



SUMMARIES OF THE PROJECTS SELECTED UNDER THE 2022 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, paragraph 3, of the Agreement, the Parties to ACCOBAMS established a Supplementary Conservation Fund (SCF) from voluntary contributions received from ACCOBAMS Parties, or from any external source in order to increase the available funds for activities related to monitoring, research, training and projects on 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 played a significant role in supporting ACCOBAMS conservation initiatives in developing countries and in countries with economies in transition.

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

In 2013, at their Fifth Meeting (Tangier, 5-8 November 2013), the Parties to ACCOBAMS adopted Resolution 5.5 on the Procedure for ACCOBAMS calls for proposals for projects to be funded under the Supplementary Conservation Fund. Resolution 5.5 was later replaced by [Resolution 7.8](#) adopted in 2019.

As provided by Resolution 7.8 the goals and objectives of 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 a local and regional level in order to improve the conservation status of the cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area;
- to assist in the development of capacities to conserve cetaceans and their habitats;
- to raise awareness on the conservation and management needs of cetaceans and their habitats;
- to provide relatively small funds to communities and other conservation stakeholders with limited access to alternative funding sources.

2022 ACCOBAMS call for proposals

At its Fourteenth Meeting (Online, 18-19 January 2022), the Bureau approved the launching of a new call for proposals in 2022 for 4 projects.

In view of supporting the implementation of the 2020-2022 ACCOBAMS Program of Work, priorities have been defined to select projects addressing one (or more) subjects pointed out hereafter, including capacity-building activities in support of project implementation, if necessary:

- Support marine litter monitoring activities during necropsies following ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Best Practices on cetacean post mortem investigation and tissue sampling, including the establishment/reinforcement of national stranding networks, where needed;

- Improve knowledge on cetacean abundance and/or distribution in areas under-studied, including through - but not limited to - the use of platforms of opportunity;
- Support the assessment and mitigation of interactions with fisheries in areas not yet covered by MAVA funded projects on such interactions.

Project proposals should demonstrate they contribute to the implementation of existing national action plans on cetaceans, as suitable.

On 16 February 2022, the Secretariat informed ACCOBAMS Focal Points, Members of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, ACCOBAMS Partners and other relevant Organisations, about the opening of the call for proposals.

At the Fifth Meeting of the Extended Bureau, Bureau Members were informed of the difficulty posed to several members (of eligible countries) of the Scientific Committee due to the eligibility rule foreseen in the Procedure for the ACCOBAMS Call for proposals adopted through Resolution 7.8 (*"Proposals from Organizations having among their employees or board, one or more members of the Bureau of the Parties, of the Scientific Committee, or of the Permanent Secretariat of ACCOBAMS are not eligible"*).

While recalling the importance of avoiding conflicts of interest during the selection process of project proposals, the Bureau agreed on a temporary modification to 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 specifically requested that Bureau or Scientific Committee members whose organisations submit project proposals under this Call would not be involved in the evaluation and selection process.

The Bureau also agreed to postpone the initial deadline for the submission of proposals by one month (end of May 2022) so to allow the concerned members of the Scientific Committee to prepare their proposals.

The Secretariat received eleven project proposals up until 31st May 2022.

An Extraordinary online Meeting of the Bureau to decide on the projects to be funded through ACCOBAMS Supplementary Conservation Fund was held in 2 parts, on 19th September 2022 and 10th October 2022.

The Bureau considered the submitted project proposals and their evaluation by the Scientific Committee, and decided on the following four projects to be financially supported through ACCOBAMS Supplementary Conservation Fund (by alphabetical order of countries):

- 1/ *"Implementing ACCOBAMS best practices in post-mortem investigations on stranded and by-caught cetaceans from Romanian shore and ingested marine litter monitoring (PONTICCET)"* submitted by the National Institute for Marine Research and Development (NIMRD).
- 2/ *"The Tunisian Dolphin Project, expanding the monitoring programme to the Gulf of Gabes"* submitted by the Association Tunisienne de la Vie Sauvage (ATVS).
- 3/ *"Research and Conservation of the Sperm Whale (Physeter macrocephalus) in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea of Türkiye"* submitted by the NGO Deniz Memelileri Araştırma Derneği (DMAD).
- 4/ *"Establishing a cetacean tissue bank in Türkiye"* submitted by the Istanbul University, Faculty of Aquatic Sciences (IUFAS).

Summaries of the selected projects are presented hereafter.

Implementing ACCOBAMS best practices in post-mortem investigations on stranded and by-caught cetaceans from Romanian shore and ingested marine litter monitoring (PONTICCET)

Country: Romania

Beneficiary: National Institute for Marine Research and Development (NIMRD)

Partner: Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests (MEWF)

Total cost of the project: 15.000 Euros

SCF contribution: 15.000 Euros

Duration: 12 months

Marine litter is a global environmental issue that affects all the oceans and seas and even marine organisms like cetaceans. Marine debris, in particular plastic, has negative impacts on marine wildlife primarily due to ingestion and entanglement. When cetaceans become entangled in plastics, they can drown, choke to death, suffer physical trauma, such as amputation and infection or they can suffer from malnutrition when it prevents their ability to feed properly. Plastic ingestion can lead to partial blockage or injury to the digestive tract and reduced feeding due to a false feeling of satiety, all leading to low nutrition and declining health. The Black Sea's cetaceans make no exception to these threats; thus, it is imperative to assess the impact of marine litter.

Through post-mortem investigations of stranded or by-caught cetaceans, the PONTICCET Project aims to assess ingested marine litter and to improve knowledge on this threat to the cetaceans from the Romanian shore of the Black Sea following ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Best practices as guidelines.

To fulfil the project's main goal, NIMRD as the coordinator will first set up a laboratory for necropsies and Gastro-Intestinal Tract (GIT) analysis. All the stranded or by-caught cetaceans will be necropsied following ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Best Practices on cetacean post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling and the GITs and contents will be analysed for the presence of ingested marine litter. A database will be created regarding strandings/ by-caught cetaceans, the ingested marine litter, and the potential hot spots areas for cetacean ingestion of marine litter.

PONTICCET Project results will be disseminated and used to raise awareness on the impact of marine litter on the Black Sea's cetaceans.

The PONTICCET Project will provide important data that will support the implementation of Descriptor 1-Marine Mammals and Descriptor 10- Marine litter of the MSFD and will be further published in form of a scientific paper.

The results will be shared and discussed with the national authorities (Ministry of the Environment, Waters, and Forests), the scientific community, stakeholders, and policymakers in order to raise awareness and find solutions for the conservation of the cetacean species present at the Romanian shore of the Black Sea.

The Tunisian Dolphin Project, expanding the monitoring programme to the Gulf of Gabes

Country: Tunisia

Beneficiary: Association Tunisienne de la Vie Sauvage (ATVS)

Partner: Agence de Protection et d'Aménagement du Littoral (APAL)

Total cost of the project: 14.997 Euros

SCF contribution: 14.997 Euros

Duration: 24 months

The Tunisian Dolphin Project (TDP) is a research initiative that started in 2014 to monitor and assess the status of the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) in Tunisia. The overall objective of the programme is to create a long-term programme that utilise mark-recapture methods (photo-id) to monitor the population in the country and to collaborate with both national and international organisation to ensure funding and continuity of the project. Indeed, and since its creation, the project has expanded its activities of monitoring from the relatively small Bizerte lake in 2014 (with financial aid from SPA/RAC) to cover the gulf of Bizerte region in 2015 (also funded by SPA/RAC), then survey the entire northern Tunisian Coast during 2016 - 2019 (funded by ACCOBAMS, SPA/RAC and the Rufford Foundation), and finally the gulf of Hammamet in 2021 -2022 (funded by the Rufford Foundation). In each campaign, the Project has linked with a local NGO (e.g. ATUTAX, ANDDCVS, Nature-Link and ATVS) and provided capacity building and public awareness activities for both the NGO and other relevant stakeholders. In the next campaign season of 2022 -2023 and with funding from the ACCOBAMS Supplementary Conservation Fund (SCF), the Tunisian Dolphin Project and the Association Tunisienne de la Vie Sauvage (ATVS) will join forces to expand the monitoring programme to cover the southern Gulf of Gabes. With this critical step in place, the project will be able to cover yet another important part of Tunisian Coast with the ultimate goal of covering the entire Tunisian coast and the dowelling bottlenose population. In turn, this effort will lead to the creating of a national-wide photo-identification catalogue and a reliable population estimate, structure and distribution which will be critical to decision makers in forming legislation or take conservation actions in the future.

Research and Conservation of the Sperm Whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea of Türkiye

Country: Türkiye

Beneficiary: Deniz Memelileri Araştırma Derneği (DMAD)

Partner: WWF-Türkiye

Total cost of the project: 42 640 Euros

SCF contribution: 14.700 Euros

Duration: 15 months

Research and Conservation of Sperm Whales in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea of Türkiye project aims to fill the existing knowledge gaps on the deep diving species in Türkiye while creating the first open-source photo-identification catalogue of the target species. The current project will run in partnership with WWF-Türkiye and employs boat surveys with a stratified effort to the summer season of 2022 and 2023. During the boat surveys both visual and acoustic survey protocols will be followed, with an addition of the photo-identification of the species. Further, drone and go-pro footages with visual observations will be compared to reveal further information on individual behavioral activity as well as the social composition and structure of the sighting. Knowing the importance of local power on research and conservation, current study adds an additional focus on the local research capacities through organizing two different workshops on field techniques while using written, audio and social media for public awareness on the whales of Türkiye. Last but not the least, hashtag analysis will be conducted to understand the potential impact of the project on the knowledge and awareness of the public. The project will be completed in September 2023.

Establishing a cetacean tissue bank in Türkiye

Country: Türkiye

Beneficiary: Istanbul University, Faculty of Aquatic Sciences (IUFAS)

Partner: Turkish Marine Research Foundation (TUDAV)

Total cost of the project: 14.970 Euros

SCF contribution: 14.970 Euros

Duration: 24 months

The project will establish a tissue bank of cetacean samples collected from all the coasts of Türkiye in Marine Mammals Laboratory at the basement of Faculty of Aquatic Sciences, Istanbul University with the partnership of a NGO, Turkish Marine Research Foundation. In short, the team want to increase their sampling and storage capacity by providing appropriate necropsy conditions. The tissue bank to be created will increase the sampling capacity of Türkiye.

Tissue samples collected from stranded and bycaught cetaceans will be used to gain advanced knowledge on cetaceans' mortality causes in the region. Other areas of studies, such as functional anatomy, physiology (including respiratory and diving physiology), life history, toxicology, pathology (including infectious diseases), population structure, and trophic relationships, will potentially be carried out by leading partners as well as collaborating national/international researchers.

Once the tissue bank is fully operational, it will be networked with the Mediterranean Tissue Banks for sharing expertise and cooperative research. The importance of establishing a tissue bank in Türkiye, which is the only country among the ACCOBAMS member states that is bordered by both the Mediterranean and Black Seas, will contribute significantly to the conservation efforts of cetaceans living in both basins.