

## **SYNOPTIC BASIN-WIDE SURVEY IN THE ACCOBAMS AREA PERIOD 2024-2027**

### **PROJECT PROPOSAL**

**DRAFT**

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

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## Executive Summary

The Mediterranean Sea, contiguous Atlantic area and Black Sea provide remarkable habitats for cetaceans and host more than 20 species, of which 14 are present throughout the year, as well as many other remarkable marine megafauna species. Most dolphins and whales in this macroregion are considered "Endangered" under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, due to significant human pressure. The ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) was set up between 2017 and 2022 in order to establish a long-term program to monitor changes in the abundance and distribution of these species, a prerequisite to allow optimizing and adjusting current measures to safeguard these species and their habitats.

While this initiative has helped to establish a baseline framework for assessing trends of their populations, it is now imperative to sustain regular efforts in monitoring cetaceans at a macroregional scale. Consolidating a comprehensive regional perspective on conserving these wide-ranging species is a prerequisite for their long-term conservation. It requires to maintain up-to-date information on population status and trends over time and to gain a better understanding of the human impact. Additionally, the economic growth coupled with the instability in the global and regional geopolitical arena have spurred a rise in socioeconomic activities at sea, further underscoring the necessity of frequent and consistent population monitoring.

To build on the momentum and benefits derived from the ASI, the ACCOBAMS Long-Term Monitoring Program (LTMP) provides an integrated and coordinated transnational program at the ecoregional level. By optimizing the efforts of countries to meet their international, regional, and national environmental commitments, the LTMP helps develop a macro-regional strategy that is adapted to the eco-ethology of species. As a result, it contributes to achieving the objective of good environmental status in marine and coastal environments and the preservation of biodiversity in general.

Proper implementation of the LTMP with regular and frequent regional or sub-regional monitoring efforts is necessary to evaluate the impact of protection measures adopted to support cetaceans and their habitats, including national/regional measures. By collecting robust time-series data, the conservation status of these species can be assessed regularly at the appropriate scale.

As a follow-up to ACCOBAMS MOP8<sup>1</sup>, Resolution 8.10 tasks the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat to create and structure a detailed technical document in the form of a project proposal for the next synoptic basin-wide monitoring surveys. The present proposal was prepared taking into consideration the experience and lessons learnt from the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative<sup>2</sup>. It includes a description of four work packages, a time-frame, budget, governance structure and a SWOT analysis. It is intended to facilitate the tasks of the countries in identifying Voluntary Contributions and other appropriate capacities, and to support the Secretariat in exploring and identifying external support and opportunities for the next synoptic basin-wide survey in the ACCOBAMS Area that, ideally, should be carried out in 2024-2026.

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<sup>1</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS (Malta, 29 November - 2 December 2022)

<sup>2</sup> As reflected in 2 reports: Final report of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative project (ACCOBAMS-MOP8/2022/Inf12); ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative - Evaluation Report (ACCOBAMS-MOP8/2022/Inf16)

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tracking changes in the distribution and abundance of species is a fundamental requirement for optimizing and adjusting conservation measures to safeguard these species and their habitats. Since its creation, ACCOBAMS has therefore prioritized cetaceans' population monitoring as a key aspect of its strategy. The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, Parties, and Secretariat have worked extensively to develop a dedicated initiative to support the establishment of a long-term monitoring program across the ACCOBAMS area. The ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative was officially launched during ACCOBAMS MOP6 in November 2016 after more than a decade of development and fundraising efforts.

The ASI was a collaborative effort between riparian countries, national scientists, and over 40 national and international organizations, conducted from 2017 to 2022. Aerial and boat campaigns carried out during the summers of 2018 and 2019 utilized a standardized methodological approach, resulting in an unprecedented database on cetaceans, other marine megafauna and human activities, including floating marine debris, across the entire ACCOBAMS Agreement Area. The [ASI's findings on the distribution and abundance of cetacean species](#) provide a valuable baseline to assess conservation status, monitor population trends, and identify key habitats. These results have also led to the (re)assessment of IUCN Red List conservation status of cetaceans species and the publication of the ["Conserving Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises in the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea and adjacent areas: an ACCOBAMS Status Report 2021"](#).

ASI results and data are openly available for various uses in marine conservation. The analysis of other megafauna species and floating debris distribution modelling, derived from ASI, is useful for multiple projects and future reports on the Mediterranean and Black Seas' good status, such as the UNEP-MAP Med Quality Status Report 2023. Governments, scientists, managers, policy makers, and NGOs widely use ASI data to address local, national, and regional conservation objectives, including the adoption of protective spatial measures, conducting environmental impact assessments, and developing marine spatial planning strategies. Moreover, the ASI method and protocols can be easily reproduced to carry out comparable initiatives in different regional marine settings.

The ASI has yielded numerous additional positive outcomes, such as establishing a trained macro-regional operational task force, raising awareness throughout the region, building substantial capacity and empowering nations to monitor marine wildlife. It has made significant contributions to international outreach in marine conservation efforts in the ACCOBAMS region and the data collected has also been further valued by showcasing the initiative's findings to a broader scientific audience through a dedicated ASI issue in the peer-reviewed journal *Frontiers in Marine Sciences*.

Such accomplishment in establishing a collaborative and coordinated monitoring system for cetacean populations has marked a significant step towards ensuring robust monitoring over the long term. Building on this success, efforts have been made since 2021 to integrate the ASI into an embedded monitoring program within ACCOBAMS. The recommendations generated from the 2021 ASI technical workshop<sup>3</sup> were utilized to formulate a recommendation from the Scientific Committee on monitoring efforts in the ACCOBAMS region. The latter, in conjunction with insights from sustainability-related studies conducted during the project (including the ASI evaluation, the Roadmap for Financial Support to Future Efforts, and the *Ad hoc* Working Group on Financial Aspects), culminated in the adoption of Resolution 8.10 at the Eighth Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS (MOP8, Malta, 28 November – 2 December 2022).

As part of this process, the successful approach employed during the ASI led to the development of the technical framework for **an ACCOBAMS Long-Term Monitoring Program (LTMP)**, which is annexed to the Resolution 8.10. The LTMP aims to monitor cetacean abundance and distribution, as well as other megafauna and human impact, on a basin scale with regular frequency and adapts to the regional environmental policy context and monitoring commitments of the participating country Parties.

As a follow-up to ACCOBAMS MOP8, and with the aim of operationalizing and financing the next monitoring effort, Resolution 8.10 tasked the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat, in conjunction with the ASI Steering Committee

<sup>3</sup> ASI Technical Recommendations Workshop - Moving from science to conservation, online, 11, 12, 14 &-15 October 2021

and other relevant experts, to create a detailed technical document in the form of a project proposal for the next synoptic basin-wide survey.

In consideration of the above, the present proposal takes up the key elements of implementation of the previous ASI surveys (main activities, timeline, governance) and builds on the previous achievements and lessons learnt (*e.g.*, Survey methodology, consolidated network, survey Task force, ASI evaluation). Financially wise, budget figures derive from the actual costs/expenses that occurred in implementing the ASI and CeNoBS<sup>4</sup> projects during the 2017-2022 period, as well as a few recommendations from the ASI Evaluation Report done in 2021. Thanks to the experience gained, some costs have been reduced for the replication of the future surveys. However, there is a high probability of potential cost increase, depending on market developments and inflation at the exact time when the next surveys will be put in place, which can be only estimated at present (*e.g.*, fuel prices). From a geopolitical point of view, the current situation in the Black Sea may also hamper monitoring efforts in the future, in this part of the macroregion.

Finally, this proposal is intended to assist countries in identifying appropriate resources and capacities, in kind and financial contributions, and to support the Secretariat in exploring and identifying external opportunities for the next synoptic basin-wide survey in the ACCOBAMS Area in 2024-2026.

## II. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The Mediterranean Sea, contiguous Atlantic area and Black Sea provide remarkable habitats for cetaceans and host more than 20 species, of which 14 are present throughout the year (11 in the Mediterranean and 3 in the Black Sea). This macroregion is also critical for numerous other marine megafauna species such as the monk seal, birds, reptiles, and elasmobranchs. Most species of dolphins and whales in this area are considered "Endangered" and listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, and are strictly protected by international and regional law, including community law. The States Parties to ACCOBAMS are actively working to better coordinate their activities to achieve or maintain good conservation status for these species, in their critical and preferred habitats. By doing so, they aim to contribute to the good environmental status of the marine and coastal environment at the ecologically coherent level of the Mediterranean Sea/contiguous Atlantic Area/Black Sea macroregion.

In light of the ongoing decline in global biodiversity, there is widespread recognition of the need for monitoring programs that can assess changes in species distributions and abundances over large spatial and temporal scales, in order to predict long-term biological responses to human pressures and global changes. Effective monitoring efforts also support the implementation of national and regional policies by contributing to provide a comprehensive understanding of the environmental status within the context of socioeconomic development, enabling long-term conservation of species and thus addressing the challenges of global changes, climate change adaptation in particular. Measuring the distribution and abundance of species is however inherently complex, particularly when dealing with highly mobile and cryptic species such as cetaceans whose ranges often span large areas and are subject to strong human direct and indirect impacts on their habitats and natural processes.

Despite the tremendous challenge posed by the geopolitical complexity of the ACCOBAMS area, the ASI has yielded significant benefits. Moreover, the global context has improved remarkably, with the publication of the IPBES report in 2019<sup>5</sup>, warning on Nature unprecedented and dangerous decline, and the adoption of a new global framework for biodiversity in 2022<sup>6</sup>. Continuing the work initiated by ACCOBAMS is crucial at this point, capitalizing on the momentum and advantages gained from the ASI and LTMP contexts. The protection of cetaceans and their habitats, as well as their associated environmental goods and services in the ACCOBAMS Area is indeed still uncertain due to several reasons and needs to:

<sup>4</sup> In the Black Sea, the survey was implemented thanks to the EU-funded CeNoBS project (Support MSFD implementation in the Black Sea through establishing a regional monitoring system of cetaceans (D1) and noise monitoring (D11) for achieving GES.

<sup>5</sup> IPBES (2019): Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. S. Díaz, J. Settele, E. S.

<sup>6</sup> The 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the "Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework" (GBF), including four goals and 23 targets for achievement by 2030.

- **consolidate a regional vision for conserving these species:** the free-ranging nature of cetaceans highlights the need to address their population distribution and trends in the long-term and on a transnational scale, particularly since only few countries in both the north and south of the macroregion currently have programs or projects to systematically survey and monitor these species. Furthermore, the national programs that do exist often cover only part of the country's marine and coastal territory. The LTMP provides a framework allowing a macroregional vision and optimizing the efforts of countries to meet their international and regional obligations; it develops a macro-regional strategy adapted to the eco-ethology of species, thus helping achieve the objective of good environmental status in marine and coastal environments. This new situation is conducive to meeting this objective but still requires continued regular and frequent regional or sub-regional monitoring efforts.
- **maintain an appropriate level of knowledge over time:** the ASI has established a critical baseline for assessing population trends over time by providing significant information and harmonizing methods and protocols for data collection across the macroregion. From there, it is crucial that countries keep on systematically and regularly implementing coherent, synchronized, and harmonized monitoring actions. By collecting enough systematic time-series data, the conservation status of these species can be regularly assessed at the appropriate scale.
- **capitalise on and optimise measures to protect species and their habitats:** providing an integrated and coordinated transnational program of robust data at the ecoregional level, the LTMP helps to prioritize measures required to maintain or restore the good conservation status of these species and also to evaluate their effects, at all levels, national and regional, on those species and on their habitats.
- **get a thorough understanding of socioeconomic activities and their environmental impact:** human activities and behaviours pertaining to the sea and coastline pose a significant threat to marine and coastal species, habitats, and the conservation of these valuable natural assets. Yet, the nature and significance of their impacts, direct or indirect and cumulative, are not yet fully understood. Activities such as tourism, fishing, transportation, and shipping are some examples of human pressures that can cause disruption. For instance, cetaceans can be directly affected by human activities at sea, including ship strikes and incidental catch in fishing gears, as well as habitat loss and degradation and pollution. The ASI data has been helpful in supporting countries' development of protective spatial measures, conducting Environmental Impact Assessments, and developing marine spatial planning strategies. To continue progressing towards a sustainable 'Blue Economy' and ensure the long-term viability of marine and maritime sectors, it is crucial to feed coherent marine spatial planning strategies with data obtained from systemic monitoring and cross-referenced with ecological information.
- **address urgency and unexpected events with a strong impact on cetaceans:** the instability in the global and regional geopolitical scene has led to an increase in human activities at sea in certain areas, including heightened military activities. These activities may cause significant impacts on cetaceans. This unstable geopolitical context further emphasizes the critical importance of monitoring populations as frequently and regularly as possible.
- **optimize the consideration and use of Cetaceans as umbrella species:** protecting cetaceans can have far-reaching benefits for their habitats and the wider biodiversity they support, ultimately leading to improved global conservation outcomes and trends in biodiversity and ecological services. Charismatic species like cetaceans can also serve as standard-bearers for conservation, influencing public opinion and raising awareness about the importance of preserving our natural resources.
- **address the impact of a changing climate:** the effects of climate change on cetaceans are likely to be varied and influenced by diverse factors. Some impacts could be direct, such as certain cetacean species adjusting their ethology to maintain optimal living conditions as temperatures and consequently physicochemical and ecological context change. Indirect impacts can also be expected, like an increased vulnerability to disease and pollutants or changes along the trophic chain. Cetaceans can be treated as sentinel species, providing key indication to assess the impact of climate change on the marine ecosystems

### III. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project forms part of the commitments made by the Parties to ACCOBAMS<sup>5</sup> to manage effectively the Agreement, in particular by applying the conservation, research and management measures prescribed in Annex 2 of the Agreement<sup>7</sup>, as well as to improve the conservation status of cetaceans and of their habitats in the area of competence of the Agreement by 2030 (general objective of the ACCOBAMS Strategy<sup>8</sup>). The project is particularly relevant to the Section 2 of the Strategy (Conservation Actions) and the theme 5 concerning the improvement of knowledge for conservation; it aims to respond to the specific objectives:

- 5.1 Centralize, organize and disseminate the existing knowledge on cetaceans, their habitat, the pressures and impacts, the national institutions, legislations and capacities<sup>9</sup>;
- 5.2. Identify the gaps in knowledge and propose actions or programmes to improve the knowledge on cetaceans<sup>10</sup>.

The project is part of a comprehensive approach to ensure at the macroregional level, that public and private stakeholders in the ACCOBAMS macroregion “**have access to a coherent monitoring system for the species concerned in the Mediterranean/contiguous Atlantic area/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.**”

In alignment with the primary motivation of the ACCOBAMS LTMP, it aims to:

- **General objective 1** – Obtain accurate estimates of abundance and distribution of cetacean species in the ACCOBAMS Area;
- **General objective 2** – Improve knowledge on human activities at sea and their potential impacts on cetaceans, (*e.g.*, maritime traffic, leisure boating, fishing, marine litter, chemical pollutants, anthropogenic noise, etc.) and on other megafauna species (*e.g.*, marine turtles, elasmobranchs, sea birds...);
- **General objective 3** – Facilitate the identification of key hotspot zones of interaction between cetaceans and human activities in the ACCOBAMS Area;
- **General objective 4** – Enhance and facilitate the setting and the regular adjustment of conservation and management measures that allow achieving a favorable conservation status for cetaceans in the Agreement area;
- **General objective 5** – Bring support to the State Parties in fulfilling their obligations under ACCOBAMS, as well as their commitments towards other relevant multilateral agreements (*eg.*: CBD, CMS, Barcelona Convention, Bucharest Convention, EU regulations, etc.) and provide them with guidance for the establishment and review of reliable indicators and thresholds.

The specific objectives are to contribute primarily to:

- **Specific objective 1** - Provide a deeper understanding of the abundance and distribution of the cetaceans at the macroregional level and overtime, based on undisputed data and better know their state of conservation;
- **Specific objective 2** - Progress towards assessing population trends on a regular basis;
- **Specific objective 3** - Collect information on human activities impacting cetaceans and characterize critical zones of interaction between cetaceans and human activities in the ACCOBAMS Area (*e.g.*, Critical Cetacean Habitat);
- **Specific objective 4** - Provide guidance on improving and strengthening conservation measures in place;

<sup>7</sup> Article II, paragraph 3, of the Agreement and its Annex 2 (Conservation Plan), paragraph 2.

<sup>8</sup> Resolution 7.4 ACCOBAMS Strategy.

<sup>9</sup> Currently supported by Resolution 6.13 Comprehensive Cetacean population estimates and distribution in the ACCOBAMS Area and Resolution 8.12 IUCN Red List Status of cetacean species in ACCOBAMS Area.

<sup>10</sup> Currently supported by Resolution 8 .10 ACCOBAMS Long Term Monitoring Programme.

- **Specific objective 5** - Strengthen international cooperation and synergies between the countries of the macroregion in order to optimize and increase the efficiency of their efforts to establish a transnational approach to conserving the species concerned;
- **Specific objective 6** - Enhance national capacity development and empowerment in the ACCOBAMS Area for marine environment, by monitoring and conservation measures/policy development;
- **Specific objective 7** - Raise awareness throughout the ACCOBAMS Area on marine biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources;
- **Specific objective 8** – Progress in research/development in this field also through the development of automated detection and to support knowledge improvement;
- **Specific objective 9** - Provide guidance on the measures needed to monitor the effects of climate change on biodiversity, using the cetacean populations as biological indicators ("sentinel species").

The Project is developed taking into consideration international, regional and national strategies for the protection and monitoring of marine biodiversity and the efforts being undertaken by States in the macroregion to meet their obligations and commitments in this respect (Tableau 1). By improving knowledge on cetacean populations, the project responds directly to a set of priorities of the riparian States with regard to the sustainable use, management and conservation of the marine environment. This includes in particular the European Union's Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Ecosystem Approach/Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (EcAp/IMAP) implemented by the Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP) and the Black Sea Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (BSIMAP) of the Bucharest Convention (BSC). All three follow the same line, requiring their Member States to achieve or maintain the Good Environmental Status of the seas and to implement regular monitoring of a wide number of indicators, including in relation to cetaceans and other mobile species.

Agreement/Organisation	relevant reference(s)
<a href="#">UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</a>	Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
<b>Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)</b>	<a href="#">Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Targets</a> in priority 4, 20, 21
<a href="#">Bonn Convention (CMS)</a>	<a href="#">Appendices I and II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals</a>
<a href="#">Bucarest Convention</a>	<a href="#">Black Sea Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (BSIMAP)</a>
<b>Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP)</b>	Actions plans for the conservation of cetaceans <sup>11</sup> , sea turtles <sup>12</sup> and birds in the Mediterranean Sea, adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention in 1991, 1999 and 2003 respectively
<a href="#">General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)</a>	Relevant recommendations on reducing the number of accidental captures of cetaceans, seabirds and turtles ( <a href="#">GFCM/35/2011/2</a> , <a href="#">GFCM/35/2011/3</a> , <a href="#">GFCM/36/2012/2</a> , <a href="#">GFCM/44/2021/13</a> , <a href="#">GFCM/44/2021/14</a> , <a href="#">GFCM/44/2021/15</a> )
<b>European Union</b>	<a href="#">Habitats Directive</a> (Directive 92/43/CEE) <a href="#">Marine Strategy Framework Directive</a> (Directive 2008/56/EC) <a href="#">Marine Spatial Planning Directive</a> (Directive 2014/89/EU)

#### IV. PROJECT STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES

The project consists of 4 work packages, whose activities will take place over a 4-year period, ideally starting in 2024. Although the Mediterranean/contiguous Atlantic area and Black Sea monitoring campaigns are to be organised over two distinct summer periods, several activities linked to the preparation of the field operations should be carried out transversally (*e.g.*, scientific coordination); efforts will also be made to synchronising and mutualizing actions

<sup>11</sup> The Action Plan for the Conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea was updated in [2021 \(IG25/13\)](#).

<sup>12</sup> Updated action plan was adopted by the 18th meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) and its Protocols (Istanbul, Turkey from 3 to 6 December 2014).



whenever possible (*e.g.*, scientific tools, trainings, contact group workshop...). This will help minimizing the costs, optimising available resources and capacities, ensuring the best possible harmonisation of data collection efforts and increasing the impact and outreach of the project (*e.g.*, communication and awareness).

## 1. Work Package 1: preparation of the survey operations and capacity development

### i. Expected Results

- a **complete operational method to survey and to monitor the species** at the macroregional level derived from the ASI methodology and ensuring comparability/aggregation/pooling of datasets (including data collection protocols, software, survey design);
- the **development of appropriate human and technical capacities in the countries participating in the project**, in terms of survey implementation and regular monitoring of the species in question and management of their critical and/or preferred habitats;
- **administrative processes identified and completed** (*e.g.*, research permits, authorizations) and all logistics ready for the conduct of survey field operations (including an active and responsive Contact Group, recruited Teams, all partnerships/contracts in place);
- **an updated information management system** for data storage and use, based on the existing ASI management system, interoperable with other existing systems as well as allowing the pooling of all dataset.

### ii. Main activities

#### A. REGIONAL CONSULTATION AND MOBILIZATION

- mobilization of each National Focal Point (NFP) and identified Contact persons to take part in the Project Contact Group;
- organization of 2 regional Survey preparation Contact Group Workshops (one for the Mediterranean / Contiguous Atlantic Area – about 40 participants- and one for the Black Sea about 15 participants).

#### B. DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL TOOLS

- selection and contracting of the Scientific Coordinator and his/her associated experts;
- definition of the surveys monitoring operational method, adjustment of scientific protocols by monitoring sectors and targets, aerial and boat survey design, software identification and preparation;
- identification and purchasing of all equipment.

#### C- ADMINISTRATIVE AND LOGISTICAL PREPARATION OF FIELD OPERATIONS

- identification and preparation of all permits and authorizations in a timely manner;
- identification and concretization of technical/scientific partnerships for field operations, at national and sub regional/regional level as needed;
- identification, call for tenders and selection of Aerial Companies and Research Vessel (call for tenders or direct MoU);
- identification and recruiting of human resources for field operations (observers and team leaders);
- planification of field operations processes and organization (including coordination structure, security procedures, teams' daily life organization.

#### D. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

- assessment of regional capacity building needs and development;
- implementation of a training programme for local stakeholders by subregion or group of subregions, in the use of standardized survey methods and in information management (a minimum of 4 workshops, *i.e.* according to ACCOBAMS sub-region division<sup>13</sup> )

<sup>13</sup> Black Sea, Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean.

## E. DATA SHARING AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM REVIEW

- study for an update of the information management system for data gathered during the survey exercise and in the medium and long term;
- the subsequent updating of the information management system (incl. IT upgrade, review of terms of use & data policy).

### 2. Work Package 2: Surveys implementation

The survey is to be implemented over two periods of time (summers), for the Mediterranean / contiguous Atlantic area survey and the Black Sea survey respectively.

#### i. Expected Results

- **a database/data sets collected** which will allow:
  - to assess current distribution and abundance of cetacean species at the macro-regional, sub-regional (ex. MFSD sub regions) and national levels;
  - to monitor population trends by aggregating data with that of the ASI and other relevant data;
  - to help assessing human impact/activities on cetacean species (*e.g.*, floating marine litter, acoustic disturbances, shipping, bycatch);
  - to help the governments in assessing the conservation status of biodiversity in the macroregion on a regular basis and updating the red lists, including the IUCN lists (*e.g.*, red list of endangered species and ecosystems, Green List of Protected Areas);
  - to support assessing the Good Environmental Status (GES) indicators related to other mega fauna species and human impact activities in the macroregion.
- **Presence/observation maps** in view of communicating on the information collected during the field work and providing a glimpse of the ecological distribution and status of the species, even before final analyses are completed. This information can inform decision-making and can be disseminated widely

#### ii. Main activities

- survey teams training workshops for aerial and boat-based components (including HUET and any relevant safety trainings) ;
- implementation of the surveys coordinated by geographic sector and conducted using the agreed methodology/protocols – surveys will be conducted as follow:
  - for the Mediterranean Sea /contiguous Atlantic Area:
    - an aerial survey campaign covering the largest area possible;
    - a regional boat-based survey campaign targeting deep diving species;
    - national boat-based surveys where aerial or regional boat-based surveys are not be possible.
  - for the Black Sea:
    - an aerial survey covering the largest area possible;
    - International/national boat-based surveys where aerial surveys are not possible.
- Preparation of presence/observation maps

### 3. Work Package 3: Data analysis and results interpretation

This component covers the analysis of the data collected during the surveys to estimate abundance and distribution of species, to conduct spatial modeling and identification of critical and preferential habitats as well as population

trends in targeted areas. Such results are to be interpreted in a conservation effort context, establishing links with the main anthropogenic pressures and protection measures, and providing technical recommendations in this regard.

#### i. Expected results

- **distribution and abundance of cetacean species** at the macro-regional, sub-regional (ex. MFSD sub regions) and national levels, **identification of critical and preferential habitats** and **trends in cetacean populations** using ASI and relevant data time series provided that sufficient data is available. (eg.: figures, diagrammes, maps, ...);
- ACCOBAMS Area Cetaceans species **Conservation status updated** as relevant (IUCN red list of species);
- an **improved understanding of the impacts of the main human pressures** on the conservation status of cetaceans 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, including national/regional, adopted to support these species and their habitats and guidance to enhance and improve this effectiveness;
- **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 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 macro region, as well as improving national, Community and international sectoral regulations and minimizing their impacts (eg.: shipping, fisheries, tourism, defence);
- **data and results made available and disseminated** following an agreed data use policy;
- **An Atlas of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS Area<sup>14</sup>** on the basis of ACCOBAMS Surveys and all relevant available databases.

#### ii. Main activities

- definition of data analysis *modus operandi* following a participatory approach, including the selection of data analysis experts;
- sub regional data analysis workshops for a consultative and participatory approach;
- data analysis and reporting: analysis of the data collected during the survey (abundance and distribution of species);
- spatial modelling, identification and characterization of critical and preferential habitats establishing links with the main human pressures and analysis of trends (using ASI data and all relevant datasets);
- interpretation of results for conservation (during 2 regional workshops) by drawing up of concrete recommendations to optimise, strengthen and complete and existing measures to protect the species concerned and prioritization of concrete actions to be taken at all levels: national, subregional and macroregional (eg.: proposals of new areas for protection, review of existing ones, support to Environmental Impact assessments);
- transfer of and securing data and results to the data management system and implementation of the sharing process;
- reassessment and updating of the IUCN lists;
- Development of the Atlas of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area: Database owners' consultation, pooling of data, analysis, Atlas writing and editing.

### 4. Work Package 4: Coordination and Communication / awareness

The project will be developed by regions or sub-regions depending on the participating countries and the current economic and safety situation. It will be coordinated at the macroregional by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat which will provide administrative and financial management, working with other groups and partner organisations who will ensure that the scientific and technical aspects are carried out correctly. These include the project's Steering

<sup>14</sup> Exemple : <https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/a5a51895-50a1-4cd8-8f9d-8e2512345adf/atlas-cetacean-distribution-web.pdf>

Committee, the project's Contact Group and the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, for aspects relevant to its area of competence.

The ASI project has proven its significance in enhancing communication and awareness-raising efforts. It is important for the project to continue along the same trajectory and *a minima*, to replicate the successful actions that were implemented previously. Additionally, it is crucial to engage into a larger communication campaign, leveraging all past results and current initiatives to increase the project's influence, as well as the LTMP, ACCOBAMS, and all stakeholders involved.

#### i. Expected results

- a **complete and successful implementation of the project** and achievement of all objectives;
- a **reinforcement of the network** of experts, specialists and other local stakeholders helping to conserve the species in question;
- an **increased awareness** among local stakeholders of maintaining/restoring the good status of marine ecosystem and biodiversity;
- 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.

#### ii. Main activities

- overall coordination of project, including running costs for the institutional governance of the project by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, communications and awareness-raising activities development and supervision. Additional external assistance may also be sought as necessary according to the needs.
- mobilization of the Project Steering Committee;
- project final assessment/evaluation: external analysis of the project results and recommendations to secure the monitoring mechanism put in place;
- definition of communication priorities and integration within the overarching communication strategy of ACCOBAMS (so to utilize the project as a catalyst for implementing the broader strategy);
- development of a specific campaign targeting institutions and decisions makers;
- development of communication materials to support the communication priorities defined for the project and specific campaign (*e.g.*, leaflet, brochure, video, press Kit);
- support local communication actions on the sidelines of the surveys: definition of geographical and thematic communication priorities, development of ToRs and launch of a call for proposals to cover 8-10 small projects;
- awareness-raising activities (participation to scientific and technical conferences, specific events during the survey campaign, etc.);
- final Results Presentation Event and delivery of the Report(s).

## V. SWOT Analysis and Risk mitigations

### 1. SWOT Analysis

<i>Internal</i>	<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Established network of partners and stakeholders.</li> <li>- Experienced team and coordinator with a track record of successful surveys.</li> <li>- Availability of proven survey methodology, techniques and equipment.</li> <li>- Strong support from governments and Regional Organisations</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited funding for the project.</li> <li>- Strong dependence on volunteers / In kind support.</li> <li>- Some areas to be covered are difficult to access</li> <li>- Limited time frame for conducting surveys (summer period)</li> <li>- Regional instability</li> </ul>
<i>External</i>	<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High public and media interest in marine mammal conservation.</li> <li>- International commitments and EU obligations for the State Parties</li> <li>- Regional need of enriching existing databases</li> <li>- Collect valuable data on several mega fauna species and habitat use.</li> <li>- Increased public and stakeholder engagement in marine mammal conservation efforts.</li> <li>- Inform policy decisions and management strategies.</li> <li>- Opportunity to collaborate with other marine conservation initiatives and organization.</li> </ul> <p>Potential to leverage project outcomes for future funding opportunities.</p>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inflation and fuel costs</li> <li>- Difficulty in obtaining permits for accessing and surveying in certain areas.</li> <li>- Logistical difficulties in certain areas</li> <li>- Risks inherent in working at sea and in the air (security)</li> <li>- Difficulties to mobilize the necessary means for the field work (technical and human)</li> <li>- Geopolitical instability, human related regional issues (migration, arising conflict areas)</li> </ul>

## 2. Risk Analysis and Mitigation

Risk level		
Low	Medium	High

Risk description	Related project Activity/WP	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation & adaptation actions
mobilizing sufficient and appropriate technical and human resources	Survey preparation (WP1) & implementation (WP2)			Search for resources beyond the region Reassess the budget consequently Decrease the survey covered area Rotating system, moving observers and/or planes & boats from one area to another
obtaining permits for surveying in certain areas	Survey preparation (WP1) & implementation (WP2)			Ensure enough preparation/application time Close consulting / meetings with national contacts and relevant departments
Unfavorable weather conditions for surveying	Survey implementation (WP2)			Keep a close watch on weather forecast and adapt surveys strategy Postpone surveys to favorable days Move to cover other survey favorable areas
Logistical obstacles in certain areas (eg.: lack of fuel)	Survey implementation (WP2)			Close consulting / meetings with national contacts for preparation Ensure that each team has a national observer Move to cover other survey favorable areas while fixing difficulties
Risks inherent in working at sea and in the air (safety)	Survey implementation (WP2)			Criteria to consider when selecting service providers such as aircraft companies Teams' security preparation (ex HUET training) All relevant security equipment (lifejackets, inflatable boat...) Security protocols in place Continuous assistance from coordinators
Geopolitical instability, human related regional issues (migration, arising conflict areas..)	All project and mainly Survey preparation (WP1) and implementation (WP2),			Security protocols for field operations Transferring activities to other areas (ie WS)
International hazards (ex. Pandemic (ex Covid))	All activities			Postponing activities Where possible, use online options

## VI. PROJECT GOVERNANCE

The project will be coordinated by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat. The Secretariat will be responsible for implementing all planned actions either directly or by coordinating with involved stakeholders and entities, for liaising with ACCOBAMS Parties and donors and for providing administrative and financial management. The project will necessitate a skilled project manager to oversee the entire project from start to finish, and an administrative and communication assistant to support the project for two years. The project will be supported by several key groups, including a Steering Committee, a Contact Group, as well as the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee which will be providing guidance on matters related to its area of competence.

The ASI Steering Committee<sup>15</sup> will be appointed to serve as the project Steering Committee, consisting of representatives from key partnering entities. Additional experts and stakeholders may be added as needed. The project steering committee will provide guidance and advice to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to help ensuring the project's success, covering all aspects of project coordination, planning and budgeting.

The Project Contact group will be composed of National Focal points (NFP) and/or designated Contact person in each country of the ACCOBAMS Area. This group is to be set up to assist the ACCOBAMS Secretariat along the course of the project and will be particularly important for the preparation and implementation of the surveys. It will in particular support proper operational execution of the surveys and all relevant activities, and facilitate contacts at national levels with all those involved over the course of the project cycle.

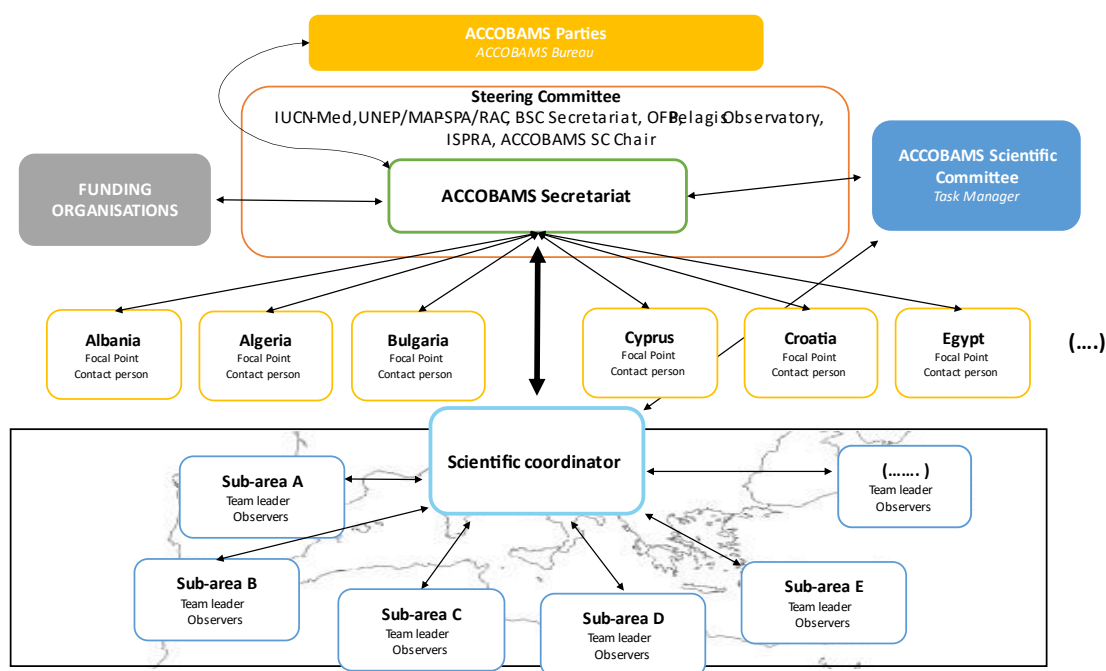


Figure 1. Project Governance structure

<sup>15</sup> Composed of IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (UNEP/MAP-SPA/RAC), Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB), PELAGIS, Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA), Bucharest Convention Secretariat (BSC), and the Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee.



## VII. TIMELINE AND MILESTONES

ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.10 seeks to conduct the next synoptic basin-wide survey in the ACCOBAMS Area in 2024-2026, to accomplish the entire program cycle by 2027. The proposed timetable suggests that monitoring in the Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area will be implemented first (in 2025), followed by monitoring in the Black Sea (in 2026). However, the order of implementation may be reversed, depending on financial, practical, and geopolitical considerations. If this is the case, the overall duration of the project would remain the same, but the timetable would need to be adjusted accordingly.

### Milestones :

- Recruitment of Coordination personnel and Scientific coordinator by March 2024
- Survey methodology ready by May 2025 (survey 1) and May 2026 (Survey 2)
- Teams recruited and trained by May 2025 (Survey 1) and May 2026 (survey 2) (or one week prior to survey starts)
- All Permits and authorization obtained by May 2025 (survey 1) and May 2026 (survey 2)
- Regional Datasets collected by September 2025 (survey 1) and September 2026 (survey 2)
- Preliminary survey results ready by October 2026 (Survey 1) and January 2027 (survey 2)
- All results reports finalized and launched during Event by June 2027
- Recommendations from workshop on Interpretation of results for conservation available by September 2027
- All data transferred to data management system and ready for sharing by December 2026

	2024				2025				2026				2027			
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T1	T2	T3	T4	T1	T2	T3	T4	T1	T2	T3	T4
<b>WP 1- Survey preparation &amp; capacity development</b>																
<b>Development of scientific &amp; technical tools</b>																
Selection and contracting of the Scientific coordinator and associated experts																
Definition of complete surveys methodology																
Identification and purchasing of all equipment																
<b>Regional consultation and mobilization</b>																
Mobilization of NFP & Contact persons																
Survey preparation Contact Group Workshop(s) (2)																
<b>Administrative and logistical preparation of field operations</b>																
Application procedures for permits and authorizations; Set up of technical /scientific partnerships; Aerial Companies and boat																

selection; Teams selection; Planification of Field operations processes and organization																	
<b>Capacity development</b>																	
Assessment of regional capacity building needs and Implementation of training programme by sub region (4)																	
<b>Data sharing &amp; management system review</b>																	
Study and update of the information management system for survey data																	
<b>WP 2 - Survey implementation</b>																	
Teams survey Training workshops (aerial and boat) (April-May)																	
Implementation Mediterranean & contiguous Atlantic area survey (may-sept)																	
Teams aerial survey training workshop (May)																	
Implementation Black sea survey (June-July)																	
Presence/Observation maps <sup>16</sup>																	
<b>WP 3 - Data analysis &amp; results interpretation</b>																	
Definition of data analysis modus operandi & selection experts																	
Data analysis, spatial modelling and reporting																	
Sub regional data analysis workshops for a consultative and participatory approach (4)																	
Reassessment and updating of the IUCN red/green list status																	
Interpretation of results for conservation (Regional/sub regional workshops) (2)																	
Data Transfer and sharing																	
Development of the Atlas																	
<b>WP 4 – Coordination and communication/awareness</b>																	
Project manager																	
Admin and comm. assistant																	
Steering Committee meetings																	
External project assessment/Evaluation																	
Communication priorities definition and integration into ACCOBAMS Communication Strategy																	
Communication campaign for decision makers (definition, implementation)																	

<sup>16</sup> This is to be covered by the Data analyst, budgeted in WP3

Preparation of communication materials																
Awareness-raising events																
Local communication actions																
Results presentation Event and reports of the results																

## VIII. BUDGET

This budget is preliminary and is subject to adjustment as financial contributions are identified.

Work Package and actions	Estimated costs (euros)
<b>WP 1- Survey preparation &amp; capacity development</b>	
Scientific coordinator and team for surveys preparation	45 000
Survey preparation Contact Group Workshop(s) and meetings	60 000
Assessment of regional capacity building needs & implementation of training programme by sub region	125 000
Study and set up for an update of the information management system for survey data	10 000
<b>Total WP 1</b>	<b>240 000</b>
<b>WP 2 - Survey implementation</b>	
Aerial and boat-based survey teams training workshops	75 000
Aircraft renting	1 100 000
Research vessels renting and/or mobilization	550 000
Purchasing of equipment	15 000
Team fees, daily life and transport	220 000
Scientific coordinator and team support fees (incl. training fees)	65 000
<b>Total WP 2</b>	<b>2 025 000</b>
<b>WP 3 - Data analysis &amp; results interpretation</b>	
Data analysis expert work <sup>17</sup>	125 000
Sub regional data analysis workshops for a consultative and participatory approach (4)	120 000
Interpretation of results for conservation (2 workshops)	50 000
Development of the ACCOBAMS area cetaceans' Atlas	100 000
<b>TOTAL WP3</b>	<b>395 000</b>
<b>WP 4 – Coordination, communication &amp; awareness</b>	
Project officer (4 years)	240 000
Administrative and communication assistant (2 years)	110 000
Steering Committee meetings	20 000

<sup>17</sup> Which will also cover the preparation of presence/observation maps (planned in WP2)

External project assessment/Evaluation	15 000
Travel and meeting	30 000
External assistance	10 000
Development of communication materials	20 000
Awareness-raising events and participation to conferences	20 000
Local communication actions (call for proposals)	40 000
Results launching Event	20 000
<b>TOTAL WP 4</b>	<b>525 000</b>
<b>TOTAL PROJECT ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>3 185 000</b>