ACCOBAMS SURVEY INITIATIVE - EVALUATION REPORT

Accord sur la Conservation des Cétacés de la Mer Noire, de la Méditerranée et de la zone Atlantique adjacente

ACCOBAMS

Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area

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Ecosystem Management Conservation
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ACCOBAMS SURVEY INITIATIVE (ASI)

EVALUATION REPORT
May 2021

Prepared for: ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretary, les Terrasses de Fontvieille, 98000 Monaco.

Citation: Lethier, H (2021) - ACCOBAMS SURVEY INITIATIVE (ASI) EVALUATION REPORT, May 2021, EMC2I-LETHIER/ACCOBAMS, 49 pages.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The consultant would like to thank all stakeholders consulted during the evaluation process; he is particularly thankful to the persons interviewed by phoneas well as to those who took the time to fill the evaluation questionnaire.

All the information and opinions collected during those discussions and inserted in the questionnaires were very helpful to evaluate the context properly.

He is also especially grateful to the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretary staff persons, Susana SALVADOR, the current Permanent Secretary, also Florence DESCROIX COMANDUCCI, her predecessor who kindly shared their deep experience with the consultant, as well as Celia LE RAVALLEC and Julie BELMONT who were instrumental in providing the consultant with the documentation needed for carrying out the evaluation. The consultant thanks them for their patience and kindness throughout the evaluation process.

ACRONYMS

ASI	ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative
BSIMAP	Black Sea Integrated Monitoring Assessment Program
CC	Climate Change
CeNoBS	Support MSFD implementation in the Black Sea through establishing a regional monitoring system of cetaceans (D1) and noise monitoring (D11) for achieving GES
CG	Contact Group
CPs	Contracting Parties
DAC	Data Analysis Coordinator
Emblas	Improving Environmental Monitoring in the Black Sea – Special Measures
GES	Good Environmental Status
IMAP	Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MAP	Mediterranean Action Plan
MFSD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
LMPA	Marine Protected Area
MoU	Memorandum Of Understanding
PNC	National Contact
NFP	National Focal Point
PO	Project Officer
PS	Permanent Secretary
RAC/SPA	UN Environments Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas
SC	Scientific Committee
SCo	Scientific Coordinator
SPA	Specially Protected Areas
StC	Steering Committee
SubC	SubRegional Coordinator
UNEP	United Nation Environmental Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks to evaluate the main achievements of the Project and to provide guidance on how (1) to consolidate the scientific and technical aspects of this monitoring programme in the future, as well as (2) to secure it, especially from a financial point of view. It also identifies all other shortcomings observed during the implementation of the Project.

The evaluation was carried out based on a literature review of a set of documents provided by the ACCOBAMS PS to the consultant, the review report prepared in close cooperation with the consultant and delivered by the PS[1], phone interviews of stakeholders involved in the ASI project implementation and written consultations of the 22 ACCOBAMS National Focal Points (NFPs). It was a desk review only and did not include field visits. Furthermore, the physical meetings initially planned with the stakeholders could unfortunately not be organized, due to the sanitary crisis.

The initial Project[2] included three (3) components seeking to:

- better understand and monitor the conservation status and development trends of cetaceans in the Mediterranean/Black sea macroregion;
- optimise efforts to manage and conserve the species in question and their marine and coastal habitats;
- reinforce local capacities to conserve cetaceans and ensure the good status of marine and coastal environments.

It contained 12 activities that, due to technical and financial constraints, were adapted by the ASI Steering Committee in February 2017, and structured slightly differently from the initial version, but faithfully to the overall spirit as well as to the components and objectives of the initial Project version. This report is based on this final version which must be regarded as the most developed and realistic version of the Project structure.

1. **Relevance** (to what extent the Project responded to the expectations of the stakeholders)

This relevance is considered as "**Highly Satisfactory**".

The Project structure and components are seen as fully relevant to the general objective of the Project "*to build a coherent monitoring system for the studied species*", across the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. Scientists, officials and all other stakeholders, at national and regional levels, were involved in the setting of the priorities and in the definition of the activities, throughout the development of the Project.

Its design and framework were very ambitious but fully logical; few key questions should be further addressed, if the decision is taken to pursue the monitoring process in the future:

- what should be the next scope of the monitoring activities (e.g.: species, habitats, themes, threats and pressure)?
- what should be the methodological approach, having in mind that, ideally, it is necessary to cover the entire macroregion (coastal and marine areas, national and international waters), all four seasons, with the same protocols and methods (e.g.: aerial and boat, visual and acoustic) and the same tools for analysis and decision-making (e.g.: data, information, soft wares)?
- what findings would be expected from the next monitoring efforts (e.g.: species abundance, distribution, diversity; location of critical habitats; knowledge and assessment of threats and pressures; conservation measures effectivity and performance; priorities for conservation)?
- how the administrative, technical and logistic procedures and their transaction costs could be minimized?

2. **Effectiveness** (to what extent the Project produced the expected results)

The effectiveness is considered as "**Satisfactory".**

[1] ACCOBAMS (2021c).
[2] Project Identification Document (2015).

The ASI general objective « *to ensure that public and private stakeholders in the Mediterranean/Black Sea region have a coherent monitoring system for the species concerned, based on objective, robust and comparable data, with a view to improving the conservation status of these species and their habitats through appropriate management for the good conservation status of the marine and coastal environments in the area of the study*" has not been fully achieved, while the activities already completed have significantly contributed in building a strong baseline for future and further monitoring activities, towards the establishment of a comprehensive and finite integrated monitoring system. A few activities are still in progress[3] and several of them are expected to be completed by the end of 2022[4]. However, the Project's activities led to:

- better understand the abundance and distribution of the studied species at the ACCOBAMS area level, based on a synoptic methodological approach and on undisputed data (SO 1 of the Project), although some parts of the geographical area have been only partially surveyed;
- strengthen considerably international cooperation and synergies between the countries in the macroregion with the view to optimize and increase the efficiency of their efforts to establish a transnational approach for the conservation of the studied species (SO 2);
- improve the level of knowledge on the good environmental status (GES) of the studied zone (SO 3) although it did not allow to "*characterize*" this status, *stricto sensu*; as such, the Project can nevertheless be seen as a strong contribution towards this characterization enabling to conclude positively that this SO has been reached at a satisfactory level;
- foster research and development, in the whole region, on marine biodiversity monitoring, in the field of the Project (SO 5).

Overall, the Project has hence achieved its intended outputs and activities, reaching most of its initial specific objectives, except two of them i.e. (1) the maintenance and restoration of the GES of the studied area[5] and (2) guidance on the measures required to adapt to climate change (CC), that were very – and probably too - ambitious and could not reasonably be achieved within the time and budget constraints; they should be considered in the future, would new monitoring activities be undertaken:

- its organization was excellent, successful and safe; no major difficulty happened, thanks to the leadership and overall coordination ensured by the PS, with all other actors, throughout the Project cycle;
- to date, important progress has been made in terms of improvement of knowledge on the studied species and their seasonal habitats, capacity building and scientific networking, as well as on data collect on specific topics, like plastic pollution.

It is however too early to conclude on the level of effectiveness of the Project; no public recommendation has yet been presented in order to "*to move from science to policy*" and transform the Project achievements into concrete conservation actions in response to the escalating pressures on the studied species and their habitats. A regional workshop will be held in June 2021 to do so. This will be the next challenge for the actors, Further works are also still needed to detail how the Project results may contribute concretely, in the future, to the adaptation to CC.

3. **Efficiency** (to what extent the Project's results were consistent with the means)

The efficiency is considered as "**Very Satisfactory**".

The Governance structure of the Project was fairly efficient; the Project was also continuously executed inclusively, with participation of the ACCOBAMS governance bodies, in collaboration with external partners; most responsibilities, from raising funds to undertaking the coordination of the desk and field operations, were mostly led by the PS with support from the Scientific coordinator , and carried out in permanent and close cooperation with the NCs and NFPs designated by the State members. In particular, the national and local contacts brought an invaluable support, especially for facilitating and/or issuing the required administrative authorizations and permits.

This structure should be kept in the future, if new monitoring activities are undertaken; however, the PS team capacities should be strengthened throughout the Project cycle; further efforts could

[3] Component 2/Activities 7 and 8.
[4] Component 3/Activities 9 and 10.
[5] And that of critical and preferred habitats of the species, both marine and coastal.

also be made to further integrate the scientific coordination at the macroregion level, so as to minimize the transaction costs of the Project and optimize resources and capacities.

The various tasks and activities were accomplished with a satisfactory financial efficiency; it is however recommended that the in-kind support from any contributor to the monitoring activities be more precisely evaluated; those supports were essential to the efficient delivery of the Project and they should be maintained and fostered for the future monitoring activities.

Considering the technical and institutional difficulties to undertake the planned activities in a very complex international context, it is also concluded that the Project was conducted, up to date, in a timely efficient way, most expected results having been timely achieved.

By the end of the Project, efforts should also seek at disseminating the scientific results and recommendations in the State member countries and at promoting their use at national level, to enhance concrete actions and decisions for biodiversity conservation and adaptation to CC. A particular attention should also be paid to convince all institutional stakeholders, that the Project has directly responded to their needs, and its results will help in achieving their own objectives. They should also be strongly encouraged to include future and regular monitoring efforts in their strategies, policies, programmes and plans devoted to the conservation of cetaceans[6].

In the next months, a major goal for the stakeholder should be to develop clear and operational conservation recommendations for adoption by the State members, at the MOP 8. From this point of view, the Project results should be used *inter alia* as a backbone to facilitate the location of Critical Habitat for Cetaceans, as well as to enhance the identification of Important Marine Mammals Areas (IMMA) under the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas task force[7] and contribute to the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework in preparation under the aegis of the Convention of biodiversity.

Part of the Project efficiency will in fact come from the capacity of the Project management structure to convince all stakeholders that future and further efforts are needed to evolve from the existing baseline to a comprehensive and finite monitoring system, at the macroregion level, adequately resourced[8].

4. **Sustainability** (to what extent the effects of the Project will be sustainable after its completion)

The sustainability is considered as "**Moderately Satisfactory**".

From the elaboration phase of the Project, sustainability was a matter of discussion and concern:

- geopolitically: although the Project received strong support and interest from all countries in the macroregion, it would be unfair to conclude that its outcomes and results will surely be preserved and sustained in the future, *a fortiori* in the long-term, due to this sensitive geopolitical context;
- financially: while the persons consulted during the evaluation process seem willing to sustain and secure the monitoring activities at the macroregion level, it is not yet possible to conclude on the financial sustainability of the monitoring activities. This will likely depend upon the objectives and conditions leading those future activities, also upon goals, priorities and conditions fixed by the potential external funder organizations[9]. The financial sustainability will require further decisions and commitments that the State members and other decision-makers should discuss in the next months and announce, ideally, at the MOP 8, in 2022;
- institutionally: a large part of the Project success should be credited to its governance and management structure; those benefits could likely be sustained if monitoring activities are kept under the umbrella of the ACCOBAMS in the future. However, the design of the process might need to be adapted, if the scope of this monitoring is enlarged to other species, topics and/or problematics. It will be important to maintain the current stakeholder network and

[6] E.g.: France (https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/biodiversite-marine-strategie-nationale-mieux-connaitre-et-proteger-cetaces).
[7] https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/immas/.
[8] Human, technical and financial.
[9] See for example the Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848 of 17 May 2017 laying down criteria and methodological standards on good environmental status of marine waters and specifications and standardised methods for monitoring and assessment, and repealing Decision 2010/477/EU.

ACCOBAMS governing structures, should it be decided to pursue the monitoring activities; hence, it is preferable that most of the persons associated in the elaboration and implementation of the ASI remain the same and are directly involved in those activities, in the future;

- environmentally: the scope of the Project did not directly include the sustainability of the environment but its findings will lead to recommendations that should guide the decision-makers in the macroregion towards a environmental sustainability. Focus was placed on improving the level of knowledge on cetaceans and their habitats in the macroregion and making the civil society and governments more aware of their critical areas. The Project also contributed to identifying a series of anthropogenic threats and pressures on this heritage. It is was also expected that the Project findings facilitate improvements of the protection and management of the studied species and their critical habitats, and, thus influence political will and decisions, in the mid- and long-terms. The data and information collected during the survey will however not always be sufficient for taking local protection measures at national level; this will require further works and decisions as well as strong political will and clear commitments from the public authorities (State members and European and international organizations), for the mid and long-terms. Those decisions will be of the highest importance to sustain and optimize the Project achievements environmentally.

5. Overall impact (what has been the overall impact of the Project)

Its overall impact is considered as "**Very satisfactory**".

The Project has achieved a large part of the expected results at its intermediate stage of implementation; it should meet most expectations by its end.

- managing properly this project was a challenge; this task was ensured successfully by all stakeholders, each as regards the matters that concerned it;
- the consultations conducted during the evaluation process highlighted also the good spirit of cooperation between all actors involved in the Project activities. The Project has proved to be an outstanding example of scientific and technical collaboration, between 26 countries, overcoming most constraints and difficulties in a very complex context, whatever they were, geopolitical, institutional, scientific and logistical; as such, it set an important precedent for further and future conservation activities at the macroregion level, and should enhance confidence between all actors on their ability and the necessity to act inclusively and in a complementary way;
- the ability to adapt timely to complex and varying situations is the third legacy of the Project. This cooperation framework and its operational flexibility should be maintained in the future, would the decision be taken to undertake other monitoring works in the studied area;
- the Project has also demonstrated the importance and feasibility of large-scale synoptic surveys to bring invaluable knowledge and reliable data on environment; its has shown that such large-scale method is desirable, realistic and manageable at the macroregion level, and in coherence with the ecosystem approach promoted internationally;
- the methods, protocols and databases inherited from the Project activities will be very helpful in the future, to all countries in the macroregion in the future. This framework ensured the highest possible quality of data collection; it also led to build strong overall monitoring and analytic skills, as well as more regular scientific cooperation for the mid and long-terms;
- the Project capacity building component was, *per se*, an outstanding Project output; the scientists and specialists from all participating countries who have been trained have now a unique opportunity to apply their increased skills in their countries, at national level and to elaborate national monitoring programmes related to the studied species and their habitats. This will be an important asset for future monitoring works in this macroregion;
- moreover, the Project results and achievements will benefit to all countries in the macroregion, whether they are members or not to the ACCOBAMS; they will support these countries to meet their commitments and may as well benefit to other countries worldwide, wishing to develop similar approaches and projects in their regions. The Project potential for replicability cannot be ignored.

Although, it is too early to conclude on the impact of the Project on the civil society, as it is not completed to date (several awareness and communication activities and events being implemented, the Project has already gone beyond its goal of defining an innovative approach for monitoring coastal

and marine environments; it has shown all stakeholders that building a common vision on marine biodiversity conservation in this macroregion is not only necessary but is also achievable and realistic.

In conclusion, the overall impact of the Project goes far beyond the monitoring of the studied species and, as such, contributes to recognize the macroregion as a large ecosystem beyond State boundaries, requiring collaborative partnerships to effectively meet the challenge of conserving marine natural heritage across multiple actors and countries. Its results and achievements should serve as technical and action bridges between knowledge and conservation works, not only in the macroregion, but also worldwide.

However, it is only a first step towards a political engagement with key issues, like biodiversity conservation and adaptation to CC; the next step should consist of moving towards concrete actions of conservation and management of marine and coastal biodiversity, at all levels, national and regional, with the European and international community support.

From the lessons learned, the project concludes on a series of operational recommendations that could provide guidance to the stakeholders in order to prepare the future.

Drawn directly from the lessons learnt from the Project, the key following recommendations are expressed as a series of questions that should be addressed by the ACCOBAMS State members and their partners in their forthcoming works and discussions, recalling their decisions to build a system that should be based on a comprehensive and finite sustainable monitoring framework:

- to what extent the **synoptic approach** should be developed for future monitoring studies (macroregional, regional, subregional, national, …)?
- to what extent those studies should be **holistic, integrated and cross-thematic** (species, themes, topics, …)?
- what should be the **frequency** of the monitoring studies?
- to what extent **harmonize the monitoring methods and protocols** at the studied area level?
- what could be **ambitious but realistic objectives and expectations** for future monitoring activities?
- which **human, technical, financial resources (magnitude, scope and structure)** are needed to meet those objectives and expectations?
- how to minimize the **transaction and organizational costs** of those activities?
- how to improve **governance, planning and functioning** of the monitoring activities in an inclusive way, throughout the monitoring cycle and at all levels (international, macroregional, subregional, national, …)?
- how to adapt the future monitoring studies' **results** to the various targeted stakeholders in order to facilitate their utilization and operationalization?
- how to ensure that those **results** will help the State members to meet their legal obligations, commitments and policies for biodiversity conservation and adaptation to CC?
- how to develop the most effective **synergies and convergence** between ACCOBAMS, the State members and their potential partners organizations and seize the opportunities?

INTRODUCTION

Background

In response to their commitments to "*coordinate their actions in order to achieve and maintain a favorable conservation status of cetaceans of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean*", the Parties to ACCOBAMS officially launched the "ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative" project (the Project) at the Sixth Meeting of the Parties to the ACCOBAMS (Monaco, 22-25 November 2016)[10].

This 3,5-years project will finish at the end of 2022; it aims to establish an "*integrated, collaborative and coordinated surveillance system for the status of cetacean populations in the ACCOBAMS area*" (Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea) [11].

Concretely, the overall objective of this Project was "*to ensure that public and private stakeholders in the Mediterranean/Black Sea region have a coherent monitoring system for the species concerned in the Mediterranean/Black Sea ecoregion, based on objective, robust and comparable data, with a view to improving the conservation status of these species and their habitats through appropriate management for the good status of the marine and coastal environments in the area of the study*"[12].

Thus, the Project is an integrated and coordinated study focus on the monitoring of cetaceans in order to better know and understand the state of conservation, distribution and trend of the studied species and to strengthen the capacities necessary to sustain this monitoring in the long-term.

Close to the end of the Project, ACCOBAMS wishes to initiate an inclusive reflection on its sustainability and build a roadmap detailing how this monitoring could be ensured overtime, in cooperation with the CPs and other stakeholders, on the basis of an interim evaluation.

Purpose

This report seeks to evaluate the main achievements of the Project and to provide guidance on how (1) to consolidate the scientific and technical aspects of this monitoring programme in the future, as well as (2) to secure it, especially from a financial point of view (**Annex 1**).

It mainly addresses the following key questions:

- were the initial objectives achieved or is it reasonable to expect that they can be by the end of the project?
- what were the main difficulties met during the Project implementation and the execution of the activities?
- is it needed to improve the project governance and management for the future?
- were the means and resources (human, technical and financial) appropriate?
- what main lessons can already be learnt from the methods and protocols used?
- was the timetable set for each activity appropriate?
- what should be done to sustain the project results in the long-term?

It also identifies all other shortcomings observed during the implementation of the Project.

Methodology

The evaluation was carried out based on:

- a literature review of a set of documents provided by the ACCOBAMS PS to the consultant (**Bibliography**);
- the review report prepared in close cooperation with the consultant and delivered by the PS[13];
- interviews of **15** stakeholders involved in the ASI project implementation (**Annex 2.1**) and selected by the PS and the consultant, upon common agreement. All interviews were carried out by phone, in English and/or in French; they were based on a grid developed by the

[10] ACCOBAMS-MOP6/2016/Res.6.13.
[11] https://accobams.org/asi-data-presentation/.
[12] ASI (2015).
[13] ACCOBAMS (2021c).

consultant (**Annex 3**) and finalized in close cooperation with the PS; the stakeholders were asked to fill and return this grid to the consultant prior to their interviews;
- written consultations of all ACCOBAMS National Focal Points (NFPs) (**22) (Annex 2.2**), based on a questionnaire prepared by the consultant (**Annex 4**), in close cooperation with the PS. This questionnaire contained nine (**9**) questions, related to five (**5**) evaluation indicators (overall (**1**) and specific (**4**)); **16** questionnaires were returned duly filled to the consultant and the PS.

Constraints and limitations

This evaluation was a desk review only and did not include field visits. Furthermore, the physical meetings initially planned with the stakeholders could unfortunately not be organized, due to the sanitary crisis.

I PROJECT DESCRIPTION

I-1 Contents

The initial Project[14] included three (3) components:

Component 1 – Better understand and monitor the conservation status and development trends of cetaceans in the Mediterranean/Black sea macroregion

Expected results:

- a detailed review of the survey and monitoring work, methods and available data for the species concerned in the macroregion;
- an assessment of their compatibility and complementarity; and a characterisation of current gaps;
- a standardised operational method to survey and to monitor the species in question at the macroregional level;
- a baseline which will enable regular monitoring of development trends for these species and meets the need for ongoing monitoring using an ecosystem approach; this baseline and the trends observed will also help with assessing on a regular basis the conservation status of biodiversity in the macroregion and updating the red lists (including the IUCN red list) of endangered species and ecosystems, and the Green List of Protected Areas;
- an information management system for data on the species concerned in the macroregion, which will be unique, coherent, innovative and integrated; this system will meet international standards and be replicable in other ecoregional environment;
- a preliminary identification and description of the principal habitats and types of critical and preferred habitats of the species in question.

Main activities:

- **activity 1**: detailed review of survey and monitoring operations carried out to date and scheduled to be conducted during the lifecycle of the Project; a comparative analysis of methods and protocols used; recommendations to improve regional coordination;
- **activity 2**: gap analysis by geographical subregion, evaluation of the cost of operations, institutional set-up, seeking of additional financing;
- **activity 3**: finalisation of operational method for standardised survey, adjustment of protocols by survey block, administrative and logistical preparation for field operations, preliminary verification study;
- **activity 4**: pre-planning study for an information management system for data gathered during the survey exercise and in the mid- and long-terms;
- **activity 5**: implementation of the survey coordinated by geographic sector (10 sectors), conducted using the standardised method with a view to establish a baseline status at the macroregional level;

Component 2 – Optimise efforts to manage and conserve the species in question and their marine and coastal habitats

[14] Project Identification Document (2015).

Expected results:

- an improved understanding of the impacts of the main human pressures on the conservation status of the species in question and their development trends, and how the environment in general, and specifically the ecosystems to which these species belong and their habitats, respond to these impacts;
- an assessment of the effectiveness of protection measures and other responses, at all levels, local/national/regional, adopted to support these species and their habitats;
- technical recommendations to improve (1) the conservation of the species concerned and their critical and preferred habitats, (2) the management of national and transnational protected areas dedicated to the conservation of these species and (3) recommendations to reinforce protection measures for the species in question and their habitats, including by extending the network of marine and coastal protected areas in the macroregion, as well as improving national, European and international regulations.

Main activities:

- **activity 6**: analysis of the results of the survey (abundance and distribution of species), and establishing links with the main anthropogenic pressures and protection measures, including national/regional measures;
- **activity 7**: identification, characterisation and location of critical and preferred habitats, with a view to protecting them;
- **activity 8**: drawing up of concrete recommendations to optimise existing measures to protect the species concerned and prioritisation of actions to be taken at all levels: national, subregional and macroregional.

Component 3 – Reinforce local capacities to conserve cetaceans and ensure the good status of marine and coastal environments

Expected results:

- a reinforcement of the network of experts, specialists and other local stakeholders helping to conserve the species in question;
- the development of the human and technical capacities of countries participating in the project, in terms of survey and regular monitoring of the species in question and management of their critical and/or preferred habitats;
- the feasibility of a long-term funding mechanism for regular monitoring of the species concerned, in relation to the international obligations of the countries participating in the project;
- an increased awareness among local stakeholders of maintaining the good status of marine and coastal environments;
- an assessment of the results obtained at the end of the Project, establishing concrete recommendations to secure and optimise the monitoring system put in place.

Main activities:

- **activity 9**: training workshops for local stakeholders (team leaders, field operators, various observers, etc.) by subregion or group of subregions, in the use of the standardised survey method and in information management;
- **activity 10**: preparatory study for a long-term funding mechanism for monitoring operations relating to the species in question, through optimisation of existing resources;
- **activity 11**: external analysis of the results obtained and recommendations to secure the environmental monitoring mechanism put in place;
- **activity 12**: overall coordination of project, including running costs for the institutional governance of the project, communications and awareness-raising activities, and organisation of a closing workshop.

Due to technical and financial constraints, the final version of the Project was adopted by the ASI Steering Committee in February 2017, with a structure slightly different from the initial version detailed in the PID 2015 (**Table 1**), but faithful to the overall spirit, components and objectives of the original Project; the evaluation report is based on this final version which must be regarded as the most developed and realistic version of the Project structure.

PID 2015		ASI Mediterranean Action Plan 2017 validated by the ASI Steering Committee on 6 Feburary 2017 *			Black Sea Survey - CeNoBS Project 2019-2021		
					Activity		Observation
Activity 1	A detailed review of survey and monitoring operations carried out to date and scheduled to be conducted during the lifecycle of the project; comparative analysis of methods and protocols used, recommendations to improve regional coordination	**Activity 1**	Definition of the standardized monitoring operational method, adjustment of protocols by monitoring sector, administrative and logistical preparation of field operations	The 3 activities were merged in a single one in the 2017 Action Plan and Budget of the project	NA		
Activity 2	A gap analysis by geographical subregion, evaluation of the cost of operations, institutional set-up, seeking of additional financing						
Activity 3	Finalization of operational method for standardized survey, adjustment of protocols by survey block, administrative and logistical preparation for field operations, preliminary verification study				**Activity 2.2**	Assessment of cetacean populations distribution and abundance at the regional scale	Expert consultants work, managed by ACCOBAMS
Activity 4	pre-planning study for an information management system for data gathered during the survey exercise and in the medium and long terms	**Activity 3**	pre-planning study for an information management system for data gathered during the survey exercise and in the medium and long terms				
Activity 5	implementation of the survey coordinated by geographic sector (10 sectors – cf. Map 1), conducted using the standardised method with a view to establishing a baseline status at the macroregional level	**Activity 2**	implementation of the survey coordinated by geographic sector conducted using the standardized method with a view to establishing a baseline status at the macroregional level		**Activity 2.2**	Assessment of cetacean populations distribution and abundance at the regional scale	managed by Mare Nostrum & ACCOBAMS
		Additional Activity 4	Using drones to monitor marine mammals	This new activity was requested by the donor Fondation Prince Albert 2	NA		
Activity 6	analysis of the results of the survey (abundance and distribution of species), and establishing links with the main anthropogenic pressures and protection measures	**Activity 5**	analysis of the results of the survey (abundance and distribution of species), and establishing links with the main anthropogenic pressures and protection measures, including national/regional measure		**Activity 2.2**	Assessment of cetacean populations distribution and abundance at the regional scale	managed by Mare Nostrum & ACCOBAMS
Activity 7	identification, characterisation and location of critical and preferred habitats, with a view to protecting them	**Activity 6**	Spatial modeling and identification of critical and preferential habitats	Title of the activity was changed in the 2017 final Action plan	**Activity 2.2**	Assessment of cetacean populations distribution and abundance at the regional scale	managed by Mare Nostrum & ACCOBAMS
Activity 8	drawing up of concrete recommendations to optimise existing measures to protect the species concerned and prioritisation of actions to be taken at all levels: national, subregional and macroregional	**Activity 7**	drawing up of concrete recommendations to optimise existing measures to protect the species concerned and prioritisation of actions to be taken at all levels: national, subregional and macroregional		**Activity 2.2:**	Assessment of cetacean populations distribution and abundance at the regional scale	managed by Mare Nostrum & ACCOBAMS
					Activity 4.2	Capitalization of the project results with the MSFD Competent authorities (	managed by Green Balkans,
Activity 9	Training workshops for local stakeholders (team leaders, field operators, various observers, etc.) By subregion or group of subregions, in the use of the standardised survey method and in information management	**Activity 8**	Training workshops for local stakeholders by subregion or group of subregions, in the use of the standardized survey method and in information management		**Activity 2.2:**	Assessment of cetacean populations distribution and abundance at the regional scale	managed by Mare Nostrum & ACCOBAMS
Activity 10	pre-planning study for a long-term funding mechanism for monitoring operations relating to the species in question, through optimisation of existing resources	**Activity 9**	Preparatory study for a long-term funding mechanism for monitoring operations relating to the species in question, through optimization of existing resources				
Activity 11	external analysis of the results obtained and recommendations to secure the environmental monitoring mechanism put in place	***additional activity***	External intermediary evaluation & detailed roadmap project for the financial perpetuation of the ASI project	This activity was not planed in the final action Plan of the project in 2017 . Additional support was granted by MAVA in 2020 (Contrat de Subventionnement)**			
Activity 12	overall coordination of project, including running costs for the institutional governance of the project, communications and awareness-raising activities, and organisation of a closing workshop	**Coordination**	Project Coordination, Monitoring	The coordination part was separated in the Action plan of 2017 - the closing workshop is also integrated here	**Activity 1.1**	Project coordination, reporting and monitoring	managed by Mare Nostrum
		Activity 10	Communicate on the project and sensitize socio-economic actors to the integration of the preservation of threatened species and their critical habitats in their activities	Communication aspects were isolated in activity (10) in the Action plan of 2017	**Activity 4.1:**	Communication and dissemination of the project activities/results at the regional scale	managed by TUDAV

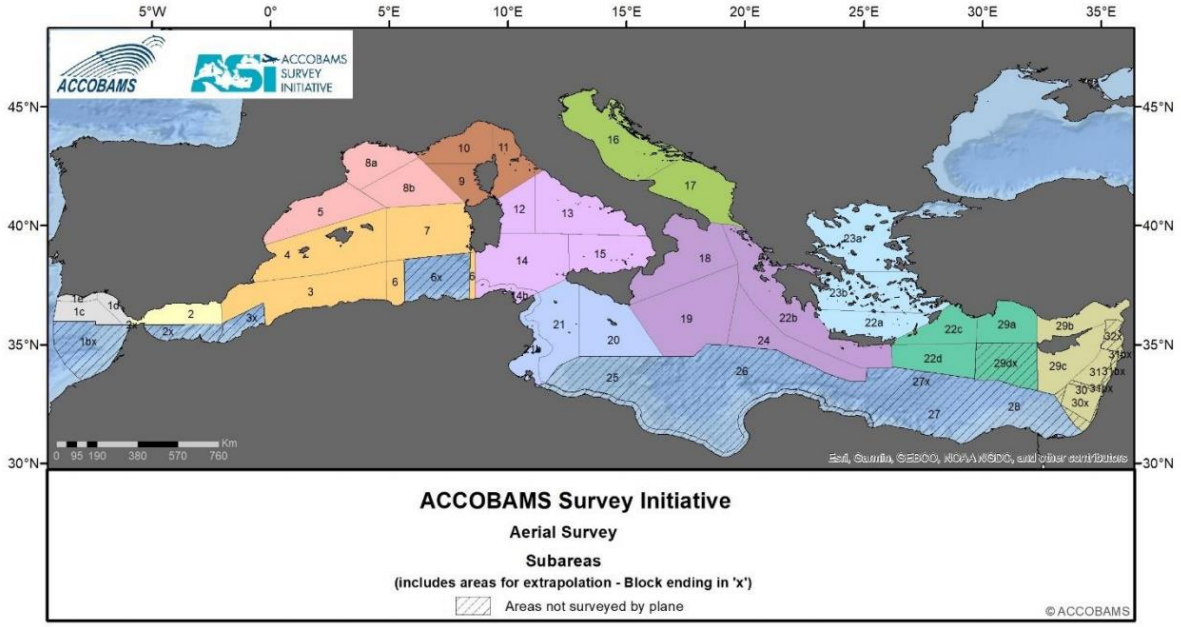
* ASI Report of the Meeting of the Project Steering Committee Monaco, 6 February 2017
**Contrat de subventionnement pour le Projet « Pérennisation de la surveillance des cétacés en Mer Méditerranée et Mer Noire (ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative) » (20109) - signé le 06/07/2020

Table 1 – ASI Project structure evolution between 2015 and 2021 (Source: ACCOBAMS PS[15]).

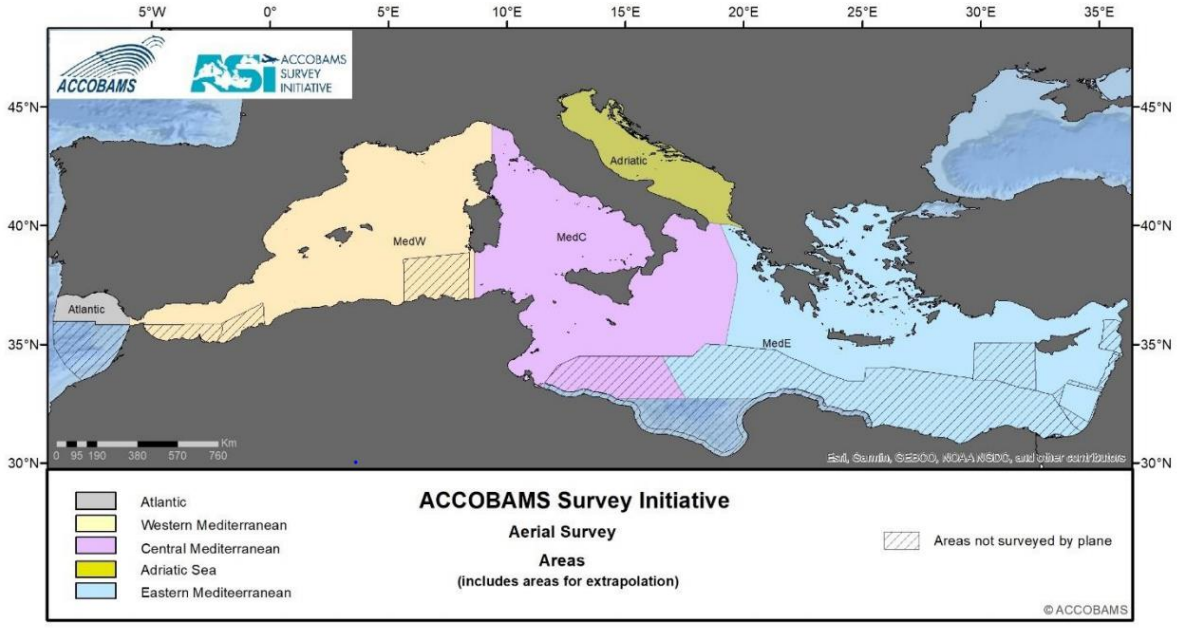
[15] ACCOBAMS (2021).

I-2 Governance

The Project was developed by subregion (Mediterranean and Black sea) due to funding availability (, and then by subareas, depending on the participating countries, the monitoring method, aerial or boat based, and the funds available (**Maps 1 to 4**).

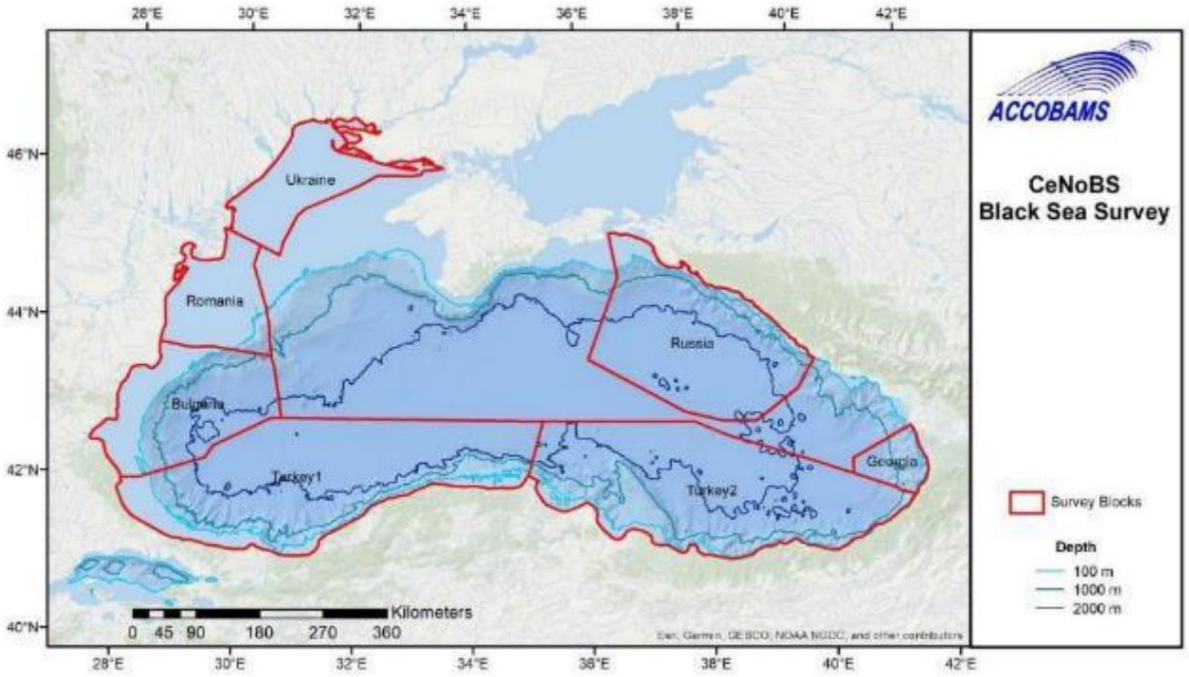


Map 1 – Blocks designed for the Mediterranean monitoring survey (Source: ACCOBAMS[16]).

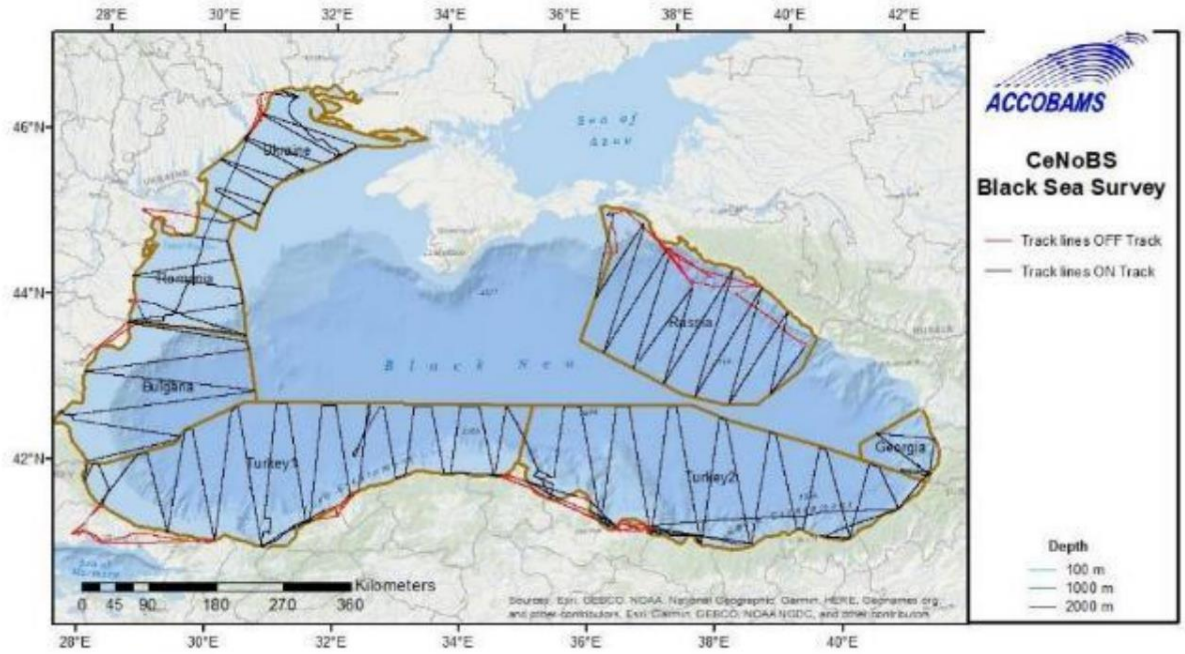


Map 2 – Subregions designed in the Mediterranean for the analysis (Source: ACCOBAMS).

[16] ACCOBAMS (2021a).



Map 3 – Blocks designed for the Black Sea monitoring survey (Source: ACCOBAMS, 2021b.[17]).



Map 4 – Tracks covered during the Black Sea aerial monitoring survey (Source: ACCOBAMS, 2021b.).

It was coordinated and implemented as follows:

- the **PS** provided the overall administrative and financial management of the Project, at macroregional level; it was responsible in implementing all planned activities of the Project and worked directly with all groups and partner organisations involved to ensure that the Project was carried out in line with the ACCOBAMS Steering Committees decisions;

[17] ACCOBAMS, 2021 b. Estimates of abundance and distribution of cetaceans in the Black Sea from 2019 surveys. By Paiu, R.M., Panigada, S., Cañadas, A., Gol'din, P., Popov, D., David, L., Amaha Ozturk, A., Glazov, D. Ed. ACCOBAMS - ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative/CeNoBS Projects, Monaco, 54 pages.

- a **Contact Group** (CG) composed of 30 contact persons from 22 countries, nominated in 2014 by the NFPs[18]. The CG assisted the PS throughout the Project implementation; it ensured the proper operational execution of the Project activities, at national level. This group facilitated also the contacts with all local persons and organizations involved in the field work, over the Project cycle;
- the ACCOBAMS **Scientific Committee** (SC) dealt with all scientific and technical aspects related to the methods and protocols used for developing the Project activities;
- a **Scientific Coordinator** (SCo) was assigned to support the implementation of the Project for tasks/actions related to the scientific matters, to coordinate the scientific works at regional level[19] and to support the PS on the scientific, technical and capacity building issues related to the implementation of the data analysis component of the Project, in coordination with other scientists[20]. The SCo was also responsible[21] to support the implementation of the project in the Black Sea sub-region[22]; he was seconded by an *ad hoc* consultant[23];
- a **Project Officer** (PO) was recruited in April 2017 for a short time period (15 days), in order to bring technical assistance to the PS for a series of specific tasks [24]; she was then hired as permanent staff member (ASI project officer), in charge of the Project.

The ACCOBAMS **Steering Committee** (StC), composed of representatives of key partners, provided the PS with advice and guidance for all aspects linked with the coordination of the Project.

In addition and from an operational point of view:

- **Subregional Coordinators** (SubC) : in the Black Sea, Mare Nostrum was in charge of the CeNoBS project and ensured that (together with the PS), the coordination of survey related activities including survey work and training, were coherent in each subregion, geographical survey sector and group of sectors; they worked with the CeNoBS project National Partners;
- **National Contacts** (NC) were designated by each country participating in the Project; they contributed directly to the preparation and successful execution of the Project at the country level; they also served as contacts persons for the subregional coordination and at the CG level
- **Technical Coordinators:** A MoU was made with RAC / SPA for handling capacity building activities with the PS – A MoU Was made with MCR (R/V Song of the Whale) for assisting the PS with the Boat based survey component

- an **ASI Data Analysis Coordinator** (DAC) was assigned in order to coordinate the analysis of the ASI data collected in the monitored areas (Mediterranean and Black Sea sub-regions); this consultant was supervised by the PO and was supported by an ASI data Expert Group consisting of scientists, under the coordination of the SCo[25].

This governance is fairly complex; however, according to all persons consulted during the evaluation, it worked well and made it possible to ensure a satisfactory implementation of the Project, at all levels and for all types of matters (diplomatic, scientific or operational).

Most persons consulted highlighted the commendable work of coordination done by the PS and they generally called for keeping this governance, in the future, would another monitoring project be undertaken.

I-3 Progress

[18] Res. 5.9 « *Comprehensive cetacean population estimates and distribution in the ACCOBAMS area*".
[19] Contract n° 06/2017/LB6402.
[20] Contract N° 03/2019/LB6400 (tasks described in art. 3 and the Annexes 1 and 2).
[21] Contracts N° 08/2019/LB 6420 and N° 19/2019/LB 6420.
[22] CeNoBS survey.
[23] Contracts N° 08/2017/LB 6402 and N°08/2019/LB 6400.
[24] Contract N° 05/2017/LB 6402 (tasks described in art. 2).
[25] Contract N° 20/2019/LB 6420 and N° 03 and 04/2019/LB 6400.

The following information comes from a set of documents provided by the PS in February 2020[26], February[27] and April 2021[28], including Review reports[29] as well as various technical reports of the Mediterranean and Black seas surveys.

This information is provisional as the Project should be completed at the end of 2022; **hence the conclusions and recommendations of this report must also be seen as provisional.**

This Project allowed to conduct multispecies aerial and boat-based surveys throughout the entire ACCOBAMS Agreement area, in 2018 and 2019**,** except in some parts of the area (eastern and south eastern Mediterranean[30] (**Map 2**)**,** north western part of the Black Sea[31] (**Map 4**)) that have been only partially surveyed, due mostly to legal and geopolitical constraints.

According to the technical reports of Mediterranean and Black Sea surveys[32], those monitoring efforts led to collect an unprecedented amount of robust data on cetaceans, other marine species (e.g.: sea birds, marine turtles, large fish[33]) and on the impact of human activities (e.g.: pollution, noise, marine litter, …).

Furthermore, an ASI data management system and data use policy[34] were developed; specific parts of the ASI data are accessible with an operational online access, on the ACCOBAMS Website[35].

Contract collaboration with the UNEP/MAP/PSA-RAC and through the CeNoBS[36] project allowed to train more than 100 scientists from the whole ACCOBAMS area. A wide range of communication and awareness activities were also developed in that context.

New technologies for data collection (e.g.: UAV, floating drones) were also experimented; results will be shared with the ACCOBAMS StC in the coming months.

The field survey started in Summer 2018 in the Mediterranean sub-region; 20 Mediterranean countries were involved and over than 100 scientific observers took part in the field operations, 8 planes were mobilized for an aerial survey effort covering 70 000 km and the boat Song of the Whale for the boat survey effort on covering 22 000 km[37]. More than 30 organisations were associated to those efforts[38].

Field works were also undertaken in the Black Sea subregion in Summer 2019, through the CeNoBS[39] and the Emblas +[40] projects, and in the Russian waters. Monitoring efforts were conducted, using online transect distance sampling methodologies, and aerial and/or boat visual and passive acoustic monitoring techniques, depending on the areas[41].

The data analysis started late 2018 through a participatory process coordinated by the SC[42]; a draft report was circulated to the SC members in February 2020 and a database is available on the ACCOBAMS website to access collected data [43] that can be used only according to detailed specific

[26] ACCOBAMS-SC13/2020/Inf 04, dated 18/02/2020.
[27] D2.2.2 Detailed report on cetacean populations distribution and abundance in the Black Sea, including proposal for threshold values (Work package 2: further developing D1 cetaceans related criteria and initiating the establishment of threshold values), 55p + annexes.
[28] ACCOBAMS (2021a) and ACCOBAMS (2021b).
[29] ACCOBAMS (2021c).
[30] 80% of the Mediterranean were covered by 10 teams using mixed aerial (visual) and boat (visual and acoustic) monitoring methods.
[31] 60% of the Black Sea were covered, by 3 teams using only aerial (visual) monitoring methods.
[32] ACCOBAMS-SC13/2019/inf04.
[33] E.g.: selacians.
[34] ACCOBAMS MOP7/2019/Inf13 (2019 - ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative Data Policy, Seventh Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS, Istanbul, Republic of Türkiye, 5 -8 November 2019, 10 p.
[35] https://accobams.org/asi-data-presentation/.
[36] Support MSFD implementation in the Black Sea through establishing a regional monitoring system of cetaceans (D1) and noise monitoring (D11) for achieving GES.
[37] In collaboration with Marine Conservation International (MCR).
[38] Source: https://accobams.org/main-activites/accobams-survey-initiative-2/asi-preliminary-results/.
[39] Support MSFD implementation in the Black Sea through establishing a regional monitoring system of cetaceans (D1) and noise monitoring (D11) for achieving GES (https://accobams.org/main-activites/cenobs-project/).
[40] Environmental Monitoring of the Black Sea.
[41] Only by boat in coastal Egyptian, Lebanese and Syrian waters.
[42] See: https://accobams.org/main-activites/accobams-survey-initiative-2/asi-preliminary-results/.
[43] https://accobams.org/asi-data-presentation/.

terms and conditions[44]. Metadata files describing all collected data for each type of survey (including maps of blocks and transects), and datasets of sightings and acoustic data in Excel and shapefile formats. (e.g.: observations, taxon, number of individuals, geographical coordinates, blocks, etc.) are available on this site.

The results should serve as a basis for the development of future conservation activities; recommendations will be submitted to the COP 8, as well as to other relevant stakeholders; furthermore, those results will also be used in order to update:

- the Cetacean Conservation Status report; this is one of the key outputs expected from the Project; it will be used as an ACCOBAMS reference document for the next assessment of IUCN Red List conservation status of Mediterranean species;
- the 2023 MAP/UNE Mediterranean Quality Status Report, in particular the section on "*Biodiversity and Ecosystems: Marine Mammals*", in relation with the Common Indicators CI 3 (Species distributional range), CI 4 (Population abundance of selected species) and CI 5 (Population demographic characteristics)**.**

In conclusion, and as recommended by the SC, the Project should seek to foster future cooperation and coordination between the national teams in charge of the development of the national monitoring schemes/programmes for marine mammals, under (1) the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and (2) the EU Environmental Compliance Assistance Program (ECAP) policies.

Furthermore, it is recommended that, by the end of the Project, the PS liaises with the European Commission and the Secretariats of the Regional Seas Conventions (Barcelona and Bucharest Conventions) to (1) inform them about the detailed results of the Project, (2) enhance coordination regarding the timing of future monitoring studies on marine mammals in the macroregion, in particular within the framework of the MSFD and the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP)[45], and (3) stress the importance of promoting the use of common monitoring protocols and adopting a synoptic approach at the macroregional level, echoing to the mobile character of the studied species.

In line with the SC's conclusions, it is finally recommended to consider other complementary monitoring approaches[46], that can provide yearly and seasonal trends of the studied species, as well as local abundance estimates of their populations[47].

II FINDINGS

A questionnaire (**Annex 2**) was sent to the 22 ASI NFPs (**Annex 4-2**); 16 of them (72%) returned it duly completed to the consultant and/or to the PS. This ratio is very satisfactory; it confirms the strong ownership of the Project by the institutional national stakeholders, throughout its life cycle.

In addition, 15 persons and organizations were contacted for direct telephone interviews with the consultant (**Annex 3**); these stakeholders were selected by the PS and the consultant due to their strong involvement in the Project implementation, technically and / or financially; 13 of them responded positively and returned the preparatory interview guide duly completed (**Annex 4-1**):

- 1 person-contact did not respond, despite several reminders from both the PS and the consultant;
- 1 person-contact considered that he was not sufficiently involved in the execution of the Project to be able to contribute usefully to the evaluation;
- 1 person-contact, although favorable to a telephone interview, did not propose date and time for the interview, after having canceled a first call.

[44] https://accobams.org/asi-data-terms-and-conditions/.
[45] Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Barcelona Convention's EcAp process (file:///C:/Users/herve/AppData/Local/Temp/IMAP_Publication_2016.pdf).
[46] E.g.: photo-ID surveys, PAM & monitoring programs using opportunity platforms such as ferries and fisheries surveys.
[47] ACCOBAMS-SC13/2020/Doc19 (2019) - Report of the thirteenth meeting of the Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS, Cap d'Ail, France, 26th–28th February 2020, 62 p.

This result is also highly satisfactory; the collected information provided the consultant with a very useful feedback for his evaluation, in addition to the other documentary sources of information.

Those consultations dealt with the Project design, implementation and management, as well as with the reporting process to the ACCOBAMS governance bodies and results.

II-1 Project design

II-1-1 The development process

The elaboration of the Project went through a lengthy administrative process that started in 2003 within the SC. A specific working group was set up in 2004 to elaborate the scientific and technical concept and a steering committee was established in 2014, aiming to initiating the process of seeking funds to implement the Project. This committee was placed under the supervision of the PS; it involved representatives from the Marine Protected Area Agency (France), the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, and the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (UNEP/MAP).

In order to support the Project's development and ensure the countries' involvement, a contact group was also established, consisting of country representatives; this group was responsible for providing the information required to develop the Project, monitoring the preparation of the Project documents and searching funds.

The design of the Project had been the subject of intense prior consultations about its content, both with scientific and institutional stakeholders involved in ACCOBAMS, and more specifically in the Project's activities. This participatory process has led all stakeholders to take full ownership of the Project which contributed to its success.

All stakeholders consulted along the evaluation process outlined that this preparatory work as well as the way the activities were coordinated by the PS and then implemented during the operational phase, in continuous and close cooperation with all other stakeholders, were very successful.

They called for adopting a similar methodological approach, would other monitoring activities be undertaken in the future.

II-1-2 The content

As developed here above, the Project was designed and delivered around 3 components and 12 inter-related activities (§ I-1) and the fixed ambitions were particularly high; therefore, it is not surprising that several specific objectives, as defined in the Project Identification Document (PID), have not yet been fully achieved[48] or even addressed[49], at the time of the evaluation.

The Project-level outcome could hardly be exceeded in the timeframe available and with the means/capacities granted to it; once again, all the persons consulted during the evaluation were very enthusiastic about the Project achievements.

However, the PS has experienced the implementation of this Project as a kind of ordeal, from an administrative point of view, increasing significantly its usual workload, already heavy.

This leads to recommend that the next monitoring studies are designed in a way to better match the objectives pursued, with the allocated resources (human, financial and technical).

II-2 Project implementation and adaptive management

As mentioned above, the governance of the Project was rather complex, involving many persons and organizations, at several levels, local, national and international.

[48] E.g.: OS 3 - characterizing the good environmental status of the study zone; OS 4 - maintaining and/or restoring this environmental status.
[49] E.g.: OS 6 - providing guidance on the measures required to adapt to CC.

However, no major dysfunction and/or complain were noted during the evaluation process, in any phase of the Project, preparation or implementation.

As said before, all stakeholders also agreed on the exemplary management of the Project by the governance bodies, especially the PS which, uncommonly for such projects, directly led the overall coordination of the Project and managed very well the many administrative (e.g.: governance, diplomatic relations, visas delivery/authorizations) and technical (e.g.: logistics of field operations) difficulties of implementation.

This overall organization made possible to adapt smoothly the execution of the field activities to all constraints, and to achieve a high-quality inventory, in a very complex and geopolitically sensitive international context. It also allowed to cover both the Mediterranean and the Black Sea areas and part of the international waters, in accordance with the initial Project objectives (See **Maps 2** and **4**).

The management flexibility was an important guarantee of the Project' success; this is a lesson for the future, being underlined however that the adaptive management employed during the execution of the activities can only meet the expectations if capacities and resources - especially human resources - dedicated to the overall coordination of the Project are sufficient and reasonable[50].

II-3 Project monitoring and reporting

Based on the current state of the Project, it is not possible to get a thorough knowledge of the technical results of the survey. However, the Project findings were briefly released on 22 April 2021, at a webinar where a question/answer session opened to the registered participants followed a presentation of the survey reports highlighting key results in relation to cetacean's species. The final scientific reports of the monitoring surveys have also been made available at this seminar; they can be downloaded on the ACCOBAMS website[51].

Pursuant to the consultations and documents available to the consultant, the monitoring and reporting works proceeded satisfactorily, notwithstanding that some areas could not be monitored due to regulatory access constraints.

The main difficulty seems to have come from the complexity of the scientific and technical coordination process, between the Mediterranean and the Black sea regions, and, in the Black Sea region, between the Russian and the other national territories. Those difficulties have however been minimized, once again thanks to the excellent and close cooperation between the PS and the SCo, and to the contribution of the NCs and NFPs.

In summary, and at the time of the evaluation, it is concluded that the monitoring and reporting phases of the Project have been carried out in a reasonably satisfactory manner.

Particular attention should however be paid in the future to a better integration of scientific aspects at the macroregional level, leading in particular to the publication of a consolidated report of the results with clear elaborated recommendations for conservation.

II-4 Project results

II-4-1 Relevance (to what extent the Project responded to the expectations of the stakeholders)

The relevance is considered as "**Highly Satisfactory**".

The Project structure and components were seen by all persons consulted during the evaluation as fully relevant to the general objective of the Project "*to build a coherent monitoring system for the studied species*", across the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. Scientists, officials and all other stakeholders, at national and regional levels, were involved in the setting of the priorities and in the definition of the activities, throughout the development of the Project.

[50] See *inter alia* ACCOBAMS-MOP7/2019/Inf 37 on the functional assessment of the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat.
[51] https://accobams.org/main-activites/accobams-survey-initiative-2/asi-preliminary-results/.

Following a long inclusive and participatory process, the Project logical framework was agreed by all actors, representing a common vision and approach of the monitoring priorities in the studied area.

From a logical point of view, the three main components of the Project were not questionable:

- improving the understanding and monitoring of the conservation status of cetaceans of the Mediterranean/Black Sea macroregion was fully appropriate and highly relevant; it totally made sense to expect from this Project an updated information collected from a common and standardized methodology founded on a strong science-based approach;
- optimizing efforts to manage and conserve the species and their marine and coastal habitats was also responding to immediate national and international obligations and commitments of the State members, relying on the international and European law and regulation; the 3 expected results were ambitious and, in reality, almost impossible to fully achieve in a project limited to 3 years only, and with a relatively modest level of funding. Information collected and lessons learned from the Project are seen as a first satisfactory response to this goal. The next step, if any, should be orientated on continuing those efforts and deepening knowledge both on the main pressures identified on the studied species and habitats and on the quality of the responses given to date by the State members to preserve them sustainably. In the future, the national actors should play a key role in implementing the Project recommendations intending to minimize the pressures on the ecosystems and strengthen conservation measures (e.g.: extension or establishment of new marine protected areas, improved regulation of uses and activities);
- reinforcing capacities to conserve cetaceans and ensure the good status of the marine and coastal environment was finally a third logical step in the overall process; some of the expected results were a natural response to the resources to be deployed for implementing the Project, while the evaluation of the feasibility of a long-term funding mechanism for regular future monitoring (which is the 3rd expected result), proved the desire of all actors to sustain the cetacean monitoring and their conservation in the long-term, as detailed in the 4th expected result.

The synoptic approach adopted for the field activities enabled also to cover the whole area in a very short period of time, thereby contributed to the high quality of the data collected and guaranteed the overall coherence of the Project. Thus, the sampling effort and the types of information to be collected were intensively discussed prior to those field works; they were fixed so as to collect reliable data and information, providing a knowledge base on the abundance and distribution of the studied species and their habitats. This baseline should facilitate future assessments of the state of conservation of those species and their critical habitats, over time and seasons, keeping in mind that a comprehensive and finite monitoring system will require further work and expertise, more time and additional funding efforts.

It is also important to note that the holistic approach followed has enabled to collect general information on cetaceans but also on some other species, like marine birds, reptiles (turtles) and large fish, as well as on threats on the environment, including noise and pollution (e.g.: plastic, other debris) and potential disturbance (e.g.: shipping). This cross-thematic approach was highly relevant in the studied areas that suffer from strong anthropogenic pressures. This approach should be kept in the future and even strengthened, so as to optimize the financial efforts and human investments that are requested to succeed on such complex and time consuming – but necessary - monitoring activities.

It is concluded that the Project design and framework were very ambitious but fully logical; few key questions should be further addressed, if the decision is taken to pursue the monitoring process in the future:

- what should be the next scope of the monitoring activities (e.g.: species, habitats, themes, threats and pressure)?
- what should be the methodological approach, having in mind that, ideally, it is necessary to cover the entire macroregion (coastal and marine areas, national and international waters), all four seasons, with the same protocols and methods (e.g.: aerial and boat, visual and acoustic) and the same tools for analysis and decision-making (e.g.: data, information, soft wares)?
- what findings would be expected from the next monitoring efforts (e.g.: species abundance, distribution, diversity; location of critical habitats; knowledge and assessment of threats and pressures; conservation measures effectivity and performance; priorities for conservation)?

- how the administrative, technical and logistic procedures and their transaction costs could be minimized?

II-2-2 Effectiveness (to what extent the Project produced the expected results)

The effectiveness is considered as "**Satisfactory**".

The review report on the Project prepared under the leading of the PS[52] provides information on the Project implementation; results and outcomes are detailed, as well as financial statement and timeline for each activity; readers can refer to the above-mentioned document, for further information.

The ASI general objective « *to ensure that public and private stakeholders in the Mediterranean/Black Sea region have a coherent monitoring system for the species concerned, based on objective, robust and comparable data, with a view to improving the conservation status of these species and their habitats through appropriate management for the good conservation status of the marine and coastal environments in the area of the study*" has not been fully achieved while the activities already completed have significantly contributed in building a strong baseline for future and further monitoring activities, towards the establishment of a comprehensive and finite integrated monitoring system. A few activities are still in progress[53] and several of them are expected to be completed by the end of 2022[54].

However, the Project's activities led to:

- better understand the abundance and distribution of the studied species at the ACCOBAMS area level, based on a synoptic methodological approach and on undisputed data (SO 1 of the Project), although some parts of the geographical area (eastern and south eastern Mediterranean[55] (**Map 2**), north western part of the Black Sea[56] (**Map 4**)) have been only partially surveyed;
- strengthen considerably international cooperation and synergies between the countries in the macroregion with the view to optimize and increase the efficiency of their efforts to establish a transnational approach for the conservation of the studied species (SO 2);
- improve the level of knowledge on the good environmental status (GES) of the studied zone (SO 3) although it did not allow to "*characterize*" this status, *stricto sensu*; as such, the Project can nevertheless be seen as a strong contribution towards this characterization enabling to conclude positively that this SO has been reached at a satisfactory level;
- foster research and development, in the whole region, on marine biodiversity monitoring, in the field of the Project (SO 5).

Overall, the Project has achieved its intended outputs and activities, reaching most of its specific objectives as set in the PID 2015, except two of them i.e. (1) the maintenance and restoration of the GES of the studied area[57] and (2) guidance on the measures required to adapt to CC, that were very – and probably too - ambitious and could not reasonably be achieved within the time and budget constraints; they should be considered in the future, would new monitoring activities be undertaken.

Throughout the Project, and in the opinion of all stakeholders consulted, there was an excellent spirit and a good collaboration between all participants that facilitated greatly the implementation and achievements of the desk and field activities; 26 countries have been involved in the Project and worked in synergy. Not less than 22 technical and 10 financial partners contributed to the survey carried out in the Mediterranean Sea, while 12 technical and 3 financial partners were involved in the Black Sea survey.

[52] ACCOBAMS (2021c).
[53] Component 2/Activities 7 and 8.
[54] Component 3/Activities 9 and 10.
[55] 80% of the Mediterranean were covered by 10 teams using mixed aerial (visual) and boat (visual and acoustic) monitoring methods.
[56] 60% of the Black Sea were covered by the Project, due to the geopolitical context, by 3 teams using only aerial (visual) monitoring methods.
[57] And that of critical and preferred habitats of the species, both marine and coastal.

The data collection, their management and analysis, as well as the development of a common database at the studied area level, must be seen as important outputs[58]; those findings will provide the countries and all other decision-makers in the area, including international and regional organizations, such as the EU, IUCN, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)[59], the Barcelona and the Bucarest Conventions, with important tools for marine biodiversity conservation and management.

Thus, the Project was an unprecedent collective effort of collecting data on marine biodiversity, at this macroregional scale; this effort should facilitate decision-making in the future and it should influence the conservation of large marine mammals and other species, as well as marine and coastal ecosystems. The ASI was an opportunity to innovate new marine biodiversity monitoring technologies, using mixed methods (aerial and boat surveys), experimenting and testing drones monitoring capacities, so as to obtain the best possible representation of reality. It was also a huge step forward to the harmonization of the monitoring methodologies and the experimentation of a common field protocol, under the coordination of high skilled international and national experts. The scientific and technical tools were developed by the SC in close cooperation with many other experts and partners[60], under the leading of the SCo, all playing then a key role in the field works and guaranteeing a high scientific and technical quality standard.

At the same time, the PS conducted an incredible series of consultations with many actors and partners for the organisation of the boat[61] and aerial operations[62]; the secretariat ensured the overall coordination of the Project and used calls for tenders to select and then contract experts and service providers (e.g.: aerial companies). Tremendous support was brought by many other national partners who contributed directly to the field operations and/or facilitated the delivery of all needed permits and authorizations[63]. The collaboration with the Black Sea countries, including the Russian partners[64], was also very successful; this collaboration led to expand the surveyed area to a wide part of the Black Sea, with EU[65] and UNDP[66] supports, and to the Russian waters.

Team leaders were designated to coordinate the operations and organize the teams works; the PS put in place a system of international prepaid credit cards which were refilled as necessary, to facilitate the daily life of the teams.

Thanks to the flexibility and commitment of its governance and management, the Project was also successful at (1) enhancing and fostering scientific and technical cooperation and (2) upgrading the skills and experience in marine biodiversity monitoring of scientists, students and managers from the region, trained in a series of sub regional workshops[67], through a capacity-building programme coordinated and implemented by SPA/RAC in close collaboration with the PS. This is also a commendable result. Would new monitoring efforts be made in the future, attention should be focused on involving again, as much as possible, the persons trained during the Project.

The Project outputs will also contribute to support further development of various policies and programmes, such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive[68], the IUCN Red list, the Black Sea

[58] E.g.: a Standardized Operational Method for Inventoring and Monitoring Marine Mammals at macro-regional level; a SAMMOA Software Guidance for Aerial data Collection (https://www.observatoire-pelagis.cnrs.fr/les-outils/sammoa/); a Mediterranean Aerial and Boat-based Survey Blocks and Design; a study report on the potential use of drones for monitoring megafauna

[59] Which has published a methodology for data collection in a "*Manual on monitoring incidental catch of vulnerable species in the Mediterraneen and Black sea*" (http://www.fao.org/publications/card/fr/c/CA4991EN/).

[60] E.g.: Pelagis (University of la Rochelle, France), Marine Conservation research (MCR).

[61] MCR Lim. and MCR Int., Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation, CNRS Lebanon, Arab Federation for Wildlife Protection (AFWP), UNDP Syria, …

[62] Pelagis, WWF Greece, …

[63] Turkish Marine Research Foundation (TUDAV), Institut Marocain de recherche Halieutique (IMRH), Centre Algérien de Recherche et de Développement de la Pêche et de l'Aquaculture (CARDPA), …

[64] Russian Academy of Science, State Oceanographic Institute, …

[65] Through the CenoBS Project aiming to support the MSFD implementation in the Black Sea and to establish a regional monitoring system of cetaceans (D1) and noise monitoring (D11) for achieving Good Environmental Status (GES).

[66] Through the Emblas Plus Project – also supported by the EU - aiming to improve protection of the Black Sea environment and focusing on marine data collection and local small-scale actions targeted at public awareness raising and education.

[67] E.g.: on monitoring techniques and photo ID methods (Albania, Lebanon, Tunisia and Montenegro), aerial and boat surveys (Malta, Spain,); Contact Groups;

[68] And its potential further development in the Black Sea.

Integrated Monitoring Assessment Program (BSIMAP), the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Project (IMAP) and the Mediterranean Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach *(*EcAp Med III*),* in the Mediterranean region.

In conclusion, this organization was excellent, successful and safe; no major difficulty happened, thanks to the leadership and overall coordination ensured by the PS, with all other actors, throughout the Project cycle.

The Project has also been an unprecedented opportunity for a wide cooperation between the scientist community and other stakeholders in the macroregion; it has enhanced a transnational ecosystem approach for the conservation of the studied species and their habitats, meeting the objectives of existing international other strategies and policies, placed under the umbrella of the EU[69], the Convention on Biodiversity[70] and the Barcelona Convention[71], and it has also addressed various matters of concern, very concretely, like the plastic pollution.

A strong baseline is now available for developing future monitoring surveys, with reliable, robust and comparable data on the distribution and abundance of the studied species in the macroregion; however, further efforts are still needed in order to cover the areas that have not been investigated during the survey, for various reasons developed above, and better the seasonality effects.

It would be also necessary to reiterate this monitoring survey several times, using the same methods and protocols so as to allow data comparison over time.

Finally, further works are needed at all levels - national and regional - to ensure all actors fully assimilate methods and protocols and allow decision-makers to transform this knowledge heritage into concrete conservation and adaptation to CC measures and decisions.

In conclusion and to date, important progress has been made in terms of improvement of knowledge on the studied species and their seasonal habitats, capacity building and scientific networking, as well as on data collect on specific topics, like plastic pollution.

It is however too early to conclude on the level of effectiveness of the Project.

No public recommendation has yet been presented in order to transform the Project achievements into concrete conservation actions in response to the escalating pressures on the studied species and their habitats. A regional worshop will be held in June 2021 on how "*to move from science to policy*". This will be the next challenge for the actors, i.e. to work, conclude and communicate on operational recommendations, by the end of the Project, or, at least, to chart a roadmap towards future conservation priorities and activities and to provide guidance for next monitoring and conservation efforts.

Further works are also still needed to detail how the Project results may contribute concretely, in the future, to the adaptation to CC.

Would new monitoring efforts be undertaken, it would be very important to also "*move from policy to action*".

II-4-3 Efficiency (to what extent the Project's results were consistent with the means)

The efficiency is considered as "**Very Satisfactory**".

The Governance structure of the Project, as already said, was fairly efficient. All persons consulted during the evaluation process were rather enthusiastic with the institutional organization and management of the Project.

It is not common for an international governmental organization to be responsible for the entire preparation and organization of such a time and energy-consuming project, requiring permanent

[69] SFMD, art. 3.
[70] COP 5 Decision V/6 (https://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=7148); COP 7 Decision VII/11 (https://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=7748).
[71] Decision IG 17 (UNEP(DEPI)/MED IG.17/10 Annex V) (https://www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/ecosystem-approach).

internal human and technical support from this organization. Such projects are generally led by an academic organization or a pool of organizations benefitting from external support and sharing responsibilities and works under the umbrella of an *ad hoc* Steering Committee.

The Project was continuously executed inclusively, with participation of the ACCOBAMS governance bodies, in collaboration with external partners; most responsibilities, from raising funds to undertaking the coordination of the desk and field operations, were mostly led by the PS and SC, and carried out in permanent and close cooperation with the NCs and NFPs designated by the State members. In particular, the national and local contacts brought an invaluable support, especially for facilitating and/or issuing the required administrative authorizations and permits.

More than 50 consultancy contracts and almost 40 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed between the PS and its technical partners, for its implementation[72] and more than 30 institutions, took part in the Project implementation; the scientific coordination itself required the signature of several contracts with diverse persons, for various technical and financial areas

These management structure has shown its full institutional efficiency and it should be kept in the future, if new monitoring activities are undertaken.

However, the PS team capacities should be strengthened throughout the Project cycle; further efforts could also be made to further integrate the scientific coordination at the macroregion level, so as to minimize the transaction costs of the Project and optimize resources and capacities.

Much lower than estimated initially[73], the overall budget was fixed to 2,713 Million Euros, in addition to an important in-kind support from the State members that was unfortunately not possible to evaluate from the information available. This budget was well-balanced, in line with the real needs whilst those needs had to be adapted to the funds available, but without degrading the quality of the Project results and achievements.

The final allocated budget was not changed substantially up until now; only few adaptations[74] were adopted in January 2019, not jeopardizing any of the Project objectives and key activities[75]. Additional financial resources were even found during the Project implementation, thanks to new partners[76]; those resources allowed to expand the initial geographical coverage of the Project to almost the entire macroregion, and to develop as well additional innovative activities, like the drone experimental survey.

It is concluded that the various tasks and activities were accomplished with a satisfactory financial efficiency.

It is however recommended that the in-kind support from any contributors to the monitoring activities be more precisely evaluated; those supports were essential to the efficient delivery of the Project and they should be maintained and fostered for the future monitoring activities.

Only the timing of the Project activities was adapted; planned for a 3-5 year period (2016-2019), the Project was delayed by 1 year due to the finalization of the fundraising activities and practical access to the funding[77]. The definition of the data analysis process required also additional time and a series of logistical difficulties had to be solved. All those issues were handled properly. The delays led only to adapt the agreements signed with several funders, but they did not affect the general Project process and cycle.

[72] Further details data and specifications of the contracts and MoUs can be requested to the PS, if needed. The evaluation of each document was out of the scope of the present evaluation.
[73] ASI (2015).
[74] E.g.: Activity 4 "*Using drones to monitor marine mammals*"; Activity 5 "*Analysis of the results of the survey (abundance and distribution of species) and establishing links with the main anthropogenic pressures and protection measures, including national/regional measure*"; Activity 6 "*Spatial modeling and identification of critical and preferential habitats*".
[75] In several cases, the budget allocated to the activity was reduced (e.g.: Activity 8 "*Training workshops for local stakeholders by subregion or group of subregions, in the use of the standardized survey method and in information management*"; Activity 9 "*Preparatory study for a long-term funding mechanism for monitoring operations relating to the species in question, through optimization of existing resources*").
[76] E.g.: FPA2 (Activity 4); CeNoBS (Black Sea part).
[77] The MAVA agreement was signed mid2016, and the FPA2 and AFB conventions in 2017.

Considering the technical and institutional difficulties to undertake the planned activities in a very complex international context, it is concluded that the Project was conducted, up to date, in a timely efficient way, most expected results having been timely achieved.

A major final goal of the Project will be to turn the survey results into conservation recommendations. The regional workshop based on the result interpretation to be held in June 2021 will lead to recommendations that will be presented and discussed in 2022, during the MOP 8.

Furthermore and on the basis of the data collected during the survey:

- the Cetacean Conservation Status report publication will be updated[78];
- the Mediterranean/Black Sea cetacean status under the framework of the IUCN Red List is being re-assessed, in collaboration with the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (IUCN-Med);
- a special issue of a peer review journal presenting a set of scientific articles reporting the Project results is under preparation; this publication is expected to be issued by the end of 2022.

It is too early to conclude on this part of the Project that is underway, but it is strongly recommended to focus, in the coming months, on the publication, communication and promotion of the Project findings[79]. Efforts should also seek at disseminating the scientific results and recommendations in the State member countries and at promoting their use at national level, to enhance concrete actions and decisions for biodiversity conservation and adaptation to CC.

A particular attention should also be paid to convince the institutional stakeholders, at all levels - national, European and international - that the Project has directly responded to their needs, and its results will help in achieving their own objectives. They should also be strongly encouraged to include future and regular monitoring efforts in their strategies, policies, programmes and plans devoted to the conservation of cetaceans[80].

Moving from science to conservation will be an important challenge for ACCOBAMS and for the State members in the next months; a major goal of the Project should be to develop clear and operational conservation recommendations for adoption by the State members, at the MOP 8. Hence, the recommendations concluding the two final survey reports should be further elaborated and more operationally to help the decisionmakers in their execution.

From this point of view, the Project results should be used *inter alia* as a backbone to facilitate the location of Critical Habitat for Cetaceans, as well as to enhance the identification of Important Marine Mammals Areas (IMMA) under the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas task force[81] and contribute to the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework in preparation under the aegis of the Convention of biodiversity.

Part of the Project efficiency will in fact come from the capacity of the Project management structure to convince all stakeholders that future and further efforts are needed to evolve from the existing baseline to a comprehensive and finite monitoring system, at the macroregion level, adequately resourced[82].

II-4-4 Sustainability (to what extent the effects of the Project will be sustainable after its completion)

The sustainability is considered as "**Moderately Satisfactory**".

[78] See previous publication from 2010: https://accobams.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Notarbartolo-di-Sciara-and-Birkun-2010.pdf.
[79] A first paper using data coming from the Project was published on the scientific journal "*Environmental Pollution*" (Lambert, C., Authier, M., Dorémus, G., Laran, S., Panigada, S., Spitz, J. Van Canneyt, O. & Ridoux, V. 2020). See also: Hodgson, A.J., Cleguer, C., Scheinin, A., Bigal, E., and Galili, O. (2020) and Bigal, A, Bar Natan, O, Levy, A., Galili, O., Rosso, M., Tchernov, D.,n Treibitz, T., and Scheinin, A.P. (no date).
[80] E.g.: France (https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/biodiversite-marine-strategie-nationale-mieux-connaitre-et-proteger-cetaces).
[81] https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/immas/.
[82] Human, technical and financial.

From the elaboration phase of the Project, sustainability was a matter of discussion and concern; this sustainability will be assessed from the four following points of view:

- geopolitically: the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions are amongst the most sensitive and delicate areas in this part of the world and nobody knows what could happen tomorrow in the macroregion where political tensions remain very high, *a fortiori* in the long-term.

Although the Project received strong support and interest from all countries in the macroregion, it would be unfair to conclude that its outcomes and results will surely be preserved and sustained in the future, *a fortiori* in the long-term, due to this sensitive geopolitical context.

- financially: while the persons consulted during the evaluation process seem willing to sustain and secure the monitoring activities at the macroregion level, most of them think that their financing will be not easy. On one hand, most actors agree that an important key of success will be to convince the State member governments and the large funder organisations (e.g.: European Union, UN agencies) that such efforts respond directly to their needs and commitments and that they have to support monitoring activities, in the future, on cetaceans and other key species and their habitats; on the other hand, it is likely that a new monitoring project would be less expensive and easier to manage and implement, based on lessons learned from the Project.

It is not yet possible to conclude on the financial sustainability of the monitoring activities. This will likely depend upon the objectives and conditions leading those future activities, and also upon goals, priorities and conditions fixed by the potential external funder organizations[83].

The financial sustainability will require further decisions and commitments that the State members and other decision-makers should discuss in the next months and announce, ideally, at the MOP 8, in 2022.

To facilitate that process, a roadmap will be developed by then, recommending several alternative institutional and financial scenarios to sustain the ACCOBAMS monitoring activities[84] and to leverage secured funds, adequate in magnitude, scope and structure.

Whichever scenario is retained, it will be needed to seek new funds and leverage the existing internal funds, based on a joint sustainable funding strategy agreed by all stakeholders.

- institutionally: a large part of the Project success, as already said, should be credited to its governance and management structure; those benefits could likely be sustained if monitoring activities are kept under the umbrella of the ACCOBAMS in the future. However, the design of the process might need to be adapted, if the scope of this monitoring is enlarged to other species (e.g.: birds, marine turtles, large fish), topics (e.g.: anthropogenic pressures like noise, fishing, transport, tourism) and/or problematics (e.g.: plastic and other sources of pollution).

It will be important to maintain the current stakeholder network and ACCOBAMS governing structures, should it be decided to pursue the monitoring activities; hence, it is preferable that most of the persons associated in the elaboration and implementation of the ASI remain the same and are directly involved in those activities, in the future.

This governance and functioning placed under the overall coordination of ACCOBAMS would likely contribute in sustaining those activities, from an institutional point of view; as previously recommended, additional PS human resources will however be critical to ensure the enduring success of this coordination.

- environmentally: the Project focused on the state of conservation of cetaceans and their habitats, more widely of marine and coastal biodiversity, in the Mediterranean and Black Sea macroregion. It aimed to contribute in the long-term preservation of natural heritage,

[83] See for example the Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848 of 17 May 2017 laying down criteria and methodological standards on good environmental status of marine waters and specifications and standardised methods for monitoring and assessment, and repealing Decision 2010/477/EU.
[84] Contract N°16/2020/LB 6402-6403 (Task 3).

by improving the level of knowledge, and making the civil society and governments more aware of the critical areas where those species and habitats are distributed. The Project also contributed to identifying a series of anthropogenic threats and pressures on them. Finally, it should, hopefully, facilitate improvements of the protection and management of the studied species and their critical habitats, and, by the way, should influence political will and decisions, in the mid- and long-terms. The scope of the Project did not directly include the sustainability of the environment, but its findings will lead to recommendations that should guide the decision-makers in the macroregion towards a environmental sustainability. The data and information collected during the survey will however not always be sufficient for taking local protection measures at national level; this will require further works and decisions.

Whilst its results and recommendations should be able to orientate conservation of the studied species and their critical habitats for the future, the Project environmental sustainability will be mainly subject to a strong political will and clear commitments from the public authorities, for the mid and long-terms.

Thus, the decisions to be taken by the State members and by the European and international organizations will be of the highest importance to sustain and optimize the Project achievements environmentally.

II-4-5 Overall impact (what has been the overall impact of the Project)

The Project has achieved a large part of the expected results at its intermediate stage of implementation; it should meet most expectations by its end. Its overall impact is considered as "**Very satisfactory**", in light of the following results areas**.**

Managing properly this project was a challenge, with a wide variety of situations to address, from scientific issues, fieldwork urgencies, particularly difficult weather, to logistical[85] and administrative[86] constraints. ACCOBAMS has met that challenge successfully.

Firstly, this is a good and obvious example of the role that this institution can play, alongside the State members and other European and international institutions, in developing large-scale synergies and mutualization for concerted action, aiming at marine biodiversity conservation in the macroregion.

Another lesson learnt from the Project is the high importance of the actors' ownership, throughout the Project cycle. The consultations conducted during the evaluation process highlighted the good spirit of cooperation between all actors involved in the Project activities. It is not usual to observe such degree of unanimity within so large and diverse groups of persons (e.g.: scientists, experts, officials, NGOs, …), each one concluding on the full success of the Project.

This success was widely depending upon the ability to work across multiple organizations and people; it has proved to be an outstanding example of scientific and technical collaboration, between 26 countries, overcoming most constraints and difficulties in a very complex context, whatever they were, geopolitical, institutional, scientific and logistical; as such, the Project set an important precedent for further and future conservation activities at the macroregion level, and it should enhance confidence between all actors on their ability and the necessity to act in an inclusive and complementary way.

The ability to adapt timely to complex and varying situations is the third legacy of the Project. This cooperation framework and its operational flexibility should be maintained in the future, would the decision be taken to undertake other monitoring works in the studied area.

The Project has also demonstrated the importance and feasibility of large-scale synoptic surveys to bring invaluable knowledge and reliable data on cetaceans as well as on human impacts, at the ecosystem level; it has shown that such large-scale method is desirable, realistic and manageable at the macroregion level, and in coherence with the ecosystem approach promoted internationally.

[85] Using 8 small planes specially equipped with bubble windows and 6 research boats.
[86] E.g.: authorizations, permits, licenses, …

The methods, protocols and databases inherited from the Project activities will be very helpful in the future, to all countries in the macroregion. For the first time, scientists, experts and other actors have shared and used common monitoring and data analysis tools, at the macroregion level, meeting also larger European and international visions, goals and conservation objectives. This framework ensured the highest possible quality of data collection; it also led to build strong overall monitoring and analytic skills, as well as more regular scientific cooperation for the mid and long-terms.

The Project capacity building component implemented with the UN Environments Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) was, *per se*, an outstanding Project output; the scientists and specialists from all participating countries who have been trained in cetacean monitoring methods have now an unique opportunity to apply their increased skills in their countries, at national level and to elaborate national monitoring programmes related to the studied species and their habitats. This will be an important asset for future monitoring works in this macroregion.

Moreover, the Project results and achievements will benefit to all countries in the macroregion, whether they are members or not to the ACCOBAMS; they will support these countries to meet their commitments, under, for example, the MSFD and the IMAP implemented by the Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP) and may as well benefit to other countries worldwide, wishing to develop similar approaches and projects in their regions. The Project potential for replicability cannot be ignored.

Its results and achievements should help to optimize and harmonize future efforts for conservation in the macroregion, having in mind that, as mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of the Project was to contribute in "*the adoption and implementation of national legislation, the assessment and management of human-cetacean interactions, the protection of the habitats of the target species, the research and monitoring, capacity building, information gathering and dissemination, training and education, as well as emergency response*". Whilst it is not yet possible to conclude on the capacity to transform this knowledge into conservation, the Project has already gone beyond its goal of defining an innovative approach for monitoring coastal and marine environments; it has shown all stakeholders that building a common vision on marine biodiversity conservation in this macroregion is not only necessary but is also achievable and realistic.

Finally, it is too early to conclude on the impact of the Project on the civil society, as it is not completed to date; several awareness and communication activities[87] and events[88] are still going on or should be carried out in the near future.

In conclusion, the overall impact of the Project goes far beyond the monitoring of the studied species and, as such, contributes to recognize the macroregion as a large ecosystem beyond State boundaries, requiring collaborative partnerships to effectively meet the challenge of conserving marine natural heritage across multiple actors and countries.

The Project results and achievements should also serve as technical and action bridges between knowledge and conservation works, not only in the macroregion, but also worldwide.

However, it is only a first step towards a political engagement with key issues, like biodiversity conservation and adaptation to CC. The next step should consist of moving towards concrete actions of conservation and management of this natural heritage, at national and regional levels, with the European and international community support.

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III LESSONS LEARNED

A series of lessons can be learned from the above conclusions, as well as from the interviews and questionnaires conducted during the evaluation process.

They should help sustain the ACCOBAMS monitoring activities and foster "*co-ordinated measures to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for cetaceans*", as fixed in the agreement

[87] Those activities should be implemented in the framework of the ACCOBAMS communication Strategy and Plan (See Res. 7.4), that started in January 2021 (ACCOBAMS Secretariat com. pers.).
[88] E.g.: Activity 8 (PID 2015) « *drawing up concrete recommendations in optimizing existing measures to protect the species concerned and prioritization of actions to be taken at all levels national, regional and maroregional*".

(Art. 2-1°); those lessons are not listed in order of priority and they reflect only the author's opinion, not necessarily that of ACCOBAMS:

- Lesson 1 – It is important to develop as much as possible a synoptic approach to conduct monitoring activities at the macroregion level and with respect to the ecosystem approach; however, these activities can be carried out and synchronized at various subregional levels in order to facilitate logistics and seize opportunities;

- Lesson 2 – It is useful and preferable to follow an holistic, integrated and cross-thematic approach, mixing species, themes and environmental issues; this will optimize resources and may facilitate fund raising;

- Lesson 3 – The monitoring methods and protocols should be fully harmonized at the studied area level; this would guarantee a high standard of data quality and facilitate aggregated data analysis;

- Lesson 4 – The monitoring objectives should be ambitious but achievable; it means that the expectations should be realistic and strictly compatible with the duration and budget constraints, and *vice versa*;

- Lesson 5 – Human resources dedicated to the overall and scientific coordination of the activities should be carefully adapted to the ambitions and needs;

- Lesson 6 – Attention should also be paid to minimize all transaction and organisation costs;

- Lesson 7 – It is crucial for the success of the activities to foster an inclusive and participatory approach throughout the project cycle, at all levels, international/national;

- Lesson 8 – Results and information should be specifically adapted to the various target audiences and disseminated timely, on a regular basis;

- Lesson 9 – The monitoring objectives and results should meet the legal European and international obligations and commitments of the State members for biodiversity conservation and adaptation to CC;

- Lesson 10 – The monitoring results should be interpreted in practical way and the recommendations drawn up should respond directly to the decision-makers and policy advisors wills and needs;

- Lesson 11 – Support measures and actions should be undertaken to enhance implementation of those results and recommendations, at all levels, especially at national level;

- Lesson 12 – The ACCOBAMS monitoring activities should seek to develop the most effective synergies and convergence with other international and European systems and thus increase their attractiveness to external funding and technical partner organizations;

- Lesson 13 – For the future, the monitoring activities should be transformed in fully-fledged ACCOBAMS programme and sourced properly in order to leverage its contribution to the execution of other ACCOBAMS programmes and projects;

- Lesson 14 – Those activities should as well be fully integrated in the relevant biodiversity and CC strategies, plans and programmes, in each country in the macroregion.

IV RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawn directly from the lessons learnt, the key following recommendations are expressed as a series of questions that should be addressed by the ACCOBAMS State members and their partners in their forthcoming works and discussions, recalling their decisions to build a system that should be based on a comprehensive and finite sustainable monitoring framework:

- To what extent the **synoptic approach** should be developed for future monitoring studies (macroregional, regional, subregional, national, …)?

- To what extent those studies should be **holistic, integrated and cross-thematic** (species, themes, topics, …)?
- What should be the **frequency** of the monitoring studies?
- To what extent **harmonize the monitoring methods and protocols** at the studied area level?
- What could be **ambitious but realistic objectives and expectations** for future monitoring activities?
- Which **human, technical, financial resources (magnitude, scope and structure)** are needed to meet those objectives and expectations?
- How to minimize the **transaction and organizational costs** of those activities?
- How to improve **governance, planning and functioning** of the monitoring activities in an inclusive way, throughout the monitoring cycle and at all levels (international, macroregional, subregional, national, …)?
- How to adapt the future monitoring studies' **results** to the various targeted stakeholders in order to facilitate their utilization and operationalization?
- How to ensure that those **results** will help the State members to meet their legal obligations, commitments and policies for biodiversity conservation and adaptation to CC?
- How to develop the most effective **synergies and convergence** between ACCOBAMS, the State members and their potential partners organizations and seize opportunities?

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LIST OF ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 – Terms of reference (from Contract N° 16/2020/LB 6402 & 6403)

- **Réaliser une évaluation intermédiaire de l'ASI** à partir des conclusions du bilan intermédiaire et d'une série d'entretiens semi-dirigés auprès d'acteurs, désignés d'un commun accord entre le Secrétariat permanent et le prestataire, impliqués dans la mise en œuvre et/ou le suivi du programme ASI. Une grille d'entretien sera proposée par le prestataire et finalisée d'un commun accord avec le Secrétariat.

ANNEX 2 – LIST OF PERSONS CONSULTED

2-1 PERSONS INTERVIEWED

	NAME	POSITION	DATE	CONTACTS
ASI ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretary - Support team				
1	Celia le Ravallec Julie Belmont Susana Salvador	Program and Project Officer ASI project Manager Present ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary	18/03	ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat Jardin de l'UNESCO Terrasses de Fontvieille 98000 Monaco Tel : +377 9898 4074 Fax : +377 9898 4208 www.accobams.org jbelmont@accobams.net Tel. dir. : +377 9898 9313 / +3307 68 88 0703 ssalvador@accobams.net Tel : +377 9898 8010/ +33 6 07 93 27 18 cleravallec@accobams.net Tel : +377 9898 4074 /+ 33 6 60 86 79 82
2	Florence Descroix-Comanducci	Ex ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary (Janvier 2014-April 2020) Director of the IAEA Environment Laboratories in Monaco	09/02	IAEA Environment Laboratories 4 Quai Antoine 1er 98000 Monaco Tel +33 6 80 86 68 28 fdescroix.comanducci@gmail.com
3	Chedly Raïs	ASI ACCOBAMS consultant	21/01	RAIS Chedly Consultant Menzah VIII, Tunis – TUNISIE Tel: +216 98444629 - Fax: +216 71763533 chedly.rais@okianos.org
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ANNEX 3 – INTERVIEW GRID

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INTERVIEW GRID
(key stakeholders)

N.B.: this grid is sent to prepare and facilitate the phone interviews between the consultant and a selection of key people in the development, implementation and / or monitoring of the ASI project; the questions asked are optional, each stakeholder being free to answer them, depending on the nature of his contribution to the project.

In order to optimize the discussions, recipients are expected to return this completed grid by mail, to the consultant, at least 5 days before the date of the phone interview; please note that some question might not be relevant based on your role in the project. Thank you for your valuable contribution.

Glossary :

- Relevance: project responding to the expectations of the stakeholders.
- Effectivness: project producing the expected effects.
- Efficiency: project whose effects are consistent with the means.
- Sustainability: project whose effects will be sustainable after its completion.
- Impact: effects of a project, positive and/or negative, primary and/or secondary, direct or indirect, intentional or not.

HS Highly satisfactory **S** Satisfactory **MS** Moderately satisfactory **US** Unsatisfactory**.**

RELEVANCE				
Overall rating	**HS**	**S**	**MS**	**US**
	HS			
Questions	**Answers**			
Q.1 - To what extent was the project in line with its general objective to build a coherent monitoring system for the studied species?				
Q.2 - To what extent could the project contribute to collect objective, robust and comparable data?				
Q.3 - To what extent could the data collected contribute to improve the conservation status of those species and their habitats?				
Q.4 - To what extent could the project influence management for the good status of the marine and coastal environments in the studied area?				
EFFECTIVENESS				
Overall rating	**HS**	**S**	**MS**	**US**
Questions	**Answers**			

Q.5 - To what extent has the project provided a deeper understanding of the abundance and distribution of the studied species based on reliable data?	
Q.6 - To what extent has the project contributed to strengthen international cooperation and synergies between the countries from the studied area?	
Q.7 - To what extent has the project led to optimize and increase countries efficiency of in establishing a transnational approach to conserve the studied species?	
Q.8 - To what extent has the project led to characterize the good environmental status of the studied zone?	
Q.9 - To what extent has the project contributed to maintain and/or restore this good status, as well as the critical and preferred habitats of the studied species?	
Q.10 - To what extent has the project led to advancing research/development in the studied field?	

EFFICIENCY				
Overall rating	**HS**	**S**	**MS**	**US**

Questions	**Answers**
Q.11 - To what extent has the project reinforced local capacities to conserve cetaceans and ensure the good status of marine and coastal environments?	
Q.12 - To what extent was the project management structure efficient in generating the expected results?	
Q.13 - To what extent was the project budget appropriate?	
Q.14 - To what extent was the project execution cost-effective	
Q.15 - To what extent have the project resources (human, technical, financial) been used wisely and allocated properly to achieve the expected results?	
Q.16 - To what extent have those resources been delivered in a timely manner?	
Q.17 - To what extent the ASI governance structure	

established under ACCOBAMS ensured an effective and efficient project management?				
SUSTAINABILITY				
Overall rating	**HS**	**S**	**MS**	**US**
Questions	**Answers**			
Q.18 -To what extent will resources be available to sustain the benefits achieved by the project after its completion?				
Q.19 - To what extent will the results of the project be transferred to local stakeholders?				
Q.20 - To what extent will the level of stakeholders' ownership be sufficient to allow for the project benefits to be sustained?				
Q.21 - What should be done to extend the project benefits and strengthen its sustainability?				
OVERALL IMPACTS				
Overall rating	**HS**	**S**	**MS**	**US**
Question	**Answer**			
Q.22 - To what extent has the project led to optimize efforts to manage and conserve the studied species and their marine and coastal habitats?				

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Consulting International
Expertise Mediation Communication

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE
(National focal points)

N.B.: This questionnaire is to be sent to the ACCOBAMS National Focal Points; it aims to better know the opinion of the Parties on the content, implementation and results obtained from the ASI project.

Glossary :

- Relevance: project responding to the expectations of the stakeholders.
- Effectivness: project producing the expected effects.
- Efficiency: project whose effects are consistent with the means.
- Sustainability: project whose effects will be sustainable after its completion.
- Impact: effects of a project, positive and/or negative, primary and/or secondary, direct or indirect, intentional or not.

HS Highly satisfactory **S** Satisfactory **MS** Moderately satisfactory **US** Unsatisfactory**.**

RELEVANCE	**Overall rating**	**HS**	**S**	**MS**	**US**
	Questions	**Answers**			
Q.1 - What should have been done in order to better monitor the studied species: ○ in your country? ○ at the ACCOBAMS area level?					
Q.2 - To what extent will the project contribute in the future to improve monitoring of the studied species: ○ in your country? ○ at the ACCOBAMS area level?					
EFFECTIVENESS	**Overall rating**	**HS**	**S**	**MS**	**US**
	Guiding questions	**Observations**			
Q.3 - To what extent has the project contributed to improve monitoring of the studied species: ○ in your country? ○ at the ACCOBAMS area level?					
Q.4 - To what extent has the project contributed to strengthen international cooperation and synergy between countries of the studied area?					
EFFICIENCY	**Overall rating**	**HS**	**S**	**MS**	**US**
	Guiding questions	**Observations**			
Q.5 – To what extent has the project strengthened local capacities to conserve the studied species: ○ in your country? ○ at the ACCOBAMS area level?					

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Q.6 - To what extent was the project budget appropriate to reach the project goals and objectives:
o in your country?
o at the ACCOBAMS area level?</td><td colspan="4"></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">SUSTAINABILITY</td><td>Overall rating</td><td>HS</td><td>S</td><td>MS</td><td>US</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Guiding questions</td><td colspan="4">Observations</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Q.7 - To what extent will the project benefits be sustainable after its completion:
o in your country?
o at the ACCOBAMS area level?
Q.8 - What should be done in order to sustain the project benefits after its completion:
o at your country level?
o at the ACCOBAMS area level?</td><td colspan="4"></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">OVERALL IMPACTS</td><td>Overall rating</td><td>HS</td><td>S</td><td>MS</td><td>US</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Guiding question</td><td colspan="4">Observations</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Q.9 - To what extent has the project led to optimize efforts to manage and conserve the studied species and their marine and coastal habitats?</td><td colspan="4"></td></tr>
</table>