariat to prepare a draft Resolution on NETCCOBAMS to be submitted to MOP8.

5) ACCOBAMS Partners

At each Bureau Meeting the Secretariat presented the requests received for ACCOBAMS partnership.

During the triennium 2020-2022, the Bureau granted the status of ACCOBAMS Partner to 5 organizations:

- The International Association of Oil and Gas Producers (IOGP)
- The Save the Med Foundation
- The NGO KYMA Sea conservation & research
- The Museu da Baleia da Madeira
- The Yacht Club of Monaco (YCM).

The Bureau decided to postpone its decision concerning Delta Association awaiting the advice from the National Focal Point of Italy.

The Bureau also considered the question of reporting obligations by Partners, as provided in Annex 2 (Rules and Commitments of ACCOBAMS Partners) of Resolution 7.9 adopted during the MOP7 - *“ACCOBAMS Partners shall present, at the latest two months after each Meeting of the Parties, a programme of collaboration with the Permanent*

Secretariat during the triennium. The programme shall include all activities carried out in the frame of the partnership and related to the conservation plan and the support to the Permanent Secretariat”.

In total, 23 Partners out of 50 provided their collaboration programmes for the 2020-2022 triennium. While highlighting the importance of collaboration with Partners, the Bureau requested the Secretariat to prepare a list of ACCOBAMS Partners reflecting their reporting contributions to ACCOBAMS.

The state of collaboration of ACCOBAMS Partners was presented to Bureau Members during BUEXT5. It appeared that 8 Partners have neither provided any documental information (programmes of activities or reports of collaboration) nor got involved in any ACCOBAMS activities.

While recalling that the status of ACCOBAMS Partner may be withdrawn at any time following a decision by the ACCOBAMS Bureau, and based on the information provided by the Secretariat, the Bureau mandated the Secretariat to address an official letter to the 8 concerned ACCOBAMS Partners in order to remind them of the applicable rules and commitments, and to warn them about the likely withdrawal of their current status of ACCOBAMS Partner.

Considering the different issues raised in addressing this issue, the Bureau also invited the Secretariat to develop a strategy on the ACCOBAMS Partnership status, as part of the 2023-2025 ACCOBAMS Work Programme.

6) Driftnets

In view of the frequent events of whale entanglements in illegal driftnets that have occurred in recent years in the Mediterranean Sea, efforts have been made by the Bureau to address this issue throughout the triennium.

At BU13, the Bureau underscored that illegal driftnetting was a major issue for the conservation of cetaceans and for ACCOBAMS and mandated the Secretariat to send a letter to all Parties in order to raise attention on this issue. The Parties were thus invited to officially notify the Secretariat of every entanglement occurrence due to illegal driftnets and to inform about existing legal instruments and measures conceived to nationally enforce the ACCOBAMS provisions on the issue.

At BU14, a review of relevant treaties and national legislation was presented to Bureau Members, based on information provided by the ACCOBAMS Parties that had responded to the consultation launched in March 2021.

The Bureau Members noted the information provided and expressed concern about the few replies received from countries on their implementation of the ACCOBAMS driftnet ban. In order to get additional feedback on such important issue, the Bureau requested the Secretariat to get in touch with the countries that have not yet replied, including through direct contacts - phone calls - with National Focal Points and/or through official contacts with Ministries of Foreign Affairs, as appropriate, so that the Legal Advisor could update his report for MOP8.

As the illegal use of driftnets in the ACCOBAMS area continues to be a serious cause for concern, the Bureau further requested the Secretariat to prepare a draft Resolution on this issue to be submitted to MOP8. The Bureau also mandated the Secretariat to explore, in collaboration with the Scientific Committee, the finetuning of the definition of driftnets so that related ACCOBAMS provisions become clearer and more precise.

7) Implementation of Resolution 4.18

ACCOBAMS provides that research activities at sea that are likely to cause harassment of cetaceans must be prohibited unless the Party in question decides to grant an exception, in which case such exception should be granted only after obtaining advice from the Scientific Committee. Guidelines on the granting of exceptions have been adopted by the Parties in 2010 through Resolution 4.18, in order to provide guidance on their implementation.

Many activities generating harassment within the meaning of these Guidelines are possibly carried out in the ACCOBAMS area. However, no request for advice has ever been submitted to the Scientific Committee.

During BUEXT5, upon information provided to the Bureau Members, the Meeting concluded this was a major issue and the procedure should be reminded to all ACCOBAMS constituents and relevant stakeholders. The Bureau mandated the Secretariat to address an official letter accompanied by an explanatory note on relevant legal provisions to all National Focal Points, Scientific Committee members, Sub-Regional Coordinating Units, Partners and relevant partner organizations, in order to remind them about the applicable procedure for granting exemptions to research activities at sea that are likely to cause harassment of cetaceans, and to invite Parties to inform the Secretariat about exemptions that they may have granted during the five past years.

With regard to future requests to be sent to the Secretariat for advice by the Scientific Committee, and considering the need to implement this procedure as efficiently as possible so as not to hinder the implementation of research activities, and in agreement with the Chair of the Scientific Committee, the Bureau invited the Scientific Committee to provide its advice on the week following the receipt of a request for exemption. If no advice is received after such delay, the requesting Party may consider that the advice of the Scientific Committee is favorable.

8) Preparation of MOP8

At each Meeting of the Bureau, the representative of Malta and the Executive Secretary informed the Bureau Members on the progress made in the preparation of the Eighth Meeting of the Parties (MOP8) in Malta (29 November - 2 December 2022).

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREEMENT: TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC ISSUES

At each Meeting of the Bureau, the Secretariat and the Scientific Committee provided the Bureau with an overview of the recent developments and activities of the 2020-2022 Programme of Work. In particular, progress was made on the following topics:

- Cetacean population estimates and distribution
- Population structure
- Monitoring cetacean's status, including the development of Conservation Management Plans (CMPs)
- Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situation
- Interactions with fisheries
- Anthropogenic underwater noise
- Ship strikes
- Cetaceans stranding
- Cetacean watching
- Interactions with marine litter

- Chemical and biological pollution
- Captivity related issues
- Area-based measures for cetaceans.

The Bureau commended the activities implemented despite the COVID-19 crisis and congratulated the Secretariat and the Scientific Committee for the work undertaken, particularly in collaboration with other organizations, which improved and developed the importance of ACCOBAMS on the international scene. The Bureau recommended to continue this collaborative approach.

The Bureau was informed about the follow-up of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) project. The Bureau members commended the importance of the Results Reports and the forthcoming publication "Conserving Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises in the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea and adjacent areas: an ACCOBAMS status report".

The Bureau recommended to implement a large communication action on the ASI results, as it constitutes an excellent opportunity to increase the visibility on ACCOBAMS and its activities, as well as the collaborative spirit of the Agreement.

While recognizing that it is an important challenge for ACCOBAMS, the Bureau encouraged the Secretariat to continue its efforts, in consultation with the Scientific Committee and the National Focal Points, so to ensure ASI sustainability. At BU14, the Bureau reviewed the reports related to the development of the ACCOBAMS Long-Term Monitoring Program (LTMP) and the roadmap to sustain the financial resources necessary for its implementation, while highlighting the importance of the LTMP in supporting ACCOBAMS mission and objectives.

The Bureau agreed to establish an *ad hoc* group composed of National Focal Points to support the preparation of the draft Resolution on the LTMP in view of facilitating MOP8 discussions and decisions regarding the funding of the LTMP.

The importance of ensuring regular synoptic monitoring operations in the ACCOBAMS Area was emphasized by the Bureau members, as well as of synergies with the relevant EU directives and Regional Seas conventions monitoring frameworks. The Bureau thus recommended that the Secretariat liaises with the European Commission, the Secretariats of the Regional Sea Conventions (Barcelona and Bucharest Conventions), ASCOBANS and IWC to (i) inform them about the results of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative, and (ii) to ensure coordination regarding the development of the ACCOBAMS Long Term Monitoring Program.